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The Call to Holy Warfare

“WHAT’S GOING ON HERE?” I, the missionary, asked myself over and over. The unreasonable resistance to the gospel, opposition from non-Christians, inexplicable depression, backbiting and division in the church, and a sanctuary burned by an arsonist left me more than suspecting that my wife and I had run straight into the midst of some very dark spiritual powers. What were we to do?

HOLY WARFARE

Throughout history many nations and groups have claimed to be fighting “holy wars” of one sort or another. But few if any wars fought between political powers can genuinely be said to be holy. Invariably, it is simply self-interests of a nation or group that are at stake. Only one kind of war can truly be said to be holy: war that is explicitly fought for the kingdom of our holy God against demonic powers that oppose His kingdom and people. In the Old Testament, holy warfare was fought with swords of steel. Since New Testament times, holy warfare has been fought with the Sword of the Spirit—the Word of God.

In discussing a Wesleyan approach to confronting powers of darkness, one may well ask, Is this something Wesleyans ought to deal with in the first place? We may find an answer by looking to John Wesley himself. When speaking of “evil angels,” he says, “Highly necessary it is that we should well understand what God has revealed concerning them, that they may gain no advantage over us by our ignorance; that we may know how to wrestle against them effectually.”¹ According to Wesley, then, we should not only understand what Scripture reveals about powers of darkness but also know how to effectively “wrestle against them.” Such was the apostle Paul’s intent in Eph. 6. This book is an attempt to help us in that direction.

When we bring the gospel to those under the grip of the enemy, we often encounter inexplicable resistance or problems. Could the reasons and solutions have anything to do with the spiritual world? What about the driving forces behind social immorality, family breakdowns, crime, even personal temptations? Church fights and splits are all too common, and so are the reasons behind them. Could there be spiritual reasons that are not often enough recognized and dealt with? As a pastor, I meet with Christians who feel they or people they know are under some kind of spiritual attack—and often they are. This book will deal not so much with personal demonization of individuals as with the influence of demonic spirits in the deception of and opposition to the people and kingdom of God. The purpose of this book is not to theologially discuss the problem of evil but to recognize that as God allows sin and evil, He also supplies us with the means of victory.

When my wife, Kim, and I returned home from missionary service and came to our church in California, we found ourselves arguing and getting upset about things in a way that we normally would never have done. It went on for a couple of weeks, and we were both very troubled by it. We started a

home cell group, and there we were told that every pastor in memory at this church (there had been quite a few) had had problems with marital conflict. Some were convinced that Satan had tried to destroy this church in many different ways, and all agreed that every pastoral couple had in some way been under some kind of attack, though no one was sure why or what could be done.

Kim and I had been through this sort of thing before. First we had the group pray for God’s peace and protection over us. When we got home, we set our disagreements and feelings aside, joined hands, and agreed with each other in heartfelt prayer that we were one in Christ, that no evil powers would deceive us or get between us, that our home and marital relationship would be covered in God’s protection, and that His peace and joy would reign. The fact that a large Mormon church stood directly across the street from our house made the prayer feel even more urgent. Since that time the problems have ceased, and joy has reigned in our home. But, as Eph. 6:18 teaches, we continue to be “alert” in prayer.

First Cor. 15:57 says that God “gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” And in 2 Cor. 2:11 Paul says that “we are not unaware of [Satan’s] schemes.” Many times we believers, as sanctified as we may be, could have gained victory or helped others gain victory but didn’t—because we were unaware of Satan’s schemes. Perhaps it was because we didn’t take the devil seriously or perhaps because we simply didn’t know. In *Exploring Christian Holiness*, Richard S. Taylor states, “We are involved in a holy warfare. It is a real war, not a chocolate-soldier make-believe. From this war there is no rest and no discharge until God himself transposes us from the field of battle to the throne of victory.”² As long as we are in this world, we would do well to follow Wesley’s advice that “we should well understand what God has revealed” concerning the powers of darkness.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND POWER

Donald Hohensee questions those who claim the infilling of the Holy Spirit without a resultant holy living. But he goes on to say, "It is also reasonable to question those who profess to be purified when there is no empowering. In recent years I believe the Wesleyan Movement has put more emphasis on the purifying aspect and not sufficient on the empowering."³ When looking at the power of the Holy Spirit manifested during the Holiness revivals of the past century, for example, we can see what Hohensee is talking about. The sweeping power of the Spirit convicted masses of people of sin and transformed their lives in an act of God that overcame the powers of darkness in people's lives. How much do we experience that power?

Jesus said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8). How many of us have neglected the empowerment of the Holy Spirit? How many of us have been satisfied with personal holiness and not pursued the truth and power of God toward breaking the hold of the evil one over people around us? This same Spirit is "the Spirit of truth" (John 14:17), for the Holy Spirit's power is founded on God's truth. And the power is for the purpose of effective witness. The truth is that God is almighty, Jesus conquered sin, death, and the devil's work, and we are children of God, who exercise His authority in Jesus' name. Effective witness demands an awareness of the devil's schemes and the exercise of the Holy Spirit's power in overcoming them to the glory of God.

OUR WARFARE IS DISTINCTLY HOLY

Non-Western nations have long recognized the activity of the spirit world and its affect in the human realm. But recent trends in the Western world of recognizing the influence of the

demonic on both individual and sociopolitical levels have led to a dramatic increase in what I am calling "holy warfare," similar to what some in varying ways call "spiritual warfare."

And while these terms are not found in Scripture, they are perhaps the best terms for what the apostle Paul speaks of in Eph. 6:12 when he says, "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against . . . spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." In numerous passages spanning both Old and New Testaments, we find a "struggle" or "war" going on in the spiritual realm. Sometimes the earthly manifestations are dramatic, at other times hardly noticeable.

Paul is clear that "the weapons we fight with . . . have divine power to demolish strongholds" and that the goal is to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor. 10:4-5). Our battle then is not simply spiritual; it is distinctly focused on Christ, so that all that is not under the Lord's authority will come to be. Such obedience and Christlikeness is what a life of holiness is all about. Our warfare then is not only spiritual but also distinctly holy.

THE NATURE OF HOLY WARFARE

By "holy warfare," then, I mean the overall conflict between the kingdom of God versus the kingdom of Satan and his legions of evil spirits. Since the matter is spiritual, prayer stands as the key instrument in our activity. In addition to prayer and the work of God, Scripture indicates that through sin and rebellion against God, humans and human society are under Satan's influence. The world, the flesh, and the devil then become almost inextricably intertwined. Thus, holy warfare involves all of the Christian life.

"Powers of darkness," a term paraphrased from Eph. 6, refers to spiritual beings of the demonic realm under Satan's control who oppose God, His purpose, and His people. "Cos-