

Spiritual Warfare and Worldview

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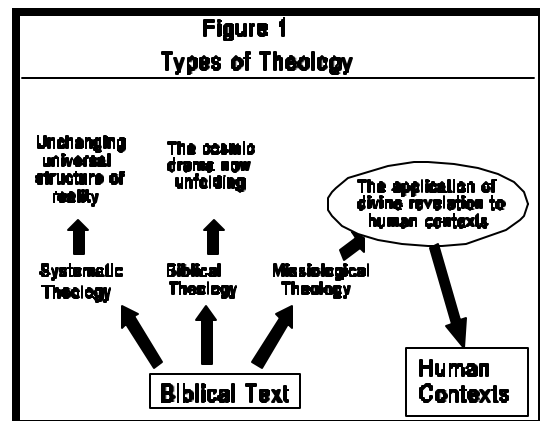
In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in the Gospel as power in the lives of people, and in spiritual warfare between God and Satan (Anderson 1991, Arnold 1997, Kraft 1992, Moreau 1997, Powilson 1995, Wagner 1991, Warner 1991, White 1993 to name a few).. This comes as an important corrective to the earlier emphasis in many western churches on the Gospel as merely truth, and on evil as primarily human weakness. Both truth and power are central themes in the Gospel and should be in the lives of God's people. But much literature on spiritual warfare has been written by missionaries who are forced to question their Western denial of this-worldly spirit realities through encounters with witchcraft, spiritism, and demon possession, and who base their studies in experience, and look for biblical texts to justify their views. These studies generally lack solid, comprehensive theological reflection on the subject. The second is by biblical scholars who seek to formulate a theological framework for understanding spiritual warfare, but who lack a deep understanding of bewildering array of beliefs in spirit realities found in religions around the world. Consequently, it is hard to apply what their findings in the specific contexts in which ministry occurs. We need a way to build bridges between the biblical teaching and the particularity of different cultures.

Doing Theology

How can we reflect theologically on spiritual warfare? There are several ways to do so, each of which has its strengths and weaknesses (figure 1).

Systematic Theology:

Traditionally, in the West, by theology we mean systematic theology. This emerged in the twelfth century with the reintroduction of Greek algorithmic logic through the universities of the Middle East and Spain (Finger 1985, 18-21).¹ At first, it was seen as the 'queen of the science, but over time it became one discipline among many in theological education--alongside biblical exegesis, hermeneutics, history, missions and other disciplines (Young 1998, 78-79). The central question systematic theology seeks to answer is: "What are the unchanging universals of reality?" It assumes that there are basic, unchanging realities, and if these are known, we can understand the structure of reality. It also assumes that ultimate truth is ahistorical and acultural, and is true for everyone everywhere. It uses the rules of algorithmic logic and rhetoric of Greek philosophy which are propositional in nature, and rejects all internal



¹ Peter Lombard founded systematic theology when he sought to disengage key theological questions from their original biblical contexts and to arrange them in a logical sequence of their own that would provide a comprehensive, coherent and synthetically consistent account of all the major issues of Christian faith, and demonstrate the rational credibility of Christian faith (Finger 1985, 19). Lombard's Sentences, written in the 1140's, provided the form of much of later Medieval and Reformation Theology. For a historical summary of its emergence see Fuller 1997 and G. R. Evans, A.E. McGrath and A.D. Gallway 1986, particularly pp. 62-173.

contradictions and fuzziness in categories and thought.² Its goal is to construct a single systematic understanding of ultimate truth that is comprehensive, logically consistent and conceptually coherent. To arrive at objective truth, it, like the modern sciences, separates cognition from feelings and values to keep the latter from introducing subjectivity into the process.

The strength of systematic theology is its examination of the fundamental categories and structure implicit in Scripture. It gives us a standard against which to compare our own beliefs, and helps us develop a biblical worldview, both of which are essential for any contemporary reflection on spiritual warfare. Systematic theology also has its limitations. Because it sees ultimate reality in structural, synchronic terms, it cannot adequately deal with change. Because it seeks to be exhaustive, it leaves little room for mystery and paradox. Because it focuses on universals, it does not tell us how to deal with beliefs in spirits and spiritual warfare in particular culture.³

Biblical theology:

A second theological approach is biblical theology. Reacting to the scholasticism of post-Reformation theologians, Philip Spener and Johann Gabler advocated a new way of doing theology. They emphasized theology as a practical science, with a stress on experience and the illumination of the Spirit, and a return to the study of the Bible as text (Evans, McGrath and Gallway 1986, 170-71). Their central question was: "What did the biblical passages mean at the time and to those writing them, and what lessons can we learn from this for us today?" Their method was to study Scripture in its historical context. They assumed that the heart of revelation is historical in character--that there is a real world with a real history of change over time which is 'going somewhere', and which has meaning because it has a plot and culminates in God's eternal reign. They argued that this view of truth was fundamental to the Hebrew worldview and to an understanding of Scripture.

Biblical theology uses the methods of historiography.⁴ It uses the temporal logic of antecedent and consequent causality, and accepts teleological explanations in which God and humans act on the basis of intentions. Biblical theology is important because gives meaning to life by helping us see the cosmic story in which human history and our own biographies are embedded. It helps us understand the cosmic battle between God and Satan--between righteousness and evil.

Biblical theology has its limits. Because it focuses on diachronic meaning, the fundamental structure of reality remains out of focus--in our peripheral vision. Moreover, it focuses on cosmic and biblical history, and does not focus on the lives and histories of people living today. Consequently, it does not directly offer us applications of biblical truth to the problems we face in our everyday ministries.

² An algorithm is a formal logical process which, if carried out correctly, produces the right answer. Algorithmic logic is sometimes called 'machine' logic because it is the basis on which calculators and computers work, and can be done faster and more accurately by these than by humans. For an introduction to fuzzy categories and fuzzy logic see Hiebert 1994, 107-136).

³ Today nonwestern theologians are developing theologies based on other systems of logic. For example, in many African philosophies meaning is not gained by understanding a logical progression, but by grasping the dynamic relationship of the parts to the whole (Sundermeier 1973). Indian philosophies are based on fuzzy sets and fuzzy logic--terms used for precise logic based on nonCantorian sets.

⁴ For G. Vos, Biblical Theology is the "History of Special Revelation (1948, 23). Biblical Theology is Historical, Systematic Theology is logical.

Missiological Theology

To deal with the problems we face in missions, we need a third way of doing theology--a way of thinking biblically about our lives here and now.⁵ Martin Khler wrote almost a century ago that mission, "is the mother of theology." Missionaries, by the very nature of their task, must do theological reflection to bring the message of Scripture to bear on the particularities of human lives. David Bosch notes, "Paul was the first Christian theologian precisely because he was the first Christian missionary (1991, 124)."

What is missiological theology? Clearly, it draw on systematic and biblical theologies to understand Scripture, but it must build the bridge of applying these truths in the sociocultural and historical contexts in which the missionary serve. Its central question is: "What does God's Word say to humans in this particular situation?" Evangelical mission theologians assume that the Gospel is universal truth for all. They also assume that all humans live in different historical and sociocultural settings, and that the Gospel must be made known to them in the particularity of these contexts. Eugene Peterson writes,

This is the gospel focus: *you* are the man; *you* are the woman. The gospel is never about everybody else; it is always about you, about me. The gospel is never truth in general; it's always a truth in specific. The gospel is never a commentary on ideas or culture or conditions; it's always about actual persons, actual pains, actual troubles, actual sin; you, me; who you are and what you've done; whom I am and what I've done (1997, 185).

The task of the mission theologian is to translate and apply the Gospel in the lives of people living today so that it transforms them and their cultures into what God wants them to be. Missiological theology seeks to bridge the gulf between Biblical revelation given millennia ago to human contexts today.⁶

The first step in missiological theology is *phenomenology*--to exegete both Scripture and the ministry setting, and to build a bridge of understanding between them. Mission theologians may begin with questions emerging either out of the study of Scripture or with questions emerging out of human life.⁷ They then start by examining the problem in its particular historical/sociocultural ministry context. They must try to understand the world as the people they serve understand it.⁸ They must also examine their own

⁵ We can also speak of Tropological Theology. Tropological theology is done in the context of worship and stresses the mystical, sacramental and iconic nature of truth. The central question is: "How can we comprehend complex, transcendent truths about God and reality that lie beyond words, logic and human reason?" Theologies of this nature tropes such as metaphors, types, myths, parables and icons to communicate transcendent truth, and are able to deal with the fuzziness and ambiguities of concrete human life. Tropological theology is doxological. It is not an abstract reflection on the nature of truth for the sake of truth itself. It sees theological reflection as an essential element of worship. Christopher Hall writes (1998, 67), "For the [early church] fathers, the Bible was to be studied, pondered and exegeted within the context of prayer, worship, reverence and holiness." It is also tied to the character of the exegete. For example, among the Russian Orthodox, the spiritual leader must be "knowledgeable in the Holy Scriptures, just, capable of teaching his pupils, full of truly unhyppocritical love for all, meek, humble, patient and free from anger and all other passions--greed, vainglory, glutton . . . (Oleksa 1987,14).

⁶The process of 'critical contextualization' is discussed in more detail in Hiebert 1994, 75-92.

⁷The dialogue between these two contexts leads to a spiral of translation and transformation. See Osborn 1991.

⁸This is referred to as an 'emic' analysis, which stands in contrast to 'etic' analysis which uses the categories and logic of the analyst which are based on a comparative study of many cultures and

worldviews--the assumptions and logic which they bring to their analysis. Here the methods developed by the social science to exegete human realities can be of help..

The second step in missiological theology is *ontology*--to evaluate both the people's and the theologian's understandings of reality in the light of biblical truth. Reflection in missiological theology must include systematic and biblical theologies, for these provide critical insights to the process. Just as an architect makes different blueprints for the same building--structural, electrical, plumbing and so on, so theologians need to look at reality from different perspectives and through different lenses. We need systematic theology to help us understand the questions, assumptions, categories and logic found in Scripture regarding the structure of reality by using the methods of algorithmic thought. We need biblical theology to help us understand the cosmic story unfolding in Scripture, the 'mystery' now revealed to us. We need missiological theology to communicate the transforming Gospel into the particular contexts in which humans find themselves.

The final step in missiological theology is *missiology*--helping people move from where they are to where God wants them to be. It recognizes that humans all live in and are shaped by particular cultural and historical contexts, and that they can only begin an ongoing process of transformation by starting with their existing systems of thought. We cannot expect people to simply abandon their old ways and adopt new ones. This transformation must also involve whole communities as well as individuals.

Human Understandings of Spiritual Warfare

Applying this model of missiological theology to the current debates regarding "spiritual warfare," we must first examine the worldviews we and the people we serve bring to the discussion. Stories of battles between good and evil, and of power encounters between good gods and evil demons are found in all religions. In Hinduism, Rama battles Ravana, in Buddhism Buddha fights Mara, in Islam Allah wars against Shaitan, and in traditional religions tribal gods fight one another for conquest.

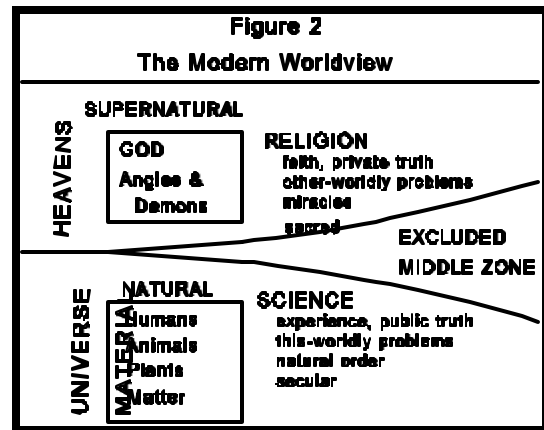
It is not our purpose here to examine the many views of spiritual warfare found in religions around the world. Rather, it is to examine our own worldviews to see how these shape our reading of Scripture. If we are not aware of our own worldviews, we are in danger of reading the understandings of war and warfare of our culture into Scripture and so distort its message. We will briefly examine three worldviews underlying the current debate in the West regarding the nature of spiritual warfare to see how they have shaped the current debate regarding spiritual warfare.

Modern Supernatural/Natural Dualism

The worldviews of the West have been shaped since the sixteenth century by the Cartesian dualism that divides the cosmos into two realities--the supernatural world of God, angels and demons, and the natural material world of humans, animals, plants and matter (Newbigin 1995, 20-24). This has led to two views of spiritual warfare. First, as secularism spread, the reality of the supernatural world was denied. In this materialist worldview the only reality is the natural world which can best be studied by science. For modern secular people, there is no spiritual warfare because there are no gods, angels or demons. There is only natural war between humans, communities and nations. Some Christians accept this denial of spiritual realities, and demythologize the Scriptures to make it fit modern secular scientific beliefs. Angels, demons, miracles and other supernatural realities are explained away in scientific terms. The battle, they claim, is between good and evil in human social systems. The church is called to fight against poverty, injustice, oppression, and other evils which are due to oppressive, exploitative human systems of government, business and religion.

societies.

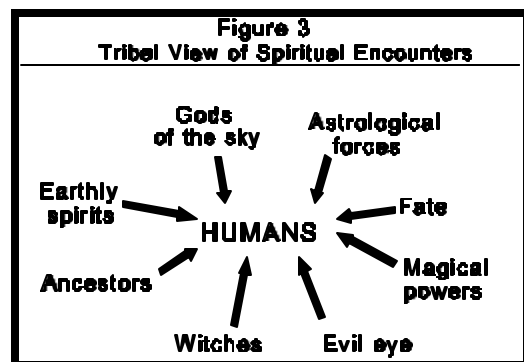
The second view of spiritual warfare emerging out of this dualism is that God, angels and demons are involved in a cosmic battle in the heavens, but the everyday events on earth are best explained and controlled by science and technology (figure 2). People pray to God for their salvation, but turn to modern medicine for healing and psychology for deliverance from so called demon possession, because demons, if they exist, exist in the heavens, not on earth. Western missionaries influenced by this dualism denied the realities of witchcraft, spirit possession, evil eye and magic in the cultures where they served. Consequently they failed to provide biblical answers to the people's fears of earthly spirits and powers, and to deal with the reality of Satan's work on earth.



Tribal Religions

For most tribal peoples, ancestors, earthly spirits, witchcraft and magic are very real. The people see the earth and sky as full of beings (gods, earthly divinities, ancestors, ghosts, evil shades, humans, animals and nature spirits) that relate, deceive, bully and battle one another for power and personal gain. These beings are neither totally good nor totally evil. They help those who serve or placate them. They harm those who oppose their wishes or who neglect them or refuse to honor them. Humans must placate them to avoid terrible disasters.

Spiritual warfare in animistic societies is seen as an ongoing battle between different alliances of beings (figure 3). For the most part these alliances are based on ethnicity and territory. The battle is not primarily between "good" and "evil," but between "us" and "them." The gods, spirits, ancestors and people of one village or tribe are in constant battle with those of surrounding villages and tribes. When the men of one group defeat those of another, they attribute their success to the power of their gods and spirits. When they are defeated, they blame this on the weakness of their gods and spirits. We see this in the Old Testament in way the Arameans viewed their battles with the Israelites (I Kings 20:23,-30).

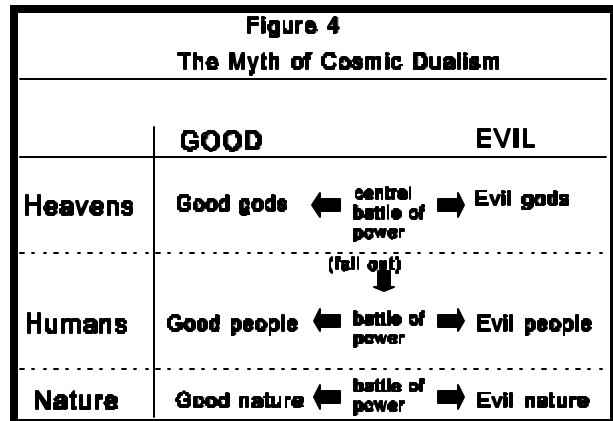


Land plays an important role in tribal views of spiritual warfare. Gods, spirits and ancestors reside in specific territories or objects, and protect their people who reside on their lands. Their powers do not extend to other areas. When people go on distant trips, they are no longer under the protection of their gods. When a community is defeated, the people are expected to change their allegiance to the stronger God and serve him. Conversions to new gods often follow dramatic "power encounters."

Some Christians interpret the biblical data on spiritual warfare using the traditional tribal themes of territory and power encounter (Peretti 1988, and Wagner 1991). Satan is viewed as having authority over the earth, an authority he exercises through delegation to his demonic hierarchy. As Chuck Lowe points out (1998), this view of territorial spirits has little biblical justification.

Cosmic Dualism

A third worldview of spiritual warfare is based on a cosmic dualism (figure 4). This is found in Zoroastrianism, Manicheism and Hinduism, and in cultures shaped by the Indo-European worldview. In it mighty gods battle for control of the universe: one seeking to establish a kingdom of righteousness and order, and the other an evil empire. The outcome is uncertain, for both sides are equally strong, and the battle is unending for when good or evil are defeated they rise to fight again. All reality is divided into two camps: good gods and bad gods, angels and demons, good nations and evil ones, good humans and wicked ones. The line between the two camps is sharp.



Central to this worldview is the myth of redemptive violence. Order can be established only when one side defeats the other in spiritual warfare. In other words, violence is necessary to bring about a better society (Larson 1974, Puhvel 1970, Wink 1992). To win, therefore, is everything. The focus, therefore, is on the battle. The myths tell of the battles between the gods, and their effect on humans. Conflicts and competition are intrinsic to the world, and lead to evolution (biology), progress (civilization), development (economic), and prowess (sports).

Morality in the Indo-European battle is based on the notion of “fairness,” “equal opportunity.” To be fair, the conflict must be between those thought to be more or less equal in might. The outcome must be uncertain. It is “unfair” to pit a professional ball team against a team of amateurs. Equal opportunity means that both sides must be able to use the same means to gain victory. If the evil side uses illegal and wicked means, the good side is justified in using them. In movies, the policeman cannot shoot first. When the criminal draws his gun, however, the policeman can shoot him without a trial. In the end, both the good and the bad sides use violence, deceit, and intimidation to win the battle. In this worldview, chaos is the greatest evil and power and control are the greatest good.

Indo-European religious beliefs have largely died in the West, but as Walter Wink points out (1992), the Indo-European worldview continues to dominate modern western thought. It is the basis for the theories of evolution and capitalism, and is the dominant theme in western entertainment and sports. People pay to see the football battle, and go home at the end claiming victory or making excuses for the loss. The story ends when the detective unmasks the villain, the cowboys defeat the Indians, Luke Skywalker and Princess Leah thwart the Evil Empire, and Superman destroys the enemies of humankind. Victory in the Indo-European myth is never final, however, nor is evil fully defeated. Evil rises again to challenge the good, so good must constantly be on guard against future attacks.

Many current Christian interpretations of spiritual warfare are based on an Indo-European worldview which sees it as a cosmic battle between God and his angels, and Satan and his demons for the control of people and lands. The battle is fought in the heavens, but it ranges over sky and earth. The central question is one of power--can God defeat Satan? Because the outcome is in doubt, intense prayer is necessary to enable God and his angels to gain victory over the demonic powers. Humans are victims of this struggle. Even those who turn to Christ are subject to bodily attacks by Satan.

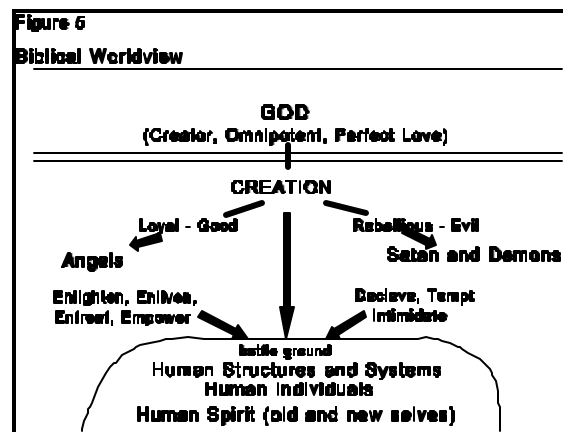
Biblical Views of Spiritual Warfare

Warfare is an important metaphor in Scripture and we must take it seriously. Eugene Peterson writes,

There is a spiritual war in progress, an all-out moral battle. There is evil and cruelty, unhappiness and illness. There is superstition and ignorance, brutality and pain. God is in continuous and energetic battle against all of it. God is for life and against death. God is for love and against hate. God is for hope and against despair. God is for heaven and against hell. There is no neutral ground in the universe. Every square foot of space is contested (1997, 122-123).

The question is, what is the nature of this battle in biblical terms? One thing is clear, the biblical images of spiritual warfare are radically different from those in the materialistic, dualistic, animistic and Indo-European myths (figure 5). For example, in the Old Testament the surrounding nations saw Israel's defeats as evidence that their gods were more powerful, but the Old Testament writers are clear--Israel's defeats are not at the hand of pagan gods, but the judgment of Yahweh for their sins (Judg. 4:1-2; 6:1; 10:7; 1 Sam. 28:17-19; 1 Kings 16:2-3; 2 Kings 17:7-23). Similarly, the battle between God and Satan is not one of power (Job 1:1-12, Jud. 9:23-24). The whole world belongs to God. The gods of the pagans are, in fact, no gods. They are merely human-made images fashioned from wood and stone (Is. 44:46). Satan is a fallen angel created by God.

In the New Testament the focus shifts to a more spiritual view of battle. The Gospels clearly demonstrate the existence of demons, or unclean spirits, who oppress people. The exorcists of Jesus' day used techniques such as shoving a smelly root up the possessed person's nose to drive the spirit away, or by invoking a higher spirit through magical incantations (Keener 1993). Jesus, in contrast, simply drove the demons out on the basis of his own authority (Mk. 1:21-27; 9:14-32). He was not simply some mighty sorcerer who learned to manipulate the spirits through more powerful magic. He is the sovereign God of the universe exerting his will and authority over Satan and his helpers.



The Nature of the Battle

The Bible is clear: there is a cosmic battle between God and Satan (Eph. 6:12). There is, however, no doubt about its outcome. The dualism of God and Satan, good and evil, is not eternal and coexistent. In the beginning was God, eternal, righteous, loving and good. Satan, sin and sinners appear in creation. Moreover, God's creation is an ongoing process. The very existence of Satan and sinners, and that the power they use in their rebellion is given them by God, is a testimony to his mercy and love.

If the cosmic struggle between God and Satan is not one of power, what is it about? It is the establishment of God's reign on earth as it is in heaven. It is for human hearts and godly societies. God in his mercy is inviting sinners to repent and turn to him.

Two parables help us understand the nature of the warfare we face. The first is the wayward son (Bailey 1998). The father lavishes his love on his son, but the son rebels and turns against his father. The father is not interested in punishing his son, but in winning him back, so the father reaches out in unconditional love. The son wants to provoke the father into hating him, and thereby to justify his rebellion, but the father takes all the evil his son heaps on him and continues to love. When the son repents, he is restored back fully into the family (Luke 15:21-24). Similarly, God loves his rebellious creations, and longs to save them. If he were to do less, he would be less than perfect love. In this battle for human

allegiances, humans are not passive victims. They are active co-conspirators with Satan and his host in rebellion against God, and God urges them to turn to him for salvation.

The second parable is the rebellious vassals or stewards (Matt. 21:33-44). At first, the stewards are faithful, and their appointment gives them legitimate authority over part of the kingdom. Later they rebel and persecute the righteous. In Indo-European mythology the king must defeat the rebels by might and destroy them. In the biblical worldview the king first seeks reconciliation, so he sends his servants. When they are mistreated, he sends his son. The son is tried in the vassal's court, found guilty and put to death. The case is appealed to the king who finds the lower court evil and removes it from power. The central question in Scripture is not power but authority.

Angels and Demons

A biblical view of spiritual warfare calls for a theology of angels and demons. Satan and his hosts are dreadfully real and represent the powers of darkness arrayed in battle against God's Kingdom of Light. Walter Kaiser and his colleagues point out that,

. . . demons are part of the cosmic or spiritual conflict going on behind the outward actions of preaching, teaching and healing. Demons fit into the New Testament picture of what the reign of God means and the fact that salvation is not simply deliverance from physical sickness or political oppression or poverty, but at root a deliverance from final judgment, from spiritual sin and from the oppression by evil spiritual forces connected to these things (1996,81).

Misfortunes and illnesses are the result of sin, but most are not directly caused by demonic sources. They are part of the fallen estate of humans and the judgment of sin. The greatest hindrance to people coming to Christ is not demon activity, real as it is, but human sin and rebellion expressed in fallen cultural and social systems which lead people to the worship themselves rather than the Creator (Rom 1:21-25).

Scripture is clear: children are delivered from the power that Satan formerly had over them. Every person who is "in Christ" shares in Christ's uniqueness, and need not be apprehensive or feel paralyzed with fear concerning Satan and evil spirits (1 John 4:4). Satan and his demons have no power over believers other than what God permits.

The belief in spirits who rule territories and control people implies that these people are hapless victims of the cosmic battles of the gods, and that once they are delivered they will be ready to convert to Christ in mass. This sells human sinfulness short. Even if demons are driven out, humans call them back and renew their individual and corporate rebellion against God. Christians should not identify Satan and his followers with territories that can be exorcized. To do so is to introduce animistic beliefs into the Christian worldview.

Belief in evil spirits now ruling geographic territories also denies the work of the Cross. Whatever delegated authority Satan had at the time of creation was taken away after the resurrection when Christ declared, "And now all authority has been given unto me (Matt. 28:16)." Satan now has no authority over the earth, only the authority given him by his demonic and human followers.

The Weapons of Warfare

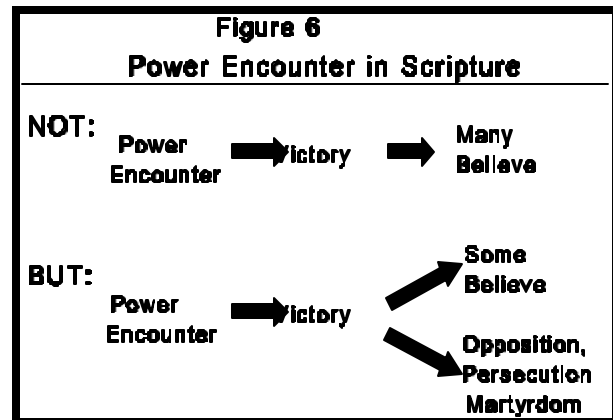
Scripture makes it clear that the weapons of spiritual warfare are different for God and for Satan. Satan blinds the minds of humans to the truth through lies and deception. He tempts them with the pleasures of sin by appealing to their old nature. He intimidates them with fear by sending misfortunes. He accuses them of their sins. Above all, he invites them to worship themselves as gods (Gen. 3:1-7, 2 Tim. 3:2). God uses the weapons of truth to enlighten the mind, righteousness to combat sin, and peace and *shalom* to counter temptation. Above all, he invites all into the Kingdom of God in which Christ reigns in perfect love and justice.

Satan and his followers [demonic and human] devise cultures and societies of rebellion that blind human minds. They seek to control those who turn themselves over to the rebellion, to keep sinners from converting, and to cause the saved to fall. Human rebellion is both individual and corporate. God and his followers [angelic and human] create the church as a counter-cultural community where Christ is recognized and worshiped as Lord, and where truth, love and righteousness reign. In the battle, God, his angels and his saints minister to protect and guide his people (2 Ki 6:17, Gen 24:7; 31:11-12; Dan 8:15-16, 9:20-23; Matt 1:20).

Power Encounters

At the heart of much of the current debate regarding spiritual warfare is the concept of 'power encounter.' Often this is seen in Indo-European terms. Proponents see such encounters as opportunities to demonstrate the might of God through dramatic healings, casting out of demons and divine protection, and assume that when people see God's miraculous interventions, they will believe. Scripture and church history show that demonstrations of God's power often lead some to believe, but they also excite the enemy to greater opposition leading to persecution and death (figure 6). We see this in the book of Acts where victories are followed by persecution, imprisonment and death (appendix 1). Above all we see it in John where Jesus confronts the religious and political establishments and is crucified (appendix 2). In biblical spiritual warfare the Cross is the ultimate and final victory (1 Cor. 1:18-25). There Satan used his full might to destroy Christ, or to provoke him to use his divinity wrongly. Either would have meant defeat for Christ--the first because Satan would have overcome him and the second because it would have destroyed God's plan of salvation through the use of unrighteous means.

The cross as victory makes no sense in the Indo-European or tribal worldviews. In the Indo-European worldview, Christ should have taken up the challenge of his tormentors, called down his angelic hosts waiting ready in heaven, and come down from the cross in triumph to establish his kingdom. In the Scriptures the cross is the demonstration of victory through weakness. At the cross Satan stands judged because he put Christ, God incarnate as perfect man, to death. On the cross Jesus bore the sins of the world and triumphed over all the powers of evil. His obedience unto death "rendered powerless him who had the power of death that is the devil" (Heb. 2:14). The cross was Satan's undoing (Col. 2:15), but Satan's defeat was not an end in itself. Rather it removes the obstacles to God's purpose of creating people fit for His Kingdom (Gen. 12:1; Ex 19:3ff; I Peter 2:9). The cross is the victory of righteousness over evil, of love over hate, of God's way over Satan's way. If our understanding of spiritual warfare does not see the cross as the final triumph, it is wrong.



Christians and churches are in desperate need of showing God's power in transformed lives and in a Christlike confrontation of evil wherever they find it, whether demonic, systemic or personal. Here we face two dangers. On the one hand, we may avoid bold demonstrations of power for fear these may become magic. The church then is poor in the manifestations of God's might. On the other hand, in our zeal to demonstrate God's power we can run after the sensational and be tempted to use power for our own glory. Neither miracles nor the Cross can be taken out of the gospel without distorting it.

Indo-European and Biblical Views of Spiritual Warfare	
<i>INDO-EUROPEAN</i>	<i>BIBLICAL</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - battle between equals - seek to defeat and control - use power of force - use the same means as the enemy - inflict pain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - rebellious creation - seek to restrain and reconcile - use power of love and truth - use only righteous means - bear pain
 ▼	 ▼
<i>SWORD</i>	<i>CROSS</i>

Demonization

Along with territorial spirits, demonization and deliverance is a central issue in the current debate on spiritual warfare. Biblically, it is clear that demons are real and that they plague people, but they must submit to the authority of Christ. We, too, must take their attacks seriously. When encountering spirit oppression, we must be prepared to pray and minister to the victims. For those raised in the West, this often means rethinking their understanding of demonic realities in light of Scripture.

The first step in dealing with people who appear to be oppressed by demons is discernment. We must not confuse phenomenology with ontology. Some who appear to be possessed, in fact, may be subconsciously or consciously seeking attention. This is often the case when the exorcism seems to be temporary and the victims return repeatedly for more exorcisms. Other cases are cases of mental illness. To seek to exorcize these patients often makes their condition worse. Still other cases of demonic oppression are real, and must be dealt with as such. One thing is clear, Satan is a master of deceit and wants humans to fear him even when he isn't there. Discernment of demonic oppression is difficult because of the complexity of the human personality, and to human tendencies to self-deception. People who are psychologically ill frequently suffer from delusions of being demon possessed. Those who are truly demonized do not commonly refer to that fact. Exorcism should not be the first approach to a problem, but come only after ruling out other biophysical causes. In diagnosing cases that appear to be possession, it is good to involve a team, such as a doctor, counselor and minister.

The second step in dealing with demon possession is to prepare beforehand. We need to examine our personal attitudes and relationship to Christ. Deliverance ministries should never be done merely out of curiosity or experiment. Demons know our hidden sins (Act 19:13ff). Complete honesty and openness is needed, and a right heart before God. Unconfessed sin, resentment and an unforgiving spirit block ministry. The possessed person must also want deliverance if it is to be successful. God does not deliver people against their will. Moreover, care must be taken to avoid undue emotional involvement, and to maintain as much objectivity as possible. Because such ministries are already very subjective and lend themselves readily to excesses and sensationalism, missionaries should not enter such ministry triumphantly.

Third, exorcisms must be surrounded by prayer for protection, discernment, and ministry. We are powerless; it is God who must drive out the spirits. Consequently, we should speak primarily to God, not with the spirits. Evil spirits are liars and we cannot trust their word. It is not important for us to know their names to call for God's deliverance. We must avoid all magical tendencies in the deliverance process. It is not dependent on the use of special words, or right gestures. The deliverance is by Christ and the Holy Spirit, not by our actions. We must avoid the sensationalism commonly associated with some healing and exorcism ministries. Following the deliverance it is important to incorporate those who are delivered into a Christian community of support and instruction that does not stigmatize them. This requires months of follow-up ministry by mature Christians.

Deliverance ministries should not focus on our ministry. Rather it is to proclaim the Good News of God's salvation in Christ. Jesus did not go seeking out the possessed, but when people came he ministered to them. His central purpose was to declare the coming of the Kingdom of God in salvation, righteousness, peace and justice. When the people wanted miracles and not his message, Jesus ceased doing them.

The Coming Kingdom

Finally, a biblical view of spiritual warfare points to the final establishment of the Kingdom of God throughout the whole universe⁹. When we focus too much on the current battle, we lose sight of the cosmic picture in which the real story is not the battle, but the eternal reign of Christ. That vision transformed the early church, and it should be our focus in ministry today.

⁹Christ came preaching 'the Kingdom.' In Scripture he referred to it more than 102 times.

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- For a more complete listing of literature on one perspective of spiritual warfare see The Arsenal published by The Resource Arm of the A.D. 2000's United Prayer Track.

Appendix 1 Power Encounters in Acts

Chapters:

- 2: Pentecost: power of the Holy Spirit-->ridicule, some believe
 - 3: Peter heals a crippled man--->put in jail, some believe
 - 5: Ananias and Saphira die from God's judgment --->fear
 - 6:-7: Stephen does signs and wonders --->Stephen killed, persecution
 - 11:-12: Growth of the church-->persecution, death of James
 - 13: Paul confront Elymas--->proconsul believes
 - 14:1 Paul and Barnabas do signs and wonders--some believe, persecution
 - 14:8 Paul heals a man--->stoned
 - 16:16 Paul and Silas cast out a demon--->beaten and put in jail
 - 17:22 Paul preaches--->some scoff, others believe
 - 21:-28: Paul preaches and defends himself--->jail and death
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Appendix 2 Jesus Confronts the Powers of Jerusalem and Rome [Power encounters in John]

1. Birth: challenges Herod and earthly kingdoms.
2. Overturns the tables; challenges the corrupt religious order.
3. Nicodemus: challenges a leader of the religious establishment.
4. Samaritan woman: violates Jewish religious exclusivism.
5. Heals on the Sabbath: confronts the legalism of the establishment.
6. Feeds the five thousand: shows failure of establishment to care for the people.
7. Feast of Booths: confronts the religious leaders.
8. Preaches: challenges the merciless interpretation of the law.
9. Heals: shows the powerlessness of the religious establishment.
10. Confronts the Pharisees: challenges their teachings.
11. Raises the dead: shows the powerlessness of the religious leaders.
12. Triumphal Entry: challenges the leaders' understanding of the Kingdom.
- 13-19. Jewish and Roman Leaders Conspire and Kill Jesus.
- 20-21. Jesus rises from the dead. defeats Satan and the establishment and establishes his kingdom.