

Understanding Spiritual Warfare

Soon after Pip and I were married we went to live in Richmond, Virginia, USA. While attending our local church we joined a prayer group that was focusing prayer on the city. The group was called to pray about the growing murder rate across the city and the increase of pornographic magazines appearing in the shops. After some time, this prayer group multiplied to several groups in different city locations focusing on these issues. City wide repentance and prayer for the city was building. After a while the leaders decided that it was time for all those who were praying to gather together for a weekend of prayer. We were probably 300 in number and met in a large church building from Friday night to Sunday evening. At our last gathering it was agreed that God was showing us that a demonic spiritual power was infecting people's minds and causing these problems. God also gave us faith and understanding about how to repent for the city and pray and speak to the demonic powers with the authority of Jesus. We did this together and then went home praying that the results would soon begin to be seen in the city.

Up to that weekend there had been at least one murder each day in Richmond. However, from the Monday following the prayer weekend there were no murders in the city for a whole month. The police and city authorities were surprised and sociologists were invited to research and find out why. Alongside this, a well-known grocery store that had numerous outlets in all parts of the city suddenly decided to take down all the pornographic magazines from their stores. There had been no media campaigns or public action to put pressure on them to do this. We were all amazed and knew we had learned something significant.

Some obvious points were clear to us. A demonic spirit over the city that was putting thoughts of murder into the hearts of angry people was disempowered. Secondly, a demonic spirit over the city had been lifted off the minds of those who make decisions to sell pornographic material or not. It also highlighted how connected the spiritual and the physical realm really are.

Paul describes the nature of spiritual warfare for the believer.

Ephesians 6:12

'For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places'

That certainly explained what we were doing that weekend.

2 Corinthians 4:4

'...whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God should shine on them.'

In this verse Paul explains that it is the god of the age who blinds the eyes of people. This also explains what was happening to people in the city. They were blind; they could not see the difference between what was light and darkness.

If that was true over a city could it be true over individuals? Yes!

The victory we experienced in a corporate setting for a city is based on the same principles for an individual to overcome the devil. Let's look at this next passage.

Ephesians 4:25-27

'Therefore putting away lying let each one of you speak truth with his neighbour for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin, do not let the sun go down on your wrath nor give place to the devil'.

This verse is saying that if I sin I could be in danger of giving a place to the devil in my life. Just as the city had given place to the devil so can we as individuals. Remember Paul is talking to Christians here.

If the devil is trying to get a hold of me how will I know it?

Answer: the starting point is your thought life for the simple reason that everything begins with a thought. When you find that you are not only thinking but also changing your mind or entertaining alternatives to the truth, then you know that the devil is trying to get a hold. Once he has infiltrated your thinking then this will affect your emotions and then your body so you need to take action.

The motive of demonic powers is to ultimately destroy. Jesus explains this in the following verse and this was the principle that we were seeing at work in the city.

John 10:10

'The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.'

How do I come free if I realise I have given a foothold in my life to the devil?

The following verse really helps us understand the steps to freedom we can take.

James 4:7

'Therefore submit to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you.'

Step 1: 'Submit to God'

Submit can mean 'to place under.' To place yourself under God's authority, you need to repent of what separated you from God in the first place and what consequently gave the devil a foothold in your life. To repent of the sinful thoughts and or the associated actions is the first step to freedom.

Step 2: 'Resist the devil'

Just as an aeroplane needs a runway to land so the devil needs a landing strip in your mind to bring influence upon your life. When you repent the runway is taken away. Now you need to resist his further attempts to circle around and create another runway.

We do this in two ways.

- a. First we address him directly and tell him to go away. The devil and his demons are personalities without bodies. Because they are personalities they can think, hear and speak. When you speak to them directly, they will hear you. Here is an example of a declaration that Pip and I often use to resist the devil in such occasions...

'I declare into the spiritual realms that through the blood of Jesus I am justified, through the blood of Jesus my body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and through the blood of Jesus I am seated with Christ in the heavenly realms far above all demonic power and authority. Therefore on the basis of these facts I resist, reject and bind all demonic power from attacking my mind and I tell it to leave me in Jesus name.'

Making a declaration into the spiritual realm in this way is based upon the following verse from the book of Revelation at the end of the bible.

Revelation 12:11

'And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.'

In this verse we see that believers overcame when they testified to what the blood of Jesus had done for them. The basis of our overcoming is through what Jesus accomplished on our behalf by the shedding of his blood on the cross. The cross was the place where Jesus defeated the devil. It is on the basis of our testimony of this fact that we also overcome the devil and all his demons.

- b. Second, we need to fill our minds with the opposite of the evil thoughts. Go to the Word of God and find passages of the bible that you can meditate on specific to your situation so that the truth can fill your mind and replace the lies you have believed.

Step 3: 'And he will flee from you.'

The devil is frightened of the believer's faith. He knows that through your faith in Jesus you have authority over him. As you exercise that authority he will run away in fear. The following verse explains this.

I John 4:4

'You are of God, little children, and have overcome them (spirits of the antichrist or demons) because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world'

You are not greater than the devil. You, on your own, are far less than him. But as a child of God you are in Jesus and Jesus is in you, as the verse says *'is greater than he (the devil) who is in the world.'*

Romans 8:37

'Yet in all things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.'

When you overcome the devil in this way you learn how to 'conquer'. You learn a very important lesson in spiritual warfare just as we did through our experiences in Richmond. You have begun to understand spiritual warfare.

Living the Christian life is a journey of revelation about God and his will for our lives. In the next session we will look at discovering what his will might be for us individually.

Suggested Further Study

The Spiritual Battlefield

The Devil

Understanding Deception