

Spiritual Warfare

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. We call this great struggle “spiritual warfare.” Consider the following verses:

(1) “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses” (2 Corinthians 10:3–4, NASB).

(2) “For 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” (Ephesians 6:12, NASB).

B) 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.” Ask yourself this question—Do I live my life aware of the fact that I am in a ‘life-or-death fight to the finish against the Devil and all his angels.’?

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 actually intended as opportunities to build your faith and strengthen your endurance (Romans 5:3–4). They make you a more skilled and effective soldier in Christ’s Kingdom (Hebrews 5:8).

B) Faith comes by hearing 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 going out and playing on a golf course. 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).

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 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 our lives by living in obedience and submission to the Holy Spirit, and by reading and meditating 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 our 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 are at the mall and notice someone who is very physically attractive. The thought comes to your mind, “How you look is what it’s all about.” But you immediately reject that thought because you have placed God’s truth in your heart—true beauty is internal, not external (1 Peter 3:3–4).

(2) How do I 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.

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.

How does temptation work?

A) James 1:13–15 is the classic passage on the nature of temptation. Here are the principles we can derive from these verses:

- (1) Satan appeals to our 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.
- (2) Satan urges us to satisfy a good desire in an ungodly way, or to satisfy a bad desire that we acquired when we were sinners (v. 14).
- (3) Our minds now consider the choice before us—to act or not to act? So far, no sin has been committed. Being tempted is not the same as sinning.
- (4) We then exercise our will and make a decision—we either act on that desire or we resist. The moment we choose to give in to that desire, we sin (v. 15).
- (5) The battleground of temptation is the mind— that’s where the battle is either won or lost.

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 (Matthew 3:16–17).
- (2) Temptation is part of God’s will for our lives (4:1).
- (3) Temptation strikes when we are weak and is aimed at our weaknesses (4:2–3).
- (4) Temptation should be resisted with the truth of God’s Word (4:4, 7, 10).
 - (a) The importance of reading and meditating on Scripture cannot be over-stated. Consider what Psalm 119:11 says: “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (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 just 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, 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 us (4:6).
- (6) Temptation can be resisted—we can be victorious! (4:11; cf. 1 Corinthians 10:13)

B) There are times when the best way to resist temptation is to run away as fast as we 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.

How do I detect Satan's lies?

A) 2 Corinthians 10:5b says, “We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (NIV). This verse highlights the importance of paying attention to the thoughts that come into our minds. We 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 that 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 our minds. Remember, love does not think evil of others; love always gives people the benefit of the doubt.

How do I avoid Satan's traps?

A) 1 Peter 1:13 says “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” (NIV). 1 Peter 5:8 says, “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (NIV). It is imperative that we as Christians be on the alert—on guard—at all times. All too often we are passive about our thought-life. We need to be actively guarding, protecting, redirecting and refocusing our minds.

B) Be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's warnings. The Spirit is faithful and will raise red flags in our minds. Are we paying attention? Are we listening to His voice? How many times have we ignored his cautions only to regret it later?

C) Proverbs 4:5–7 says, “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” (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) Paul once said that he was not ignorant of the Devil'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.
- (2) Situations. Satan loves to create situations in which he can trap us.
- (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.