

Worship (40)

Worship as Warfare

The word 'Worship' conjures up ideas of singing, rejoicing, praying, perhaps bowing, honouring. But what about fighting, killing, struggling, battling. Not the first thoughts that come to mind, perhaps. But in fact Spiritual warfare is worship. The Bible links worship and warfare in many ways.

The names of God are often the very things we use to worship because they reveal God. When you consider the name, 'Lord of hosts,' that is a military term. The hosts refer to angelic powers used for battle. We know this because when Joshua met the Lord Himself in a human form before the battle of Jericho, Joshua asked Him, 'Are you on our side or on their side?' and the Lord replied, '*And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come.*' We can paraphrase this to say, 'No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.' The word '*Hosts*' means warfare, armies, conflict, and battle. God refers to Himself as the LORD of Hosts – Yahweh of Battle, Jehovah of Heavenly Armies. Here is the remarkable thing - God refers to himself that way 245 times. As far as I know, that makes it the compound name He uses most often of Himself in the Old Testament. We know of The Lord my Shepherd, the Lord my Righteousness, the Lord my Provider, the Lord my Banner – but they are used relatively rarely compared to the LORD of Hosts. That's very significant, because when God wants to refer to Himself, He keeps using a military title.

When you look at the nation of Israel, warfare and worship were inseparable.

Numbers 10:35-36 *And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, LORD, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee. ³⁶ And when it rested, he said, Return, O LORD, unto the many thousands of Israel.*

You might remember some incidents in Israel's history which linked warfare and worship. When Moses had his hands lifted up, signifying prayer and dependence on God, the Israelites prevailed over the Amalekites; when they sank – they began to lose.

Or think back to when Israel thought the presence of the Ark would save them against the Philistines. Perhaps the clearest example of worship and warfare being inseparable is in the time of Jehoshaphat.

2 Chronicles 20:1 *It came to pass after this also, that the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them other beside the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle.*

2 Chronicles 20:20-22 *they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper. ²¹ And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever. ²² And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten.*

Then you read the Psalms – which of course are songs of praise – songs for worshipping God, and guess what theme often comes up?

Consider how the psalms make warfare a worship theme:

Psalm 149:5-9 *Let the saints be joyful in glory; Let them sing aloud on their beds. ⁶ Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, And a two-edged sword in their hand, ⁷ To execute vengeance on the nations, And punishments on the peoples; ⁸ To bind their kings with chains, And their nobles with fetters of iron; ⁹ To execute on them the written judgment -- This honor have all His saints. Praise the LORD!*

Psalm 24:8 *Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, The LORD mighty in battle.*

Psalm 45:3-7 *Gird Your sword upon Your thigh, O Mighty One, With Your glory and Your majesty. ⁴ And in Your majesty ride prosperously because of truth, humility, and righteousness; And Your right hand shall teach You awesome things. ⁵ Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the King's enemies; The peoples fall under You. ⁶ Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. ⁷ You love righteousness and hate wickedness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions.*

Psalm 68:18 *You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive; You have received gifts among men, Even from the rebellious, That the LORD God might dwell there.*

The reasons why warfare is worship become plain. Warfare is about opposing forces battling one another for victory. Victory proves superiority. God wages war against His enemies to prove His supremacy. His victory is part of His glory.

To be engaged in battle for Christ is to magnify His glory as victorious Captain, as conquering King.

Now we know Israel's was a physical warfare against flesh and blood, because they were occupying a physical land. But the principles were the same. God's glory was at stake. God had tied His name to Israel, and their defeat meant His reputation was marred amongst the nations; their victory was His glory.

So it is with us. Our warfare is not a physical war, but a spiritual one. But the principles are the same.

It is speculation, but this may be part of the reason God allowed the fall of Satan, and the consequent fall of man. Because it would set up a battle, a war, a conflict in which He and those on His side would wage a good warfare; and the victory would be all the more glorious than if there had been none.

What is the warfare?

In fact, the warfare is about worship. It is about two persons who expect worship. One is God who deserves worship; one is Satan, who does not.

Isaiah 14 is seen by many as referring to someone more than the King of Babylon, but to Satan Himself. Reading it, we see his goals were worship.

Isaiah 14:12-14 *How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! ¹³ For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: ¹⁴ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.*

Therefore, the warfare is made up of claiming worshippers for one or the other. Every soul that comes to Christ is a further victory to God. Satan fights to have our sinful natures kept in their blinded, God-rejecting condition, by surrounding us with a world system that deceives us, that makes sin seem normal and righteousness seem strange. Revelation seems to suggest Satan is aiming for one man to become his son – the man of sin or the antichrist, as it were, to whom all worship will be turned, and then he can finally get his aim.

The Lord fights to bring souls to worship Him by introducing His Word in the world, by saving repentant sinners and then transforming them. We worship God in warfare when we work with Him in these aims. Victory in this fight, means claiming more worshippers for Christ. It is not staging ‘power encounters’ with demons, shouting out commands, doing prayer walks around cities, going up onto high places and taking dominion over the place for Jesus. It is not casting out demons or binding and rebuking Satan or the spirit of this and that. All these things are like shooting at decoys, while ignoring the real battle. In fact, I think that is exactly what they are – decoys to get the focus of the church away from the real battle – claiming worshippers for Christ.

Who is the enemy?

Ephesians 6:12 *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

Not humans, but spiritual forces. In **1 Peter 5:8** Peter explicitly says, ‘Your adversary the devil.’ Our enemy is Satan and his angels, who also dupe humans into achieving their aims. Yet humans become allies of Satan.

Romans 11:28 *Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.*

How do we wage warfare?

That is an incredibly broad question because, in a way, the warfare is a picture of the whole Christian life. And we could spend many, many hours just in one spiritual warfare passage like Ephesians 6. But instead, I want to take the approach of listing what the Bible expects from us defensively, and what God expects from us offensively. Warfare is made up of defending and attacking, and we are to do both. I want to list three Biblical ways of defending, and three biblical ways of attacking.

Our Defence

The first thing which a defender does is **watch**. Defenders watch for incoming attacks. Sentries stand on high walls to see approaching armies. Guards stand at their posts, being vigilant, looking for danger. Modern nations have radar and satellite technology to spot anything which might threaten their borders.

God tells His people to watch.

1 Peter 5:8 *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.*

In fact, the command to watch comes in one form or another in the New Testament at least fourteen times.

The opposite of a guard watching would be a guard sleeping. In the spiritual realm, sleep is associated with spiritual indifference. To have a half-hearted, ‘yawning through the sermon’, approach to the things of God will bring certain defeat by Satan. He will catch you off guard – and you will find you have fallen into sexual sin, or the pit of despair, or find your family has long since abandoned God.

What are we to watch? Paul tells Timothy in **1 Timothy 4:16** *Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.*

Another way of saying that is, ‘Keep a close watch on yourself. Watch yourself. Be aware of your weaknesses. Be aware when you are likely to be discouraged. Know what to do with yourself when you are in a weakened state spiritually. Know what things tempt you, and what things to avoid.’ Be like Paul who could say, ‘All things are lawful for me, but not all things are expedient.’

Learn to track your thoughts. Track your thinking, not your feeling. As Martin Lloyd Jones said – ‘*The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, preach to yourself, question yourself.*’

It is no accident that the Bible uses a military term when speaking about the heart in **Proverbs 4:23** – ‘*Guard your heart, for out of it flow the issues of life.*’

This is being sober and vigilant. It is looking out for weaknesses the enemy may exploit. We are also told in this verse to watch the doctrine. What does this mean? It means to guard the truth which has been given to you. Paul even uses those words later in **1 Timothy 6:20** - *O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called:*

Literally – guard what has been entrusted to you. If you are to make a stand against the Evil One, it is only right that you know the teaching of the Word of God.

Did you ever think that the Bible and its doctrine is something God wants you to know and defend? You can’t defend what you don’t know. In order to guard the Word, you must know the Word. Be in it. Learn it. Study it. Teach it. Let it dwell in you richly.

Satan’s primary tactic is not fear, or manipulation, or bribery. His primary tactic is deception. If he can trick a human into believing him, then a human acts of his own free will to follow Satan. That’s why to stand, you must know the truth. You must be able to smell counterfeit teaching, counterfeit ideas because of your familiarity with the Word of God.

The second important defensive tactic is to be ***disciplined, not distracted.***

2 Timothy 2:3-4 *Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. ⁴ No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.*

Soldiers, to be effective, have to be single-minded. A soldier who hates the discipline of the army, and is always looking over his shoulder to see what his civilian friends are doing, will be distracted, double-minded, and in the end, a poor soldier. It is a fact of life – warfare is not

fun or easy. It is the most serious thing on earth, and therefore discipline is absolutely necessary.

Rome eventually fell because its rulers, citizens and soldiers fell in love with pleasure and ease. Their armies were filled with German mercenaries who lacked loyalty to their commanders, and complacency set in.

So, in the same way, a Christian who wants everything convenient, easy and simple is a sitting duck for Satan. If you do not discipline your body to get up to read the Word, if you do not discipline yourself to spend time in prayer, if you do not embrace the inconvenience of being at church multiple times in a week, if you do not exercise yourself to memorise Scripture, if you do not struggle to learn new habits and put off old ones, you will be a pushover to Satan. If you do not learn how to subordinate yourself to the will of God, and become an efficient steward of your time and resources and body – you will not stand.

And in that lack of discipline, you will entangle yourself in the affairs of this life. You will leave your post and go looking for pleasure in this world. And what did Jesus say?

Luke 9:62 *But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."*

Thirdly, to mount a good defence, you must seek *to be like Christ*.

Ephesians 6:13-17 *Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶ above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. ¹⁷ And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;*

When you study **Ephesians 6**, you will notice that most of the armour is defensive - the helmet, the breastplate, the shield, the strong shoes, the belt. And if you read what each one of those represents, they have to do with Christian character. The helmet of salvation is getting to know Him in the first place; the breastplate of righteousness is His righteousness which you have positionally, and must work out, practically. The shield of faith is continually looking to His Person and His Promises to shield away the darts of discouragement, temptation and worldliness. The shoes are a readiness to declare Him whenever required; the belt, an efficient life rooted in His truth.

The point is, Paul is using these metaphors to suggest a Christian growing in maturity, a life of faith, truth, and righteousness - in other words, a Christlike life. You'll notice that twice in this passage, Paul instructs to take up the whole armour. We cannot afford to leave off one piece. We cannot approach our Christian life in a piece-meal way. It must be all of us, all the time.

When you think of how Christ handled Satan, it only follows that a life rooted and grounded in Christ will stand against the enemy. If only the spiritual warfare fanatics would understand that the armour is character, not some verbal technique.

Notice how many times that word '*stand*' occurs in Ephesians 6.

Ephesians 6:13 *Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*

This defensive posture is what it means to resist the devil. Watch yourself for cracks in your own armour – watch the doctrine, be disciplined, not distracted, and work on continually being changed into the image of Christ.

The Bible promises, ‘*Resist the devil and he will flee from you*’. Not because you are so mighty, but because a vigilant, disciplined Christian becoming more like Christ, is a mighty sword in God’s hand. He flees because when you are like that God is mighty through you!

Our Offence

Firstly, ***be strong and courageous.***

Ephesians 6:10 *Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.*

This command is given so many times in the Old Testament, and repeated in the New, we would do well to remember it. God instructs us to be victorious, put our heads down, and be bold in Him.

This attitude is necessary because our flesh is inclined to be self-protective. Why get into conflict? Why trouble myself? Let there be peace in my days. The Lord says, ‘That is not an option for you – you are to fight the good fight of faith.’ God has to deal with the cowardliness in our hearts and say, ‘Get up and fight; fight for your souls, fight for the souls of others, fight for my glory. If it costs you your soul, you will save it. But if you try to save your life, you will lose it.’

It is an attitude of willingness to enter the conflict. Whether it be by sharing the Gospel and risking rejection, or preaching the Word without compromise at the risk of offence, or even arrest in certain countries – God says don’t be a passive spectator. Make a difference.

The second thing we must then do as an attack on Satan is ***Pray.***

Ephesians 6:18 *praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints –*

We are told here to be praying continually. Prayer is the most powerful weapon you have to claim worshippers for Christ. That’s part of what the Lord’s Prayer asks for – ‘Hallowed by thy name, thy Kingdom Come, they will be done on earth as it is in heaven.’ Let your rule extend in the world today, let people turn to you.

Every time you pray for someone’s salvation, or pray for a missionary, or pray for pastors who preach the Word, or pray for the preaching of the Word – you are waging warfare. Someone has said, ‘Prayer enlists God, and God can do all things, therefore prayer is enlisting omnipotence.’

This is why Satan will do anything and everything to keep you off your knees. A defensive church is a bother to Satan, an offensive church He is threatened by.

To pray for the spread of the Word and the reception of the Word is to attack. To pray for it to have free course and be glorified, is one of the most potent attacks on Satan's claim on souls.

Thirdly, we attack by *making disciples with the Word of God*.

There is only one offensive weapon listed in Ephesians 6 – it is the Sword of the Spirit – the Word of God. We know also that faith comes by hearing, and hearing of the word of God. Therefore, we wage warfare as we preach the Gospel, and teach and train those who receive Christ. The act of sharing the Gospel is taking the enemy on 'head-on'. You are reaching into his kingdom, and seeking to arrest another one for God's glory. You will be opposed. But take heart. If you are watchful, disciplined and wearing the armour of Christlikeness, He cannot harm you.

1 John 5:18 *We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.*

This is what is meant in 2 Corinthians 10:3-6

2 Corinthians 10:3-6 *For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, ⁵ casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, ⁶ and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.*

Cast down arguments with the Word of God.

Since Satan's stock in trade is lies, we assault his stronghold by demolishing the false reasoning and arguments of the world. We do this in conversations with others, in sermons we preach, in books we may write, in public discourse we may partake in. Certainly Satan's philosophies seem like towers. Think of philosophies like evolution, or humanistic psychology, or relativism. These are like superstructures, part of the mental scenery of the average man. But we are to cast them down and bring thinking into captivity to the supremacy of Christ.

This does not mean we are argumentative. It means like proverbs says – a word in season – a word at the right time, overturning false ideas which keep people enslaved to Satan's world system.

So you can see that shouting at demons and binding them and having extravagant spiritual warfare services is really doing pea-shooting at aircraft carriers. Satan laughs those things off; in fact I think he has full-time demons working on keeping such Christians convinced they are really doing something important.

But if we are to wage a good warfare, we must take orders from the LORD of hosts. And He never told us to take on Satan verbally or try to confront demons personally. He told us how to defend ourselves, and take the sword of the Word of God, and cut big chunks out of Satan's kingdom – that is, more souls for Him.

There is something very glorious about battle and about victory. The final scene of human history before the millennium will be a Conquering King.

Revelation 19:11-21 Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. ¹³ He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. ¹⁵ Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. ¹⁶ And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. ¹⁷ Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, ¹⁸ "that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great." ¹⁹ And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. ²⁰ Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. ²¹ And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.

We do not fight for victory. We fight from victory. Nevertheless, we fight. This world, as Tozer put it, is not a playground, it is a battleground. Satan's world system is there to make you feel it is a playground, and that it is okay, if not expected, that you spend your life playing, or at least getting enough money so you can keep playing. In fact, the dramatic truth is that billions of souls are unwittingly marching on to condemnation while they play their lives away. Therefore, in obedience to the captain of the Hosts, and for His glory, we fight.