

Spiritual Warfare

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Collated & adapted by Paul Quek

Wikipedia quoted **Dr. Ed Murphy** (*The Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*, revised ed.; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996, page 13) as follows:

Some speak of [**Spiritual Warfare** as being] the struggle between good and evil. Others talk of the battle between right and wrong, or between light and darkness. Still others refer to the conflict between the positive forces which seek to preserve life and order in the universe and the negative forces which tend to disturb and even destroy life and order. From a biblical perspective, however, this dualism is revealed to be an on-going conflict waged on two fronts: God and His angelic kingdom confront Satan and his demonic kingdom, while the children of God contend with the children of Satan.

The writings of the Bible evoke images of conflict and spiritual struggle in the life of the Christian. One of the evocative images that is associated with **Spiritual Warfare** is found in the New Testament in the *Epistle to the Ephesians*. This letter is traditionally ascribed to the authorship of the **Apostle Paul**. In that letter, **Paul** gives instruction to his readers on the spiritual life in the context of conflict. He illustrates his points by apparently alluding to the armour and weapons of a Roman centurion, though it is notable that **Paul's** phraseology imitates *Isaiah 59:17*. The various pieces of armour are likened by way of analogy to the *shield of faith*, *sword of the spirit*, *helmet of salvation* and so forth.

Classic Demonology

The Christian Church in all of its major traditions - Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Ancient Oriental Orthodox, Anglican, and Protestant - has confessed on the basis of biblical revelation the reality (or ontological

existence) of a fallen angel known as the **Devil** and **Satan**. This affirmation is reinforced in the writings of the Church Fathers, in the councils and creeds of the early church, and in the later confessional documents of the Christian denominations.

The classic position of the Christian Church is that **Satan** and other fallen beings now known as **demons**, are spiritual entities that exist and sometimes manifest their presence in the world. These entities have as their primary focus the **spiritual deception of humanity**. Their primary mission is to thwart God's purposes on earth, specifically to prevent non-believers from placing faith in **Christ** and to prevent Christians from being effective disciples of **Jesus**. **Satan** is referred to as "**the father of lies**" (*John 8:44*) and as "**the accuser of our brothers**" (*Revelation 12:10*).

Demonic references

Biblical passages that highlight the demonic are principally found in the gospels of **Matthew**, **Mark** and **Luke**, and the **Acts of the Apostles**. Paul's epistles focus on the victory of **Christ** over principalities and powers. The **Book of Revelation** portrays the casting down of **Satan** and his being bound forever due to the triumph of **Christ** in the resurrection. Other passages concerning demons and angels are scattered throughout both the Old and New Testament. Outside of the biblical canon, **demonology** is found in the *pseudepigraphal* writings, such as the **First Book of Enoch**, and in the post-New Testament writings of the early fathers such as **The Didache**, **The Shepherd of Hermas**, Ignatius's *epistle to the Ephesians*, and Origen's *Contra Celsum*.

The classic response of the Church in its various traditions has been to positively confess and proclaim the supremacy and victory of **Christ** in his *resurrection from the dead* over all things including the **Devil**, **demons** or **fallen angels**. In the early church the rite of exorcism took various forms including prayer, laying on of hands, fasting and sprinkling holy water. Church Fathers such as **Justin Martyr** and **Tertullian** attest to the importance of invoking the name of **Christ** against a **demon**.

Other early rites involved **demon**-repelling prior to a candidate undergoing baptism. The candidate would participate in various rituals intended to cleanse demonic influences (*Clementine Recognitions*). During the rite of

baptism the candidate would publicly renounce **Satan**, while the water was consecrated. The sign of the cross developed as a **demon**-repelling device.

In the Roman Catholic tradition the rite of exorcism was placed under strict guidelines by **Pope Paul V** in the ***Roman Ritual (12, 13)***. Further definition came in the early Twentieth century from **Pope Pius XI**.

Reformation and Post-Reformation

The practice of exorcism was also known among the first generation of teachers and pastors in the Lutheran Reformation. **Johannes Bugenhagen Pomeranus** was the pastor of the Wittenberg town church and officiated at Martin Luther's wedding. In a letter addressed to **Luther** and **Melanchthon** dated November 1530, **Pomeranus** recounted his experience of dealing with a young girl who showed signs of **demon** possession. **Pomeranus'** method involved counselling the girl concerning her previous baptismal vows, he invoked the name of **Christ** and prayed with her. (Letter reproduced in *Montgomery, Principalities and Powers*).

The Anglican-Puritan writer **William Gurnall** wrote a lengthy three-volume work ***The Christian in Complete Armour*** that was published between 1662 and 1665. In this work **Gurnall** stressed the place of reading Scripture, prayer and the name of **Christ**.

Contemporary Roman Catholic

In modern times the views of individual Roman Catholics have tended to divide into traditional and "new-shape Catholic" understandings of the subject. An example of the new-shape perspective, which offers a theologically liberal and unsupernatural view of the **demonic** is found in the work of the Dominican scholar **Richard Woods'** ***The Devil***.

The traditional outlook is represented by **Father Gabriele Amorth** who has written two instructive books on his personal experiences as an exorcist for the Vatican: ***An Exorcist Tells His Story***, and ***An Exorcist: More Stories***. **Francis MacNutt**, who was a priest within the Roman Catholic Charismatic movement, has also addressed the problem of the **demonic** in his writings

about healing.

Protestant Evangelicals

In the American revival tradition among evangelicals, prominent preachers such as D. L. Moody, Billy Sunday, R. A. Torrey and Billy Graham have all affirmed their belief in the existence of the **demonic** and had occasions to recount some of their own **spiritual warfare** encounters. In the nineteenth century, one of the major evangelical authorities on **demon possession** was the missionary to China, John Livingston Nevius.

During the late twentieth century, evangelical writers such as Mark Bubeck and Merrill Unger presented their theological and pastoral response to **demonic phenomena**. The problem of **demon possession** and **spiritual warfare** became the subject of a Christian Medical Association symposium that was held in 1975. This symposium brought together a range of evangelical scholars in biblical studies, theology, psychology, anthropology, and missiology (see Montgomery, *Demon Possession*).

One of the very significant German writers is the Lutheran Kurt Koch whose work has influenced much of both evangelical and charismatic thought in the late twentieth century. The impact of his ideas has been recently examined by the folklore specialist Bill Ellis.

Interest in spiritual warfare increased markedly after the release of the film *The Exorcist* in 1973.

Pentecostal and charismatic perspectives

Spiritual warfare has become a prominent feature in some pentecostal and charismatic churches. The concept is well embedded in Pentecostal history, particularly through Jessie Penn-Lewis's book *War on the Saints* arising from the Welsh Revival in the early twentieth century. However, Jessie Penn-Lewis preaches a very different kind of **spiritual warfare** to that preached by the *third-wave Charismatic movement of today* - notably C. Peter Wagner and Cindi Jacobs. Other Pentecostal and charismatic pastors include Don Basham and Derek Prince, who have emphasized claiming the

power of the blood of Christ.

The concept of **spiritual warfare** has been applied by Pentecostals to the Christian's **spiritual growth in holiness** or what is technically called **sanctification**. A preacher may discern that parishioners are experiencing obstacles in their faith, prayer life and general spiritual well-being. That process of discernment may yield an awareness of spiritual oppression caused by a combination of **personal sin** and **demonic influence**. The obstacles are then removed through prayer, delivering a parishioner from **demonic possession**, and breaking down false beliefs about God. Dr. Ed Murphy is the author of a modern 600-page tome on the subject from the point of view of deliverance ministry entitled *The Handbook of Spiritual Warfare*.

Pentecostals and charismatics have also applied the concept in the task of evangelism and worldwide missions. Former missionaries such as Charles Kraft and C. Peter Wagner have emphasized the problem of demonology on the world mission fields and the need to drive demons out.

A popular fictional portrayal of **spiritual warfare** is found in the novels by Frank E. Peretti, *This Present Darkness* and *Piercing the Darkness*.

Controversy and Assessments

From inside the evangelical tradition a number of concerns have been raised about the current emphasis on **spiritual warfare**. Robert Guelich of Fuller Theological Seminary has questioned the extent to which **spiritual warfare** has shifted from its basic moorings as a *metaphor* for the Christian life. He is disturbed to find **spiritual warfare** metamorphosing into "**spiritual combat**" techniques where Christians seek power over **demons**. Guelich argues that Paul's writings in the *Epistle to the Ephesians* is focused on proclaiming the peace of **God** and nowhere specifies any techniques for battling **demons**. He also finds that the novels of Frank Peretti are seriously at odds with both the gospel narratives on **demons** and Pauline teaching.

Missions specialists such as A. Scott Moreau and Paul Hiebert have detected traces of animist thought encroaching on both evangelical and charismatic discourses about the **demonic** and **spiritual warfare**. Hiebert indicates that a dualist cosmology now appears in some **spiritual warfare** texts and it is

based on the Greco-Roman mystery religions and Zoroastrian myths. However, **Hiebert** also chastises other evangelicals who have absorbed the modern secular outlook and have tended to downplay or even ignore the **demonic**. **Hiebert** speaks of the flaw of the excluded middle in the thinking of some evangelicals who have a cosmology of **God** in heaven and humans on earth, but have ignored the "middle" realm of the **angelic** and **demonic**.

The excesses of unsubstantiated allegations made in the **Satanic Ritual Abuse** phenomenon of the 1980s and 1990s has also prompted critical reviews. Some apologists in the Christian countercult movement have expressed concerns that **spiritual warfare** techniques seem at times to have been based on spurious stories and anecdotes without careful discernment and reflection. Some of these general concerns have been expressed by apologists like **Elliot Miller** (Christian Research Institute), and **Bob** and **Gretchen Passantino** in various articles published in the Christian Research Journal. Others, such as **Mike Hertenstein** and **Jon Trott**, have called into question the claims of alleged ex-Satanists like **Mike Warnke** and **Lauren Stratford** whose stories have subsequently influenced many popular books about **spiritual warfare** and the **occult**. **Bill Ellis's** work, *Raising the Devil*, has detected the presence of folkloric stories about the **occult** and **demons** circulating in evangelical and charismatic circles, which later become accepted as unquestioned facts.

In 2000 an international collaborative attempt was made by evangelicals and charismatics in the **Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization** to reach some common agreement about **spiritual warfare**. The conference gathered in Nairobi, Kenya, and yielded a consultation document as well as many technical papers published as the book *Deliver Us from Evil*.

Other Viewpoints

Other perspectives that move in a therapeutic line include Christian author **William Bandler**, PhD in his popular book *Spirit Releasement Therapy*, and healer and author **Ken Page** uses a similar approach. There is also **M. Scott Peck's** acceptance of the reality of **demons** with remedial help framed in a healing psychotherapeutic framework in his book *People of the Lie*.

The Islamic concept of Jihad is also often used to refer to a **spiritual**

struggle against sin.

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