

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

When you think of a trumpet, you think of a powerful, commanding, striking, military sound. No doubt that's why trumpets have been used so much in warfare. In Numbers 10:9 God told the people of Israel to blow trumpets as an alarm of war. Today we're going to turn our minds for a while to the subject of war, and to remember that we as Christians have been called by God to fight in a daily war – as we read in 2 Timothy 2:3: we are soldiers of Jesus Christ. Also note in 1 Timothy 1:18 – we are told to war a good warfare.

What kind of a war is this we are fighting? What is it all about? Who or what are we fighting against?

2 Corinthians 10:3 ³“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does.”

It is not a fleshly, physical war. God doesn't want us to fight that kind of a war – it is against His law to kill other human beings.

Verses 4-5 ⁴“The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

This has to do with the mind – it's a **spiritual warfare** – a battle for our minds.

We read more about our enemy in this war in Ephesians 6:11-12 (NIV): ¹¹“Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹²For 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.”

“The spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” shows that we are fighting against wicked spirit beings. Our spiritual battle is against Satan the devil (verse 11) and his demonic forces.

Warring armies need to be very careful not to underestimate the strength of their enemies. For example, in the Falklands War, the Argentinians didn't really think the British would fight with all of their strength to keep hold of those distant islands. The Arabs have often underestimated the strength of the Israelis, or they wouldn't have attacked them.

Similarly, we need to be sure not to consider lightly the skill and ability of our spiritual adversary. This verse shows that Satan is an incredibly powerful supernatural being. He is clever, subtle, cruel, relentless and experienced. He has many trophies and battle prizes to his name. He has overthrown many hapless victims – Cain, Balaam, Nimrod, Korah – even David and the righteous men of the world at times. In fact he has deceived the whole world – that means every single one of us, before we were called. And he's still working on us now – he's working hard, because he doesn't want to lose us.

Satan works through attitudes of doubt, despondency and negativism. He attacks swiftly and at the most unexpected, inopportune moment.

We need to be aware of his **schemes** as verse 11 describes them, referring to his methodology, his wily plans and strategies. In physical warfare, it is very important to be aware of what the enemy is up to. Spies are constantly infiltrated behind the enemy lines to uncover information about enemy capability, plans of attack, etc. When enemy weapons are captured, they're examined carefully to

determine the technology being used on the other side. When enemy spies defect, they are questioned in minute detail to work out the knowledge and secrets of the enemy.

Similarly, in the spiritual realm, we should not be ignorant of Satan's devices, as it says in 2 Cor.2:11, lest Satan should get an advantage over us. In warfare, many kinds of strategies and tactics are employed – ambushes, sieges, pincer movements, surprise attacks, blitzkrieg and so on. The Bible reveals many of the techniques Satan uses to war against God's people. It's valuable to study the way Satan works so we can better hold out against him.

Ephesians 2:2 is an important verse showing how he works: "in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient."

He works in the airwaves – in the spirit waves – like a radio transmitter broadcasting evil thoughts, desires, attitudes and impulses.

Eph. 2:3 "All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath". That's what we've got to be on guard against – that type of thought entering our minds.

Galatians 5:19-21 ¹⁹ "The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."

This is one of the sections of scripture that provide us with a checklist of some of the ways Satan can get at us. He is fighting the war on many fronts. He has insidiously infiltrated all of the world's entertainment, customs, music and literature, to get across his twisted attitudes of violence and greed, lust and hatred.

Let's never forget that Satan is a supernatural foe. He is an immortal spirit being, able to move at the speed of thought, and able to influence our minds with wicked impulses and attitudes in a constant barrage.

How would you like to test your strength against the "Superman" of the movies and TV? Do you think you could beat him? You wouldn't have much of a chance of winning against a being capable of zooming off miraculously just as you get near to him!

And so it is in our individual battle with Satan. In fact, the sobering truth is that, of ourselves, we can't beat a supernatural foe! It's impossible for us to defy Satan on our own.

Back to 2 Corinthians 10:4: "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. That's why our weapons need to be "not carnal but mighty through God."

Verse 5 "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

We have to cast down philosophies, reasonings, intellectualism, and self-righteousness, and any wrong attitudes, lusts and desires.

So God promises to help us – and we can use the weapons of His Spirit to overcome our superhuman enemy. But God doesn't just give us the victory without requiring us to play our part too.

People ask the question – “If God gives us success in life through His Holy Spirit, and if we want to be a true Christian and have love, peace, and joy etc, we have to get it through God's Holy Spirit; then what do we have to do ourselves?” What is our part and what is God's?

I'd like to answer that question by looking at what God requires us to do in this spiritual warfare, and then looking at what He says He will do to help us.

1. The First Attitude We Need Is That Of Discipline

2 Timothy 2:3-4 ³“Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer.”

Being a soldier isn't easy – spiritually, or physically. It involves tough and rigorous effort, courage and zeal. Paul shows here that it's a situation similar to slavery. A soldier isn't free to follow his own interests and pursuits, but must buckle down and single-mindedly seek to please his military superiors.

Similarly, as spiritual soldiers, we must strive always to be loyal to our Commanding Officer, Jesus Christ, who is called the “Captain of our Salvation” in Hebrews 2:10.

One of the most vital necessities in an army is that of **discipline**. We must be strictly disciplined as God's soldiers – God's Army. In this regard, we can learn a lot by looking at the stringent code of discipline imposed on the soldiers in the Roman Army. For instance, the military discipline of the Romans is described in pages 34-35 of the book “Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire” by Edward Gibbon.

“On his first entrance into the service, an oath was administered to him, with every circumstance of solemnity. He promised never to desert his standard, to submit his own will to the commands of his leaders, and to sacrifice his life for the safety of the emperor and the empire. It was impossible for cowardice or disobedience to escape the severest punishment. The centurions were authorised to chastise with blows, the generals had a right to punish with death; and it was an inflexible maxim of Roman discipline that a good soldier should dread his officers far more than the enemy. From such laudable arts did the valour of the Imperial troops receive a degree of firmness and docility, unattainable by the impetuous and irregular passions of barbarians.”

In our spiritual army, we aren't subject to severe punishments of this sort. Christ doesn't stand over us with a cudgel in His hand. Instead, He gives us positive encouragement to do well.

But we ourselves should strive to be disciplined – the mighty men of faith in the Bible have done this. (Proverbs 16:32 “He that rules his spirit is better than he that takes a city” – discipline is more important than physical strength.)

Notice an outstanding example in 2 Samuel 23:10: “but Eleazar stood his ground and struck down the Philistines till his hand grew tired and froze to the sword. The LORD brought about a great victory that day. The troops returned to Eleazar, but only to strip the dead.”

This man had fought so valiantly, with such intense concentration and discipline, that his hand now held his sword in an immovable iron grip!

That example should provoke us to ask ourselves how mighty we would be spiritually if our minds would cleave to God's Word in the way Eleazar's hand clave to his sword! God's Word is compared to a sword in Hebrews 4:12.

So an important quality we need as Christ's soldiers is that of spiritual **discipline**.

2. Another vital attitude of a soldier is that of **loyalty**.

We read an example of the loyalty of men for their Commander in verses 15-16, and of the loyalty of the Commander to his men in verses 16-17. ¹⁵“David longed for water and said, “Oh, that someone would get me a drink of water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem!” ¹⁶So the three mighty warriors broke through the Philistine lines, drew water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem and carried it back to David. But he refused to drink it; instead, he poured it out before the LORD. ¹⁷“Far be it from me, LORD, to do this!” he said. “Is it not the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives?” And David would not drink it. Such were the exploits of the three mighty warriors.”

When the General gives the order to fire, it's no use if each of the soldiers charge off with all barrels blasting in whatever direction he chooses. An army, in order to win its battles, has got to be unified. And it's got to be directed from the top down. God's army is like that too.

3. Another ingredient these mighty men of David described in this chapter had was that of **courage**.

Notice Deuteronomy 20:1 “When you go to war against your enemies and see horses and chariots and an army greater than yours, do not be afraid of them, because the LORD your God, who brought you up out of Egypt, will be with you.”

This applies in spiritual warfare too. Sometimes our trials and weaknesses seem to be too great to overcome.

Deut. 20:3-4 ³“He shall say: “Hear, Israel: Today you are going into battle against your enemies. Do not be fainthearted or afraid; do not panic or be terrified by them. ⁴For the LORD your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory.”

God has made the promise of verse 4 to us too in our spiritual war. He has promised not to leave us or forsake us. He has promised us the victory.

Deut. 20:8 “Then the officers shall add, “Is anyone afraid or fainthearted? Let him go home so that his fellow soldiers will not become disheartened too.”

This shows how important the attribute of courage is.

Similarly, in the spiritual warfare, Rev.21:8 shows that if we don't have faith and courage, we're not going to gain the victory: “But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death.”

Deuteronomy 20:4 says God will give us the victory – but we've got to do our part! We've got to believe He is giving us that victory, and show God we believe it by getting into it with our whole hearts – exercising discipline, courage and loyalty. If we're willing to do that, God does promise us great help.

Ephesians 6:13-18 ¹³“Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.”

Here we read about the **Armour of God** which God gives us to put on in order to be successful, victorious Christian Soldiers.

At the time Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians he was a prisoner (verse 20), probably in Rome, and was in contact with Roman soldiers daily, perhaps even chained to one. So he was very familiar with the various parts of their armour, and used this as an analogy which was vividly real to him.

Verse 13 “evil day” – a time of severe trial or temptation by Satan. The troublous times ahead of us when we will really have to stand up for what we believe.

The first item of armour we are exhorted to wear is the belt of truth (Verse 14A). The belt held the Roman soldier’s tunic in, and gave him freedom of movement. A true Christian can move freely and quickly, not having to grope about in doubt and confusion, because in any situation he knows and practices the truth.

Next, we are to put on the “breastplate of righteousness” (Verse 14B). Righteousness, which consists of unswerving obedience to God’s commandments (Psalm 119:172) defends and secures our spiritual existence, just as the Roman soldier’s breastplate defended his heart. Sometimes a breastplate becomes heavy and a weary soldier may be tempted to take it off. Some members decided to have an easier life by watering down God’s laws a little – don’t do it – it exposes your heart!

The soldier’s footwear of course showed he was ready to move (Verse 15). As spiritual soldiers, we need to have the gospel of peace about our feet. The gospel of God’s coming Kingdom is what gets us moving, earnestly desiring to help proclaim God’s way to the world.

The shield referred to in Verse 16 was a large oblong shield which covered the whole body, and was specially designed to catch and extinguish burning arrows dipped in pitch and set alight. The dart sank into the wood and the flame was put out. If we possess and use the shield of faith in God, we can overcome any and every fiery temptation Satan launches at us.

Hebrews 11 gives us a chronicle of the soldiers of God who overcame Satan by using the shield of faith. Verses 32-38 here were the fiery darts of Satan quenched by the shield of faith!

Verse 17A – the soldier’s helmet protected his head – the seat of his mind. Once our mind has grasped the hope of salvation, the glorious goal of eternal life in God’s family, that helmet of salvation will protect our mind from Satan’s attacks on it. If Satan can get us to take our breastplate off, and get his arrows through our shield of faith, then when he has felled us he takes off our helmet of salvation and our battle is lost!

Verse 17B The only offensive weapon God gives us is the “sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” Jesus Christ, our captain in battle, gave us an outstanding example of the use of this weapon in His battle with Satan recorded in Matthew chapter 4. He repulsed each of Satan’s powerful

temptations by a stunning blow with the sword of God's Word. Every attack Satan made to destroy Him was countered with a direct quote from God's Word (see Verses 4, 6-7, 10). Satan used God's Word too – see how subtle he is! He often uses God's Word today too.

Another vital weapon we have is that of prayer (Verse 18), which fastens all the other parts of the armour together.

So God gives us all those weapons. But we have to put them on – and we have to be disciplined enough to keep them on and to have the courage to keep going in the Christian warfare. And notice that each person has to put on the armour individually – we can't be adequately protected by anyone else's breastplate or shield or wear anyone else's helmet. We can hide behind them for a while, but when the battle rages, it's everyone for himself. God said "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

It's interesting to note that all of these weapons are used on the front of the body. We're told to stand our ground (Verses 11 and 14) and face the enemy. If we turn our back on the foe and draw back in the spiritual battle, we are in mortal danger.

Luke 9:62 "Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

Don't be one of those who draws back and are destroyed: Hebrews 10:38-39 ³⁸ "But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back. ³⁹ But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved."

This is a life and death struggle. We're fighting for our lives – our eternal lives!

Finally, what will the outcome of our spiritual warfare be? The answer is good news – we will be victorious – if we fight the battle God's way. If we make use of the spiritual armour available to us, God promises we will be able to hold firm in every battle and "having done all (Greek: having conquered or defeated all) to stand". (Eph. 6:13).

2 Cor. 2:14-15 ¹⁴ "But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of Him everywhere. ¹⁵ For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing."

When the Roman soldiers experienced a victorious campaign, the winning general would lead a magnificent parade through the streets of Rome, called a "triumph". Paul alludes to one of these triumphal processions where he shows that God "always causes us to triumph in Christ." The triumphal parades were occasions where incense was burned in great profusion, filling the whole city with aroma. We have the opportunity to be like a sweet-smelling perfume to God as we gain victory in our spiritual warfare.

Revelation 3:21 contains a wonderful promise for Christians: "To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame and have sat down with my Father in His throne."

The Greek word translated "overcomes" in this verse is from the root "nikao" which can mean to conquer, prevail, or be victorious (a term coming from battle or warfare).

We are fighting in the real "war that will end all wars". So let's be courageous, valiant Christian soldiers, using the impregnable armour God gives us and march onward to victory!