

Discerning the Devil's Schemes and The Key of Awareness ***Staying Alert in Prayer***

By Dave Butts

War is dangerous business. Lives are lost. Bodies damaged. Families painfully torn apart. Nations destroyed. Knowing the horrors of war, we strive to avoid it as much as it depends upon us.

But what if it's not possible to avoid war?

What if war is thrust upon you—and the only question is whether you win or lose? That's the picture the Bible presents regarding the reality of the spiritual war we face daily. Though we can find spiritual battles throughout the Bible, literally from Genesis to Revelation, the Apostle Paul focuses deliberately on the imagery of war. In his great teaching in Ephesians 6 (see page 15), Paul employs the metaphor of Roman armor and our understanding of physical warfare in order to help us deal with ongoing spiritual battles in our lives today. God never presents spiritual warfare as an option, but rather as a reality we must face.

That's why I am convinced that the key to spiritual victory is an awareness of the warfare that rages around us and sometimes in us. Paul, warning the Corinthians about how Satan works to "outwit" God's people, says, "We are not unaware of his schemes" (2 Cor. 2:11). Sadly though, I'm afraid much of the Church today would have to confess, "We have no idea what the devil is up to." Battlefields are dangerous places, but there is nothing more dangerous than not knowing you are in the midst of a strategic war.

Put on His Armor with Prayer

How can we learn to walk in daily awareness of the spiritual battlefield surrounding us? The always-practical Scriptures give us an easy approach. In Ephesians 6, Paul couches his teaching on warfare and armor in the context of prayer. I believe one of the simplest ways to walk in awareness of our spiritual battlefield is to daily put on the armor of God through prayer. Part of the teaching on the armor has to do with our responsibility to live a godly lifestyle. But it is also appropriate to pray over this lifestyle armor and to accept it daily through prayer. Remember the old hymn, "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus"? One of the verses reads, "Put on the gospel armor, Each piece put on with prayer." Rather than just sing it, let's do it! Putting on the armor *every day* continually reminds us of the battlefield we enter *every day*. We don't get up each morning headed off for a picnic. We're headed into battle! This simple act of prayer can heighten our awareness and prepare us for what's to come.

Awareness of warfare in the Church allows us to deal with issues in spiritual ways rather than with carnal thoughts and attitudes. When we forget that we are at war, we begin to look at people, events, and situations in the same way those with no spiritual basis do. Awareness of warfare, however, causes us to see that "problem person" at church as one of the walking wounded. Opening our spiritual eyes will help us see that so many of our attempted solutions to problems are merely Band-aids in a situation needing extensive surgery. With our armor fully in place and our eyes opened to the warfare around us, we will begin to see that one of the major recipients of the attacks of the devil is, in fact, the Church. That shouldn't surprise us because the Church is the only real threat to Satan on earth. Satan knows that the people of God are the ones who can, through prayer, release the power that defeats him. As those dearly loved by the Lord, we find ourselves hated by this enemy of Christ—thus making Satan our enemy as well.

Four D's of Warfare

Walking in awareness allows us, like Paul, to declare that "we are not unaware his schemes." So what are the schemes of the devil against the Body of Christ? Though there are certainly others, I believe we can lump together the bulk of satanic attacks into four areas: *Doubt*, *Deception*, *Discouragement*, and *Division*. Understanding these tactics allows us to know how to pray and live in such a way that we blunt the force of the attacks and we achieve victory.

Doubt. The devil has always attempted to get God's people to fall into doubt, especially regarding the Word of God. As far back as the Garden of Eden, the voice of the serpent encouraged this kind of doubt: "Did God really say. . . ?" That same voice with the same message still tries to get Christians to doubt the authority and accuracy of God's Word. Perhaps you've been in a discussion in a Bible study and heard, "I know the Bible says that, but I believe. . . ." However, God's Word is the ultimate authority. Another area of doubt the devil uses is whether or not God truly loves us. Most of us have heard that insidious whisper, "How could God love *you*?" Even if we have an intellectual understanding of the truth of God's love, sometimes we do not allow ourselves to rest in and enjoy the Lord's deep love for us. This is Satan's attack on the very nature of the God who is pure love.

Satan goes after the Word of God and the nature of God with his relentless attempts to sow seeds of doubt. When we learn to recognize these attacks, we will see how serious they are. This isn't just a side issue that can be ignored. We must begin our counterattack by praying prayers of faith. When, as a way of life, we combat doubt with faith, we gain the victory.

Deception. The second area of attack is deception. Jesus, who knew Satan from the beginning, said that Satan is a liar (John 8:44). Of course we see many obvious marks of deception in the church, with the growth of false doctrines, including false doctrines regarding demons. What is not so obvious is the way the devil deceives even those of us who hold to the Word and to sound doctrine. Perhaps the most significant example is the way Satan has deceived us into confusing *hearing* the Word with *doing* the Word. Across the board, I believe this is the most prevalent, serious deception in the Church today. Sunday after Sunday, millions of us sit under the teaching of the Word, yet we walk out of church and fail to accept the responsibilities of living out what we have heard. How is it that a man can sit in church for 50 years, hearing the Word of God taught, yet he gets meaner and less loving as he ages? Satan's deception spares no one. I often find myself at a conference, listening to a great speaker. I walk out thrilled by his passion and power and the truth I have heard. That's the first step of deception. I feel good because I agree with what I heard. Yet I haven't made a commitment to do anything. I just enjoyed what I heard. As a matter of fact, I will often ask, "When is he speaking again?" An addiction to hearing the Word is often tragically divorced from actually doing the Word. Recognizing the hand of the great deceiver, though, will cause us to begin to live differently. We find ourselves praying passionately that we ourselves will be doers of the Word and not just hearers. We pray that the Church will hear the truth, discern the truth, and act upon the truth. We stand against the lie and for the truth!

Discouragement. One of the most effective weapons of our enemy is discouragement. He knows that we will need courage to walk in victory throughout all of life, so he goes all out to steal our courage. That's really the root meaning of *discourage*—to take away courage. You've seen "the discouraged" at church haven't you? They used to be involved in church activities, but a failed program here, a criticism there, failure to receive help—and soon they are barely involved or even rarely attending. The enemy has stolen their courage. Jesus said that the devil is a thief who "comes only to steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:10). Tragically, the enemy uses *other believers* to steal that courage too. In Hebrews 10:25, the Lord warns us against failing to meet together. Why? Because God designed our times of gathering with other believers to be times when we give courage to one another for the great tasks we have ahead of us—for life itself. When we come together as the Body of Christ, we are literally to hand out courage to each other. That's encouragement! But the thief comes in, and we find ourselves stealing courage from (discouraging) others through our criticisms and even through a failure to pass along courage (encourage). Once again, awareness helps us discern what the enemy is doing. We begin to pray for courage for our brothers and sisters. We commit to speaking words that encourage and not discourage. That which the enemy tries to steal, we come to bring abundantly—that is, the courage to live a life that pleases Christ.

Division. The last of these attacks, one of the most deadly, is that of division. It is not just the division of denominations, but the divisiveness within those denominations and within individual congregations. Satan has truly been successful in bringing about division within the Church, leaving multitudes without shepherds and

countless millions walking away from the Church. One thing we can count on in spiritual warfare is that *whatever Jesus loves, Satan hates*. Even a cursory reading of Jesus' great high priestly prayer in John 17, shows us how much Jesus longs for unity within His Church. Satan mocks Jesus' passion for unity. And Christ's own people often ignore it. The best way we can walk with Jesus in unity is to learn to pray with Him. As we join our prayers for unity with the prayers of Jesus in John 17, we find that our own hearts begin to change. We come to the point where we would rather die than cause division in the Body of Christ. A church that prays with Jesus over the things that Jesus prayed for is unstoppable!

Live in Reality

The Christian who walks in awareness is not engaged in a paranoia that sees the devil behind every bush. Rather, perhaps only the "aware Christian" has a firm grasp of the reality of the demonic realm spoken of in the Scriptures. After teaching us about the armor of God and the reality of spiritual warfare, Paul closes by saying, "With this in mind, *be alert* and always keep on praying for all the saints" (Eph. 6:18, emphasis added). Not only can we pray for ourselves (putting on the armor of God); we can intercede for our brothers and sisters in Christ fighting in rank beside us. We are at war, so pray as one who is fully engaged and living in the reality of the ever-present battlefield.

Seven Tools to Prepare Yourself for Warfare Prayer

So many believers are blindsided when Satan messes with them mentally, physically, or spiritually. Not everything that happens is caused by Satan, but Scripture says "he is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short" (Rev. 12:12). As followers of Jesus, we don't have to be afraid that we might be attacked at any moment. But our Lord has given us many ways to prepare ourselves for whatever battles come. Here are seven specific prayer tools, designed by God, to help us defeat the enemy of our souls.

1. Put on the full armor of God (Eph. 6:11) is not a suggestion. It is a command! As you pray each morning, deliberately dress for battle by placing on each piece of armor and asking God to protect you from attack. Also ask Him to make you dangerous for the sake of the Kingdom. *Suggestion:* Pray something like this: "Lord, today I put on the belt of truth. Protect me from listening to any lies of Satan and convict me when I am tempted to speak any exaggerations or untruths. Help me to discern truth from error."

2. Train yourself to be self-controlled and alert. Proverbs 25:28 says, "Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control." A city with broken-down walls is easy for an enemy to penetrate. By exercising self-control—especially when we face temptation—and learning to be alert for signs of the devil's attacks, we can train ourselves to be in a state of continual readiness. *Suggestion:* Ask God to keep you self-controlled, alert, and ready to fight temptation. This is a prayer He wants to answer!

3. Know your enemy is *not* flesh and blood (Eph. 6:12). Jesus tells us to love and pray for our enemies and those who mistreat us (Matt. 5:44). Sometimes the devil will use others, or even us, to do his work. *Suggestion:* The next time you are tempted to fight the wrong enemy, ask the Spirit to prompt you to pray for others rather than retaliate or respond in anger.

4. Learn to use the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Jesus is our greatest example of using the Word of God against the devil. During His time of temptation in the desert (Matt. 4), Jesus consistently thwarted the attempts of Satan by saying, "It is written. . . ." This weapon is the only "offensive" part of the armor of God. *Suggestion:* Practice praying the Word of God back to God.

5. Pray out loud so Satan can hear you. Jesus responded to the temptations of the devil out loud and with Scripture! He also commanded evil spirits to come out of people. There is power in praying out loud, as Satan likely cannot read your thoughts. Therefore, ask God to make you bold enough to speak your prayers aloud. *Suggestion:* If praying out loud is difficult for you, practice by praying Scripture out loud.

6. Respond to the attacks of the enemy with worship. Worship is prayer! It keeps our hearts, minds, and spirits focused upon Jesus and His power rather than upon our problems or attacks of Satan. At the same time, the devil abhors our worship. So God gets the victory. *Suggestion:* When you are tempted by the devil, turn on worship music. Worship silences the foe and the avenger (Ps. 8:2).

7. Pray in the powerful name of Jesus. All the power and authority of Jesus to overcome the devil is in His name (Phil. 2:9–11). Paul, Peter, and others commanded demons to come out of people in the name of Jesus. *Suggestion:* Do a search of “name of Jesus” and “in my name” using *biblegateway.com* or something similar. Note the emphasis Scripture puts on the name of Jesus. The power of God is stronger than any of the enemy’s weak attempts, but only if we are prepared to use the tools God has given us. Prayer defeats Satan, and he will do everything he can to keep you from praying or growing in prayer. Stand firm!

The Armor of God

Paul’s Prescription for Spiritual Warfare

Ephesians 6:10–20

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. 12 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. 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. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 And 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. 19 Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.