

Spiritual Warfare

1) What is spiritual warfare?

- A) The Bible reveals that Satan and the other fallen angels are active throughout the world blinding sinners to the truth and tempting Christians to sin. As Christians, we resist Satan and seek to free people from the bondage of sin. This great struggle is called “spiritual warfare.” Consider the following verses:
- (1) “For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:3-4).
 - (2) “For 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” (Ephesians 6:12 NIV).
- B) As a Christian, you are engaged in a spiritual struggle against the forces of evil. *The Message* paraphrases Ephesians 6:12 like this: “This is for keeps. It’s a life-or-death fight to the finish against the Devil and all his angels.”

2) Why does God allow Satan to attack me?

- A) The attacks of Satan that God permits in your life are not intended to weaken or destroy you. They are designed to build your faith and strengthen your endurance (Romans 5:3-4). If you respond properly, Satan’s attacks will help you become a skilled and effective soldier in Christ’s Kingdom (Hebrews 5:8).
- B) Faith comes by hearing and believing the Word of God (Romans 10:17), but faith does not grow without exercise. Reading the Bible without practicing its principles is like reading a golf magazine without ever playing golf. All the golf magazines in the world will never make you into a golf player. Reading about war does not make you a soldier, but basic training and combat will.
- C) Building muscle is based on the principle of resistance: the more resistance, the more your muscles develop. Satan’s attacks are spiritual resistance. Accept them as a challenge to practice your faith and build spiritual muscle (James 1:2-3).

3) How do I prepare for the battle?

- A) Prayer. You cannot be victorious in spiritual warfare without prayer. Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “And don’t let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one” (Matthew 6:13 NLT). In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus told Peter, James and John, “Pray that you will not give in to temptation” (Luke 22:40 NLT). Unfortunately, prayer is often the last thing we think of when we encounter temptation. Prayer should be a constant part of our day, from the moment we wake up to the moment we go to sleep (Ephesians 6:18).
- B) The armor of God (2 Corinthians 6:7; Romans 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:8; Ephesians 6:10-20). When you read these passages, it’s easy to get caught up in the details of

the armor metaphor, and you may start wondering, *Now is it the breastplate of righteousness or the breastplate of faith and love?* But what I want you to focus on are the qualities and attributes that Paul mentions in these passages: faith, love, light, truth, righteousness, salvation, the gospel of peace. All these things are produced in your life when you obey the Holy Spirit and read and meditate on God's Word (Galatians 5:22–23). Paul's point is that these spiritual qualities and attributes function as armor and weaponry in our battle against Satan.

- (1) How do these things act as your armor? As an example, let's consider 'truth.' In what way does truth act as protection against Satan's attacks? Consider the following attack: you're at the mall, and you notice someone who is very physically attractive. The thought comes to your mind, "How you look is what it's all about." Then the truth of God's word comes to your mind, and you reject this thought, for you know that true beauty is internal, not external (1 Peter 3:3–4). The truth just acted like armor—it protected you from believing a lie.
 - (2) How do you put this armor on? As an example, let's consider righteousness. How do you put on righteousness? You put on righteousness by living your life in obedience to the standard of God's Word. You put on righteousness by keeping your conscience clear. You put on righteousness by submitting yourself to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Doing these things produces righteousness within you, and it will protect you from Satan's attacks.
- C) Accountability. Whoever heard of fighting a war by yourself? We need each other to be victorious. Seek out another brother or sister who is mature in the faith, and make yourself accountable to them. Pray for each other and commit to be honest with each other. There's nothing like the thought of having to confess to someone else to keep you from sinning.

4) What are the primary ways that Satan attacks us?

- A) He tempts us to sin.
- B) He lies to us about God, ourselves and others.
- C) He lays traps and snares for us.

5) How does temptation work?

- A) James 1:14–15 is the classic passage on the nature of temptation. Here are the principles we learn from these verses:
 - (1) Satan appeals to your desires. We all have normal, natural, God-given desires for many things: food, sleep, companionship, love, sex, fun, etc. If you lived a life of sin, you may also have acquired unnatural desires: drugs, drinking, smoking, aberrant sexual behaviors, etc. (James 1:14).
 - (2) Satan then urges you to satisfy a good desire in an ungodly way or to satisfy a bad desire that we acquired when we were sinners (James 1:14).

- (3) Your mind now considers the choice: to act or not to act? So far, no sin has been committed. Being tempted is not the same as sinning.
- (4) You then exercise your will and make a decision to either act on that desire or resist. The moment you choose to give in to that desire, you sin (James 1:15).
- (5) The battleground of temptation is the mind. That's where the battle is either won or lost.

6) How do I resist temptation?

A) The gospel of Matthew tells us about a time when Jesus was tempted by Satan. Jesus' response is a model of how to resist temptation (Matthew 4:1-11). Let consider some of the lessons we learn from this account:

- (1) Temptation can come immediately after a time of spiritual joy or happiness (Matt 3:16-17).
- (2) Temptation is part of God's will for your life (Matt 4:1).
- (3) Temptation strikes when you are weak and is aimed at your weaknesses (Matt 4:2-3).
- (4) Temptation should be resisted with the truth of God's Word (Matt 4:4, 7, 10).
 - (a) The importance of reading and meditating on Scripture cannot be overstated. Consider what the Psalmist said: "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11 NIV). Jesus' ability to respond with Scripture came from the time He had spent "putting on the truth."
 - (b) I often refer to this type of resistance as "replacement strategy." Consider being tempted to think lustful thoughts. It's not enough to say to yourself, *I won't think that, I won't think that*. You must replace the ungodly thought with something else (Philippians 4:8). Turn your mind to the truth, sing a song of praise, read the Bible, or call another believer. Take action to occupy your mind with something edifying.
- (5) Temptation can contain a grain of truth that has been twisted in order to deceive you (Matt 4:6).
- (6) Temptation can be resisted. You can be victorious! (Matt 4:11; cf. 1 Cor 10:13).

B) There are times when the best way to resist temptation is to run away as fast as you can. Consider the case of Joseph in Genesis 39:6-10. Also consider what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:14 and 2 Timothy 2:22.

7) How do I detect Satan's lies?

A) Paul said, "We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5 NIV). This verse highlights the importance of paying attention to

the thoughts that come into your mind. You are commanded to recognize, reject and replace. For example, imagine a time when you put a lot of work into something and then someone criticized your effort. Immediately you find yourself thinking, *I'm such a failure, I can't do anything right. Every time I try I just mess things up. Fine, I won't ever try again.* Do you hear what you're thinking? Take these thoughts captive and reject them for the lies they are. Turn your mind to God's Word and replace Satan's lies with Scriptural truth.

- B) 1 Corinthians 13 is the filter through which you should be examining thoughts about other people. For example, suppose there is a birthday party, and you discover that your friends were invited, but you were not. Thoughts begin to rush into your mind, *Why wasn't I invited? I thought they liked me. I guess maybe they don't. How could they treat me like that when I invited them to my party two months ago?* Satan is a mastermind when it comes to questioning people's motives and intentions. He delights in planting accusations and criticisms of others in your mind. Remember, love does not think evil of others; love always gives people the benefit of the doubt.

8) How do I avoid Satan's traps?

- A) Be alert. Peter said, "Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed," and "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 1:13; 5:8 NIV). It is imperative that you be on the alert for Satan's traps.
- B) Be sensitive. The Holy Spirit will warn you and raise red flags in your mind when Satan tries to trap you. Listen to Him and do what He says. The more you obey, the more you will be able to hear His voice.
- C) Be wise. Solomon said, "Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding" (Proverbs 4:5-7 NIV). Wisdom comes from studying God's Word, living a life of obedience and seeking out godly counsel. It will save you from the snares of the enemy. For example, consider 1 Timothy 6:9-10.
- D) Be informed. Paul once said that he was not ignorant of Satan's schemes (2 Corinthians 2:11). You should be able to say the same thing. Consider the following:
- (1) Relationships. Satan can use relationships to ensnare even the most mature Christians. Examples: A young girl meets an attractive young man who is not a Christian (or vice versa). A recently married couple who is struggling with issues in their marriage meets another couple who begins to draw them away from church. A person who is lonely is befriended by someone who claims to be a Christian but is very shallow and unreliable.
 - (2) Situations. Satan loves to create situations in which he can trap you. Examples: A teenager at school is surrounded by classmates who are involved in a sinful activity. A husband struggling to make ends meet is offered the position of Treasurer on a local committee. A young girl's roommate starts inviting her friends over for parties.

- (3) Places. Satan can use places as traps for the unwary, and not just the obvious places like casinos, bars and nightclubs. The Devil can use other places as well. Examples: A bookstore (whose magazine racks are filled with sinful images). A restaurant (which often has a bar section). A mall (which has whole stores dedicated to worldly pleasures). A grocery store (which is filled with every possible tasty food you could want).