



How to Meet the Enemy: Arming Yourself for Spiritual Warfare (MacArthur Study)

John F., Jr. MacArthur

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C.S. Lewis wrote: There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors, and hail a materialist or magician with the same delight (The Screwtape Letters [New York: Macmillan, 1961], p. 3). Lewis was right. Unfortunately, strands of both errors exist in today's church. On the one hand, some Christians are materialists who fail to understand that the Christian life is a fierce spiritual battle. One reason for a materialistic attitude is indifference. When your world is an easy place to live in, it's easy to forget that a spiritual war is going on. It's easy to forget that millions of souls in the world are in the grasp of Satan. And it's easy to forget that Satan always takes advantage of Christians who are lethargic, indolent, or spiritually stagnant. He loves it when Christians try to hole up in a sanctified environment instead of fighting the battle. Yet that is precisely the agenda of many churches today. People are trying desperately to enjoy fellowship while remaining indifferent to the battle. Another reason for being materialistic is worldliness. Too many Christians crave earthly, temporal pleasures instead of the rigors of warfare. They seek a life of ease—a life of entertainment and activities, never realizing their role in the battle of the ages. A believer who invests his or her time and resources in mundane things won't understand spiritual warfare. A Christian who had a deficient view of God's grace said to me, "The wonderful thing about the Christian life is that basically you can do whatever you want." Believers are not handed a free pass to do what they want. They are called to obey Christ, the Commander-in-Chief. In Matthew 16:24-25, Jesus raised this call: "If any one wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it." We can't let spiritual warfare rage around us without joining the fight. It's vital that we take spiritual inventory by asking, Am I making a difference in the fight? Too many will settle for indifference and worldliness. Satan has a heyday with such Christians. My prayer is that your devotion and commitment level will deepen when you understand how to meet the enemy. On the other hand, there are also many in today's church who have an excessive and unhealthy fascination with demons. The following article, which appeared in the Los Angeles Times, illustrates this obsession: Under the militant banner of "spiritual warfare," growing numbers of evangelical and charismatic Christian leaders are preparing broad assaults on what they call the cosmic powers of darkness. Fascinated with the notion that Satan commands a hierarchy of territorial demons, some mission agencies and big-church pastors are devising strategies for "breaking the strongholds" of those evil spirits alleged to be controlling cities and countries. Some proponents in the fledgling movement already maintain that focused prayer meetings have ended the curse of the Bermuda triangle, led to the 1987 downfall in Oregon of free-love guru Baghwan Shree Rajneesh, and for the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, produced a two-week drop in the crime rate, a friendly atmosphere and unclogged freeways. This is not the cinematic story line for a religious sequel to "Ghostbusters II," yet the developing scenario does have a fictional influence: interest in spiritual warfare has been heightened by two best-selling novels in Christian bookstores. "This Present Darkness," by Frank Peretti, describes the religious fight against "territorial spirits mobilized to dominate a small town." A second Peretti novel has a similar premise. Fuller Seminary Prof. C. Peter Wagner, who has written extensively on the subject, led a "summit" meeting on cosmic-level spiritual warfare Monday in Pasadena with two dozen men and women, including a Texas couple heading a group called the "Generals of Intercession" and an Oregon man who conducts "spiritual warfare bootcamps" (John Dart, "Evangelicals, Charismatics Prepare

for Spiritual Warfare," 17 February 1990, F16). More and more Christian leaders seem to be championing such efforts. I know of a large conservative mission organization that is requiring all its missionaries to attend special training seminars to learn how to confront and assault the powers of darkness. Their strategy includes speaking to demons and learning techniques for exorcising them. It is becoming very popular to deliver incantations against Satan and supposedly rebuke or bind him. What about this fascination? Do believers need to attend spiritual warfare bootcamps? Are we to break the stronghold of demons so we can regain cities and countries? Should believers speak to demons and cast them out? Can we actually bind and rebuke Satan? Certainly Christians are engaged in a struggle against the powers of darkness, for in Ephesians 6:12, Paul said, "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." Many of the practices of today's spiritual warfare movement, however, are in stark contrast to the clear teaching of God's Word. Dr. Archibald Alexander, the first professor of Princeton Seminary and a brilliant theologian, wrote: There is nothing more necessary than to distinguish carefully between true and false experiences in religion; to "try the spirits whether they are of God." And in making this discrimination, there is no other test but the infallible Word of God; let every thought, motive, impulse, and emotion be brought to this touchstone. "To the law and the testimony; if they speak not according to these, it is because there is no light in them" (Thoughts on Religious Experience [Carlisle, Penn.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978], p. xviii). God's Word must be our only guide for all we believe and practice. Let's examine what Scripture says about spiritual warfare in contrast to the beliefs, practices, and experiences of those in today's spiritual warfare movement.

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