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Spiritual Authority and Mission

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The past several decades have seen a wave of books, articles and ministries focussing on the issue of spiritual warfare. It can be treated in almost “fad like” fashion along with issues such as alternative spirituality and the latest renewal movement. However, even a cursory reading of Scripture reveals a significant focus on spiritual warfare in the life of Christ and the teachings of the early church.

How are these teachings to be applied and taught today in our present Western context? How do we prepare our mission candidates and pastors to both practice and teach appropriate principles of spiritual warfare? What is an Anabaptist contribution to the discussion of spiritual warfare?

A survey on spiritual warfare exposure and training was conducted of mission workers from around the world who serve with Anabaptist related mission agencies in preparation for a consultation on this topic in 2001. Of the workers surveyed, some eighty per cent indicated they encountered spiritual warfare in their ministry, while only fifteen per cent felt they had been adequately trained and prepared to face those challenges.¹



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When Jesus sent his disciples out “like lambs among wolves” (Luke 10:3), he didn’t send them out unprepared. They returned with a faith-building story of God’s healing power to save and deliver. Our challenge is no different today.

Clearly the scope of the topic exceeds the limitations of this chapter. Therefore, we will limit our focus to a brief background of our Western worldview as it affects spiritual warfare, the importance of proper order in acquiring spiritual “knowledge,” an examination of four realms of spiritual warfare, an Anabaptist contribution to the discussion, and finally, the training and discipleship implications.

In his book *God at War*, Gregory Boyd makes the point that although Scripture provides a clear presentation of a warfare worldview, we have been conditioned in the West to read Scripture through our materialistic and rationalistic orientation. A contrast exists between our Western materialistic and rationalistic bias and the heightened spiritual awareness of other cultures.²

MB Mission teams serving alongside the church in other parts of the world have experienced this contrast. During ministry with the MB church in Congo, MB Mission teams have been exposed to clear and practical teaching from the Congo church on how to both resist the works of the enemy and pray for those afflicted by him. Believers openly ministered to those serving the powers of darkness. The fast-growing Mennonite church in Ethiopia (Meserete Kristos Church) similarly trains its young leaders in the “One Year for Christ” program to resist the enemy and see those bound by evil spirits freed. Is this merely an unenlightened throwback to their pre-Christian spiritist roots? Or is it a faithful response to Christ’s statement that he has given us authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy (Luke 10:19)?

Is it possible that our chronocentrism—our tendency to assume that the worldview we hold at the present time is the only ultimately true worldview—is limiting our ability to perceive and apply the teachings of Scripture in this critical area? Boyd makes the point that the early church prior to Augustine had an understanding of evil that included personal spiritual beings with the ability to oppose the will of God. Augustinian tradition (post fourth century) has tended to view angels merely as agents who invariably carry out God’s sovereign will. The post-Enlightenment naturalistic worldview rejects such beings outright.³

The modern evangelical Western worldview, deeply shaped by both the Enlightenment and Augustine’s view of God’s sovereignty (omnipotence over all evil), is unable to explain the spiritual beings referred to in Daniel 10, whose resistance of the angel Michael delayed a message Daniel was to receive. Are there territorial spirits and fallen angels committed to opposing God’s work in the world?

The much broader issue of evil emerges in this discussion. Is the problem of evil an issue of God's providence as an omnipotent being and thus his character? Or is the problem of evil one which includes fallen angels with free will who oppose the work of God and his church?

Clearly the latter perspective involves a much more active role for the church in addressing spiritual warfare. Rather than a fatalistic resignation to the sovereign will of God in allowing evil, Scripture calls the people of God to "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." (James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:9).

A passive response to the works of darkness in our lives results in undisciplined thoughts from which flow behaviour and character. Frequently, Christians respond to spiritual warfare from a position of fear, believing that resisting the enemy will somehow encourage his influence in their lives. Nothing could be further from the truth. The victory Christ won on the cross establishes our authority over the enemy. Unless claimed and established in daily resistance over temptation, this victory is limited to salvation. Believers have the opportunity to grow in Christ-like character through the renewing of their minds and transformation of their attitudes and behaviour. Spiritual warfare is the first half of this renewing process. The inability to actively resist that which is evil in our lives sabotages the reception of God's truth.

A university student had been a Christian for about a year. During the months following her conversion she experienced great joy and freedom from the episodes of depression and suicidal thoughts that had characterized her life prior to knowing Christ. Then, after about eight months, the manic-depressive periods began to return. She had been immersed in Scripture and a worshipping community but had never been taught that she had to resist destructive thoughts.

As the counsellor listened to her story she suddenly exclaimed, "If one more person tells me I have to believe and apply the truth about how God loves me and accepts me I'm going to scream. I know the truth. It's just not making a difference." The counsellor then urged her to actively resist the enemy of her soul.

As she began to realize that spiritual transformation was more than just a question of embracing truth and also included resisting the enemy, hope began to rise up within her. Many believers like this student have not been instructed in the basics of spiritual warfare including the establishment of who they are in Christ and the importance of resisting evil—not just embracing the truth.

As we consider helpful principles for training disciples of Christ in this area, we will want to consider all that Scripture has to teach us. However, we do well to look first at Jesus' example. His preparation of the twelve disciples in Luke 9 includes a pointed reference to their power and authority over the demonic realm in

the context of sharing the Good News of the kingdom of God. The same authority is acknowledged in debriefing the seventytwo disciples later in Luke 10:17-24. Jesus wanted them to know they had spiritual authority.

However, Jesus goes on to gently rebuke the disciples for focussing on their various deliverance stories. It is human nature to dwell on the more sensational aspects of ministry. To focus on our relationship with the Father and our knowledge of him, however, requires discipline and maturity. This balance between ministering in spiritual authority and power, while not getting distracted by it, is still a challenge for us today.

Spiritual Knowledge

In Hosea 4:6 God declares through his prophet: “My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge” (NIV, *passim*). God’s people were religious, yet their religion was not tied to obedience. They had more knowledge of evil than good. Similarly, Christians today can become destroyed through a lack of knowledge. And in this area of discipleship, order is important.

We require, first of all, knowledge of the Father and his incredible love for us as his covenant people, leading to the truth about our identity and positional authority in Christ, followed by a knowledge of our hearts (the true nature of our inner life), and concluding with an awareness of the nature of the enemy and his schemes.

Knowledge of the Father

Jesus points out to his disciples that a relationship with the Father is hidden to the “wise and learned” but “revealed . . . to little children” (Luke 10:21). The disciples were to rejoice, not that the spirits submit to them, but that “your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). Spiritual pride blocks us from understanding the value of our relationship with the Father, but it can also open the door to a fascination with spiritual warfare. In particular there can be dependence upon technique and strategy rather than upon the Father. Biblical knowledge is always tied to obedience and not merely to intellectual assent. To know the Father is to obey him. Jesus reminds us “apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

The cautionary story of the seven sons of Sceva in Ephesus reminds us of the futility of technique or formula in spiritual warfare when a relationship with the Father is not present. These seven sons of the chief priest would “invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon possessed. They would say, ‘In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out’” (Acts 19:13). This must have worked several times or they would not have repeated their formulaic statement.

However, they did not know the Father, through his Son Jesus Christ. The unclean spirit recognized their lack of relationship with the Father and replied, “Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?” (Acts 19:15). A second hand relationship with the Father will not stand up in spiritual battle.

The beating these seven men received from this demonized man and their resulting testimony caused the fear of God (not of demons) to fall on the church in Ephesus. “Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly...in this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power” (Act 19:18-20). Those who believed in Jesus were also practicing sorcery. They were expecting to receive God’s forgiveness of sins and blessings while still holding on to their occult practices. The same syncretistic reality exists today in churches of first generation Christians coming out of ancestral worship and spiritism. Without repentance for occult practices, new believers in Jesus lack growth in discipleship and the preaching of the word will lack transforming power.

Knowledge of the Father means relationship with God alone. The first two commandments require no other gods besides the Lord God, and no idols in the lives of his followers (Deuteronomy 5:6-10). Our God is a jealous God who promises consequences to those who commune with unclean spirits.

There is nothing the enemy wants to block or disrupt more in the life of Christ’s disciples than our daily communication and love relationship with the Father through Jesus. Knowledge of spiritual warfare technique is dangerous without a growing knowledge of the Father expressed in daily dependence and obedience.

Knowledge of Our Identity and Authority in Christ

The knowledge of our authority and power in Christ flows out of our knowledge of the Father. Before we knew Christ we were following “the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient...gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts” (Ephesians 2:2-3). We lived under the authority of the “world, the flesh and devil.” “But, because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ...and raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:4-6). Those who are in Christ have been forgiven and given his authority to resist sin and the work of the enemy in their lives. We are called to be overcomers.

Jesus told his disciples, “I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you” (Luke 10:19). What is the difference between authority and power?

If someone waving a gun stepped into traffic on a city street, they could force trucks to stop just by pointing a gun. Take away the gun, and they get run over. That's power. Power is simply the capacity to influence others. However, a uniformed but unarmed police officer could step into the same traffic and simply hold up their hand and trucks would stop. Why? The officer carries the authority of the badge and behind that, the state. Society has collectively given them authority to enforce the laws of the land. Authority must be given for it to be legitimate. In Christ, we have been given both authority and power.

Through this revelation of our position in Christ we know the "hope to which he has called" us, the "riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints" (our value to God), and "his incomparably great power for us who believe" (Ephesians 1:18-19). These truths put the experience of spiritual warfare in its proper context. It is our relationship with Jesus that is everything. Much of our spiritual warfare is focused on simply maintaining unbroken fellowship with Jesus.

Spiritual authority has been given to the believer through the finished work of Christ on the cross (Matt. 28:18-19; Col. 2:13-15; Eph. 6:10-11). Believers are called to apply this authority that Christ won for us through actively resisting harmful thoughts and the enemy's attacks (Col. 3:5-11; 1 Pet. 5:8-9; Jas. 4:7).

Jesus models for us how to resist temptation and the enemy's attacks in Luke 4:1-13. Three times the tempter came to Jesus and each time Jesus responded with "It is written...." Jesus quoted Scripture from Deuteronomy in resisting Satan's attacks. We have been given the Word of God as a sword. Knowing and memorizing specific Scripture related to the areas of temptation and attacks we frequently face, and then declaring them out loud is an effective way to exercise the authority we have in Christ, the Living Word. Memorizing and then declaring specific Scripture that address fear, lust, anger, unforgiveness and pride changes how we face temptation!

In addition to the Word of God, we have been given the name of Jesus. "... These signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons..." (Mark 16:17). Jesus has been given a "name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11). There is power in the name of Jesus as illustrated in the Ephesus deliverance story (Acts 19:13-20), especially when we know our authority in Christ.

Knowledge of Our Hearts

With the often used picture of our hearts being a home in which Christ comes to take residence, we are invited to surrender daily every area of our lives to his control. Renovation and ongoing surrender under the leading of God's Spirit are evidence we know Jesus is the new owner of the house.

Humility leads us to acknowledge that our hearts are “deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). If we ask Him, God will show us our hearts and all that limits his glory in our lives.

There are four basic steps to spiritual freedom in the life of a disciple of Christ:

1. **Recognize.** The disciple prays with David, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way within me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:23-24). Is there any repetitive sin, a sin foothold or even stronghold that I need freedom from?
2. **Repent.** Responsibility must be taken personally for our sin issues. Like David we must declare, “I have sinned” (2 Sam. 12:13). We cannot blame the enemy for our own wilful transgressions (James 1:13-15). Bitterness, anger, pride, fear, and lust all involve choices of our will. Repentance involves confession (acknowledging sin against others and God), turning from sin (our will is engaged), and choosing God’s way. Jesus linked our forgiveness of others to our own reception of forgiveness (Matt. 18:35). In many cases a person’s freedom is linked to their willingness to forgive someone who has hurt them. In repentance we are removing the legal ground of sin that the enemy is holding on to. Here the cross is our most powerful weapon.
3. **Resist.** “Submit yourselves then, to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9). While we frequently pray petitionary prayers, authoritative prayer is standing in Christ’s authority and resisting fear, lust, pride, anger, etc., out loud. “In the name of Jesus, I resist you, lust, and command you to flee.” In the battle for our thoughts we “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:5).
4. **Renew.** The process of renewing our minds includes filling our minds with the truth of God’s Word (Psalm 119:9), and daily yielding to the Holy Spirit (Ephesian 5:18; Romans 8:5-6). Memorizing and meditating on Scripture, worship, and prayer reorient our lives around God’s presence and truth.

Knowledge of the Enemy

Jesus pointed out that, although he came that we “might have life, and have it to the full,” there was also the “thief” who comes to “kill, steal and destroy” (John 10:10). Revelation 12 similarly presents the enemy as a devourer, accuser, and deceiver. Jesus’ unexpected rebuke of Satan working through Peter (Matt. 16:21-23; Mark 8:31-33) is an illustration of how subtle spiritual warfare can become. Paul pointed out that unforgiveness must be dealt with in the body of Christ “in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes” (2 Cor. 2:11). Jesus gives us knowledge of the enemy and his schemes for our protection.

Believers under the control of the Holy Spirit cannot be “possessed” by the enemy. However, Paul warns that without renewal in our minds and an active, daily “putting off” of the old nature and “putting on” of the nature of Christ, we can give the devil a “foothold” (Eph. 4:20-27) or way of influencing our lives.

“Footholds” can exist in the lives of disciples even though ownership of the house belongs to Jesus. Demonic footholds can be distinguished from periodic sin (everyday house dirt). Footholds are established when we are unable to stop repetitive wilful sin through simple confession. We are instructed in situations like that to “confess our sins to each other and pray for each other that you might be healed” (Jas. 5:16). When we recognize their presence we respond to these sin footholds much as to an unlawful squatter. They must be evicted.

Jesus said when you sweep a house clean and put it in order, it is important that the house is then filled (Luke 11:24-26). The lies of the enemy must be replaced with the light of God’s truth. Jesus’ warning that demons return sevenfold to retake space they have lost has been documented in countless counselling relationships. It is often much harder in matters of spiritual warfare to hold ground than to take it. It is essential to have a growing knowledge of the Father and of our identity and authority in Christ, as well as regular spiritual house cleaning, to complement our knowledge of the enemy’s nature and ways.

Spheres of Responsibility and Authority

Personal Sphere

The first and most basic sphere is that of the personal mind and will of each believer. The believer is given spiritual “weapons” to “demolish strongholds” in our minds and to “take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). Strongholds of fear, lust, bitterness, and anger can be built up in the minds of believers. Without a clear recognition of their existence and an understanding of how to apply the spiritual weapons that have been given to demolish them, these strongholds persist and influence destructive behaviours that limit spiritual freedom, destroy marriages and families, and discredit ministries.

The authority to “bind and loose” in the spiritual realm (Matt. 16:18-19) is given in the context of the advance of Christ’s church against the gates of Hades. The enemy’s strongholds are no match for a believer who actively submits to Christ and resists the enemy. When Jesus rightly perceived the satanic origin of Peter’s resistance to the cross, he verbally rebuked the enemy (Matt. 16:23).

Recently a teenager was brought to me by her youth leader following a youth rally. In a ministry of prayer, I had opportunity to witness the dramatic changes that result from recognizing one’s authority in warfare.

The teen struggled with anger toward an absentee father and a variety of other relational issues. Although a confessing Christian from a “successful” Mennonite home and churchgoing family, she was bulimic and suicidal. Her parents and youth leaders were helpless to change her destructive behavior. After gently and repeatedly telling her that Jesus loved her, the teen was finally able to raise her eyes to meet mine. As we asked the Holy Spirit to show us the root of the oppression in her life, the girl was reminded of a prayer she had offered to Satan during a particularly difficult time in her home eighteen months before. This seemingly innocuous prayer in her bedroom had initiated a very destructive period in her life.

She was initially unable to verbalize the name of Jesus and renounce her prayer to Satan. Finally, with the Holy Spirit’s assistance, she blurted out, “Can I say something?” and she stood to her feet. With the tenacity of a fighter she declared, “Jesus is my Lord and Saviour and in his name I bind you Satan and command you to flee my life, now!”

The breakthrough was immediate, and strongholds of death, anger, fear, and bitterness were quickly renounced and broken. However, to hold the ground, this young woman forgave her father and repented to her parents for rebellion. The change in this girl’s countenance, eating habits, and personality was amazing. She continued to hold the ground through the daily infilling of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, and resistance of thoughts that represented old strongholds.

Are all eating disorders demonic in origin? Definitely not. Scripture teaches that we battle the ways of “the flesh, the world, and the devil” (Eph. 2:12; Rev. 12:17). The interrelationship among those three aspects of the battle requires that we be “selfcontrolled and alert” (1 Pet. 5:8). In dealing with the symptoms of spiritual warfare, such as suicidal thoughts or self-destructive behaviour, the ministry of the Holy Spirit is often critical in revealing root issues and incidents, which are the “legal basis” for spiritual oppression. This is less a formula than it is another expression of our dependency on Christ, without whom we can do nothing.

Without personal freedom in Christ from destructive thought and behaviour patterns, believers will have limited authority to engage in warfare in the subsequent three spheres of responsibility.

Family Sphere

The second sphere of responsibility for spiritual warfare is the family. Christian marriage is a picture of Christ’s relationship with his bride, the church, and as such is a point of attack for the enemy. Lust and a lack of selfcontrol are referred to by Paul in 1 Cor. 7:5 as a prime target of the enemy in marriages. Similarly, an attitude of dominance or disrespect (1 Pet. 3:7) blocks the prayer life in a marriage

and represents another target. Humility and submission one to another represent a protection against darkness while the “days are evil” (Eph. 5:8-21).

Husbands and wives must pray for each other and even do battle for each other in addressing strongholds when necessary. Instead of living in darkness Paul calls us to live in the light (Eph. 5:11). By bringing strongholds of fear or lust into the light and interceding for each other, marriages are taken to a new level of oneness and freedom. A lack of willingness to live in the light and address strongholds in a marriage can result in vulnerability to spiritual attack in a family. Numerous missionaries, pastors, and spiritual leaders have fallen because of an unwillingness to practice the principles of submission to Christ in one another and resistance of the enemy in their marriages.

I recently had the opportunity to pray with a church elder that was addicted to Internet pornography. His repeated private confessions were powerless to break the foothold. It was only when he brought the issue into the light and confessed to another brother, and together we resisted the enemy, that the power of this foothold was broken in his life. What he did not realize was that his son had also come to me for prayer some weeks previous. The son confessed getting a girlfriend pregnant and then taking her to an abortion clinic where the “evidence” was disposed of.

We need to consider whether the sins of the parents, potential footholds, are visited on the children to the third and fourth generation (Exodus 34:7) even under the new covenant, and what the impact of the spiritual law of “sowing and reaping” (Gal. 6:7-8) might be on generational sin.

Church Sphere

The third sphere of responsibility in the area of warfare for the believer is that of the body of Christ. However, it must be noted again that we will have limited freedom to intercede for each other at this level if we are living in defeat in our marriages or personal life. Paul frequently called on the churches to pray for him in his ministry (2 Cor. 1:8-11), recognizing that Satan could frustrate and even block him (1 Thess. 2:18). Without intercession and warfare the schemes of the enemy to block ministry at the local church level proceed unhindered.

The final piece of the armour given in Eph. 6:10 is that of intercession and prayer for the saints. We must be on guard for each other. “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (Jas. 5:16).

Footholds that impact the church include relational sin in areas of bitterness, slander, and gossip (Eph. 4:29-32). Repentance is our most powerful weapon to confront these footholds. The freedom to confront and confess relational sin is

spiritual warfare. The “accuser of the brethren” (Rev. 12:10) who often accuses us through each other will be overcome by our application of the blood of the Lamb and willingness to repent. Similarly, a proactive commitment to live “at peace with all men” (Rom. 12:18) is a form of defensive warfare that thwarts the schemes of the enemy to divide the saints.

When leadership teams, in particular, apply this commitment to not speak of each other negatively and remain loyal to each other, they are arming themselves against the accuser. Ministries led by personnel who are loyal to each other and guard their tongues experience much freedom from the enemy’s relational attacks. Without “relational baggage” we are free to pray together and lay down our lives for each other.

The prayer ministry of the church is one of the ways in which we develop in maturity and responsibility in Christ’s kingdom. Jesus is looking for an active praying church that functions as his ambassadors on the earth. Satan is opposed to this role. As he did with the people of Israel, God has allowed the enemy to remain in the land to teach us responsibility and to reveal our hearts (Judg. 2:21-3:4). We are being prepared to rule and reign with Christ in the age to come (2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 20:6). This is our training ground. “However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8).

Societal Sphere

Perhaps one of the reasons the church in the Western world has had such limited influence on the “principalities and powers” is because of our inability to walk in the light in the previous three levels of spiritual warfare. Without freedom personally, in our marriages, and in the church, we have a limited effectiveness or even desire to engage in intercession for our cities and nations. Those who do learn and begin to apply some fresh principles of intercession for their city or nation without walking in freedom at the previous three levels cannot withstand the “counterattack” and fall away from their course of action.

Scripture does not provide clear teaching on territorial spirits. The presence of a “prince of the Persian kingdom” and a “prince of Greece” (Dan. 10:13, 20) who are resisting an angelic messenger sent to communicate with Daniel are indications that the “prince of this world” (John 12:31) has assigned fallen angels to territories. However, rather than knowingly influencing the angelic battle around him, Daniel appears oblivious to it until the angel of the Lord tells him. This in itself should be a caution against creating our own practical theology based on what works somewhere else. What is clear is that we are warned against slandering celestial beings (Jude 8, 2 Pet. 2:10-12), and confronting things we do not understand.

While we are called to drive out unclean spirits afflicting people, there is no such command regarding principalities and powers. Instead, we are called to “put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand” (Eph. 6:13). This defensive posture includes the offensive weapons of “the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions...” (Eph. 6:17-18). When our attention is on the Lord, and not on the enemy, we will be led by the Lord as to how to pray.

We cannot allow fear to continue to keep us immature about spiritual warfare. Jesus stated, “I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matt. 16:18). We are to pray that his kingdom would come and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10), precisely because his will is presently not being done on earth. The advance of Christ’s kingdom is warfare against a determined opponent: “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work” (1 John 3:8). When Satan offered Christ the kingdoms of the world if he would only worship him (Luke 4:5-8), Jesus never challenged Satan’s ability to offer those kingdoms. Christ’s victory, however, would come another way: the way of the cross. “Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Col. 2:15).

While some persons go into great detail delineating the differences in role and function of the various levels of spiritual authority listed by Paul in Ephesians 6:12, what is important for our purposes is that this unseen enemy does exist and that he is organized. His organization along geographical lines seems to correspond to the earthly political and human powers that he attempts to control. Further, it seems logical that prevailing cultural gods or deities, such as the goddess Artemis in Ephesus (Acts 19), gain their power to influence a particular region through direct or indirect worship.

These prevailing cultural sins renew the covenants with powers of darkness often through annual festivals or ceremonies. Many who live in the non-Western world can clearly articulate the identity of their regional deity. It must, however, be stated that God and not the enemy has determined the “places where they (the nations) should live” (Acts 17:26).

Given the reality of a geographically organized enemy, we have an opportunity to walk the streets of our cities and intercede for those blinded to the truth of Christ. We have an opportunity to join with the church gathered and to jointly intercede for our regions, as is happening in cities across North America. We can

also intercede together with the church in other parts of the world. When combined with Christian witness and loving demonstrations of Christ's kingdom community, this intercession is powerful.

Our adversary understands power, influence, fame, and wealth. He does not understand death to self and servanthood. There is a role for "binding and loosing" (Matt. 16:18-19) in our proclamation of Christ's kingdom rule. However, this must not be at the expense of our kingdom servanthood and loving community "displacing" the kingdoms of this world. Our proclamation of the victory of the cross must be made in the Spirit with which that victory was won. There is no room for spiritual "Rambos with an attitude" in this area of evangelism, spiritual warfare, and intercession.

Humility, godly character, and a demonstration of Christ's power should provoke the world to ask "the reason for the hope" we have (1 Pet. 3:15). However, kingdom living by itself rarely opens blinded eyes (2 Cor. 4:4). Similarly, intercession without a demonstration of kingdom living is incomplete (John 13:35). Kingdom community, when combined with intercession and warfare against the one who "blinds" the minds of unbelievers from the light, has the ability to powerfully advance the kingdom.

An Anabaptist Contribution to Spiritual Warfare

While this is only an introduction to the discussion, there are several theological emphases that Anabaptists can offer to the broad topic of spiritual warfare.

As Hans Kasdorf and others so clearly pointed out in *Anabaptism and Mission*, the theological core of the early Anabaptists was radical obedience to the Great Commission's call to go and make disciples of all nations. H. W. Meihuizen states that these early evangelists were commissioned as "Christian Knights," borrowing a term first used by Erasmus.⁴ When captured and flogged before magistrates, these evangelists publicly stated their forgiveness of their enemies. These "knights" were clearly in a war. However, they were not battling flesh and blood in their proclamation of Christ's kingdom rule.

Paul stated "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12). Others have noted that if we do not wrestle against "principalities and powers," we will fight against flesh and blood. This has been the history of the church through the ages. And here we should include Mennonite churches. In our battle against unjust societal structures and systems in the pursuit of peace, we have too often opted for battling in the "flesh and blood" dimension. We have failed to invest in the warfare of intercession and prayer.

The example of Christ invites us to be active in both the spiritual and physical realms. The kingdom proclamation is of an anointing to “preach good news to the poor... freedom for the prisoners... recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19). Jesus addresses the physical and spiritual nature of both the problem and the cure.

The early Anabaptist evangelists were warriors who integrated both the seen and unseen nature of the battle. The present spiritual warfare discussion could benefit from a greater emphasis on this integration. The seen and unseen nature of the battle was evident at the cross with both the demonic forces of hell and the Roman soldiers surrounding the crucifixion.

At the cross we also see the paradox of the suffering servant and the victorious warrior who “led captives in his train” (Eph. 4:8). Anabaptists have tended to focus on the suffering servant and not on the victorious warrior. Both are accurate in a fuller understanding of Christology and its importance for the church.

We now have an opportunity to call the larger church to an engagement using Christ’s way of addressing evil. The church’s proclivity towards triumphalism and a prideful attitude in spiritual warfare will be challenged as we remember that Christ’s greatest victory over Satan occurred through obedience to the Father unto death. We will cease warring against flesh and blood as we take up the weapons of love and forgiveness.

The Lamb of God will lead us to battle against the real enemy who seeks to block the rule of Christ in our lives, marriages, churches, and world.

Training and Discipleship Implications

1. While numerous churches and leaders within the Anabaptist churches have participated in training seminars dealing with spiritual warfare on a personal level through ministries such as “Freedom in Christ” (Neil Anderson) and others, we have not systematically trained our missions personnel or pastoral candidates in this important area of discipleship. Where fear of excesses has held us back we must acknowledge the far more serious consequences of sending unprepared “knights” to the frontlines. Every worker should receive systematic training (biblical, anthropological and prayer based) in spiritual warfare prior to commissioning for assignments.
2. We have much to learn from what the Lord is teaching our brothers and sisters in Latin America, Africa and Asia about spiritual warfare. Our Western worldview colours how we read Scripture with regard to this area of teaching and discipleship and limits the kind of freedom the Lord wants in our mission efforts. Too

- many mission efforts are being blocked by relational brokenness at a personal and conference level, depression amongst workers, unexplained sickness and other seemingly “reasonable” issues that could have their origin in the enemy’s kingdom. Unfortunately, we are all too easily “unaware of his schemes” (2 Cor. 2:11). We have unique opportunities in this generation to learn at the feet of our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world in this critical area of discipleship.
3. In light of increasing interest on the part of individual congregations to get involved in short term missions, we should encourage/facilitate intercession and prayer teams from local congregations to visit various established and emerging church planting and mission locations. These prayer ministry teams can serve to “soften the spiritual ground” and augment the present evangelism and service mission efforts. Some level of local congregational discernment would be important in determining the spiritual maturity and composition of these teams. Factors such as freedom and right standing in the four areas of spiritual authority and responsibility listed earlier would be more important than age in determining “maturity.” Similarly, the need for a common understanding of the principles and practice of intercession as well as cross-cultural ministry on the part of the members of an intercession team are important. A common orientation alongside someone with experience in cross-cultural mission and intercession immediately preceding the intercession trip could help facilitate this preparation.

Conclusion

Spiritual warfare is a reality for those who follow the Lord Jesus, particularly those who seek to live and share his gospel amongst the least reached of this world. Similar to any other area of discipleship, Jesus is our best teacher in spiritual warfare. The danger is that we either ignore this topic to our peril, or we fixate on it and take our eyes off of Jesus. Our primary focus must be living and sharing the gospel amongst all nations in word and deed. When we face spiritual warfare, we don’t run. We stand and fight with the weapons Christ has given us. When in the course of living on mission with Jesus we find those in bondage to the enemy, we don’t need to look for a deliverance ministry down the street, or seek to start such a ministry ourselves! Proclaiming freedom in Christ is part of the gospel. We are called to stand in our authority in Christ as we recognize, repent, resist and are renewed. Seeing new followers of Jesus find freedom in Christ is a privilege. Living under Christ’s authority and with his blessing in our thought life, families, the church and broader community is part of our kingdom inheritance and witness. Jesus has given us all we need to be more than conquerors and overcomers. Let’s live it!

Notes

- ¹ Stanley Green, “Survey of Anabaptist Mission Workers on Spiritual Warfare” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Council of International Ministries, Chicago, IL, January, 2001).
- ² Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 18-29.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 61-62.
- ⁴ Wilbert R. Shenk, ed., *Anabaptism and Mission* (Scottsdale and Kitchener: Herald Press, 1984), 89.

Recommended Reading

- Anderson, Neil. *Victory Over the Darkness*. Ventura: Regal, 1990.
- Arnold, Clinton. *Powers of Darkness*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992.
- _____. *Three Crucial Questions About Spiritual Warfare*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997.
- Boyd, Gregory A. *God at War*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997.
- Lewis, C.S. *The Screwtape Letters*. Revised Edition. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1982.
- Shenk, Wilbert R., ed. *Anabaptism and Mission*. Scottsdale and Kitchener: Herald Press, 1984.

Study Questions

1. Have you been around people who seem “over-engaged” regarding spiritual warfare? Do you think you might have been too “unengaged” in this area? Discuss how you can take the author’s advice in this article while being honest about your fears and ignorance.
2. Identify at least one area of sin in the four spheres that the author outlines: personal, family, church and society. Find someone who can discuss this with you.
3. What impact do “societal sins” have in our ability to resist evil (for example, the acceptance of slavery in past generations)? What can or should be done about these?