Spiritual Warfare

Chapter 2 - The nature of the war



Danielle Carter

WARFARE—WHAT IS IT?

Previously, we established the reality and necessity of spiritual warfare. We saw that this battle is not optional for the believer and that Scripture presents it as a normal and expected part of the Christian life. But now we must ask a deeper question: What exactly is the nature of this war?

We know that our battle is not "against flesh and blood," which means our weapons cannot be conventional weapons and our strategies cannot be based on human wisdom. So who are we fighting? And how do we engage in this conflict?

The Bible describes our battle as "the good fight of faith" (1 Timothy 6:12).
At its most basic level, spiritual warfare is a fight to believe what God has said and to contend for that truth in the face of everything that opposes it. We are surrounded by a world system that rejects spiritual realities, and we often face personal experiences that appear to contradict what God has revealed in His Word.

My pastor once preached a sermon titled, "Who Controls Reality?" It is a question every believer must wrestle with.

What defines reality for me? Are the things I perceive with my natural senses the highest authority? Do my circumstances, emotions, experiences, and observations determine what is true? Or do I live according to a higher reality—the reality that what God has spoken remains true regardless of anything that appears to contradict His Word?

This is one of the most important questions we will ever answer because the foundation and authority of all spiritual warfare is the Word of God. If we have not settled in our hearts that God's Word is the final authority, then we have no foundation from which to fight. We have no weapon to wield in the battle and no confidence to engage the enemy.

Spiritual warfare is ultimately a power encounter between two kingdoms. It is a confrontation between competing realities. The question is simple: Which reality will prevail?

Only through Scripture can we know what God has made available to us through Jesus Christ. And once we discover what belongs to us and recognize that we are not experiencing the fullness of those realities in our lives, we must decide how we will respond. The proper response of a kingdom warrior is not to redefine God's promises to match our experiences. It is to stand on what God has said and contend until His truth becomes our lived reality.

Yet many Christians choose another path. Rather than confronting the gap between their experience and the promises of Scripture, they develop explanations that justify living beneath what God has made available.

Consider this scenario….

Someone receives prayer for healing from an illness, but they are not healed. What happens next? This moment becomes a crossroads where what we truly believe is revealed.

Sadly, one common response is to conclude that the sickness is God's will, given to us in order to teach us a lesson or bring us closer to Him. But we must ask an important question: Is this truly how God teaches and draws His children near—by afflicting us with the very things Jesus bore on the cross?
Were we healed by His stripes or not?

Isaiah 53:5 and 1 Peter 2:24 testify that we were. If that is true, then should we simply dismiss this truth because our current experience does not appear to align with it? Or should we recognize that something is out of order and seek God for greater understanding?

Let me bring some balance and clarity to this important issue. I absolutely believe that during seasons when we are standing in faith for healing, God can do powerful things within and through us. He can deepen our faith, reveal His character, teach us endurance, and draw us closer to Himself. Our life can reveal Him as the One who sustains and comforts us in the midst of our suffering.

The issue arises when a season of standing becomes a permanent mindset of unbelief—when we stop believing God desires to move, accept sickness as the ultimate will of God, and find comfort in the idea that God's greatest glory is simply demonstrated by our ability to suffer well.

Spiritual warfare begins when we recognize that the enemy has deceived us in ways that diminish our faith, limit our understanding, and prevent us from experiencing the fullness of the Christian life. Often, these deceptions operate quietly and remain unnoticed until the light of God's Word exposes them.

But once we know the truth, a decision must be made.

What will we do?

Will we settle for a comfortable Christianity that simply gets us through this life until we reach heaven? Will we accept a faith that avoids conflict but also avoids victory?

Or will we say, "Enough!" and engage the battle God has called us to fight?
Will we allow God's Word to become the foundation upon which we build our lives, refusing to settle for anything less than everything He has promised?

As surprising as it may sound, many believers choose the easier path. They choose a normal American life with Jesus added into the mix. It is comfortable. It requires little warfare. It requires little sacrifice.

But it also produces very little spiritual impact.

There is little conflict, but there is also little victory. There is little resistance, but there is also little evidence of the power of God working through their lives.

Then there are those whose hearts have been awakened to something more. They long to see the glory of Jesus revealed on the earth. They desire to experience the reality of God's kingdom breaking into the lives of people around them. Even if they wanted to return to a comfortable, passive Christianity, they could not. They have seen possibilities they never knew existed, and their hearts burn for more.

There is no going back for them.

So where are you on this spectrum? Have you recognized how far beneath God's purposes you may be living? Have you discovered that there is more available through Christ than you have experienced?

And if you have—what will you do about it? The choice is yours. And so are the consequences of that choice.

WHO IS OUR ENEMY?

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Ephesians 6:12

We addressed this previously, but it is so foundational that it deserves continued emphasis: our enemy is not flesh and blood.

We are not fighting people.

Paul clearly identifies the nature of our conflict. Our battle is not against human beings but against spiritual forces operating in opposition to God and His kingdom. In this verse, Paul gives us a description of the enemies we face:

- Principalities
- Powers
- Rulers of the darkness of this age
- Spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places

Notice something important: none of these enemies are human. They are spiritual beings and spiritual forces. Yet, while they are unseen, they often operate through visible means—including through people and systems influenced by darkness.

Our war is against spiritual forces that are actively working against the purposes of God, seeking to hinder the advancement of His kingdom and prevent people from experiencing the freedom and life that Jesus came to provide.

This battle is not new. It has been raging since the earliest days of creation.
The serpent in the Garden of Eden was already an enemy of God, and through one act of deception and human disobedience, he brought the entire human race into the consequences of rebellion against God. Satan and his demonic forces continue to oppose everything that reflects the heart and purposes of God.

Their hatred toward God is expressed through their hatred for what He loves.
And what does God love?

People.

The great strategy of the enemy is to destroy what God values most. He seeks to deceive, enslave, torment, and destroy humanity. One of his greatest victories is convincing people to participate in his work—to hurt one another, hate one another, and destroy one another—while remaining completely unaware of the spiritual forces influencing their conduct.

Imagine the enemy's satisfaction when people created in God's image turn against one another while he remains hidden behind the scenes. This is why we must maintain biblical perspective.

Although our enemies are unseen, they often operate through people. If we are not careful, we can find ourselves engaging in warfare against the very people Jesus came to save. We must remember this: Jesus died for people—even sinful, broken, and wicked people…and even people who are actively hostile towards us.

His desire is not their destruction, but their deliverance. He came to set captives free from the bondage of sin, deception, and the influence of darkness. When we direct our anger and hatred toward people, we have missed the heart of God and have wasted our energy fighting the wrong battle.

When we take to social media and attack ungodly people with hateful words while believing we are defending righteousness, we may actually be advancing the enemy's purposes rather than God's. We do not excuse evil. We do not ignore injustice. We do not remove personal responsibility from those who choose wickedness.

But we must learn to discern what is happening beneath the surface.
We must recognize the spiritual influences at work and direct our warfare where it belongs.

Our responsibility is not to hate those trapped in darkness but to pray for their freedom. It is not to curse those deceived by the enemy but to contend for their deliverance. It is not to become hardened toward people but to remember that every person is someone Jesus came to redeem.

Consider these Scriptures that reveal the enemy's influence in the world:

There is a "spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience". Ephesians 2:2

We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one. 1 John 5:19

He has schemes that we are not to be ignorant of. 2 Corinthians 2:11

He leads the whole earth astray: So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world. Revelation 12:9

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 1 Peter 5:8

The enemy is active. He is strategic. He is constantly working. Yet sadly, much of the Church remains unaware.

Many believers have already surrendered to one of the enemy's most effective weapons against the American church: complacency. A sleeping army does not pose much of a threat.

And when believers do become motivated to act, we often direct our energy primarily toward natural solutions—political battles, social movements, cultural arguments, and other human strategies. These things may have a place and may accomplish certain purposes, but we must understand that they cannot address the root of humanity's greatest problem.

The world can engage in political battles. The world can fight social battles.

The world can organize movements and pursue cultural change. But only the believer can engage in spiritual warfare. Only the Church has been given authority through Jesus Christ to confront the spiritual forces behind the darkness affecting humanity.

If we remain disengaged, the battlefield is left uncontested. And when the spiritual battle is ignored, no amount of social or political reform can ultimately defeat the forces of darkness at work in the world.
The question is not whether a battle exists. The question is whether God's people will recognize it, engage it, and stand in the authority Christ has given them.

WHY IS HE FIGHTING US?

In a word: hatred.

The enemy hates God, and because humanity was created in the image of God, he hates us as well. His opposition toward God's people is not random, and it is not temporary. It flows from his hatred of the One we represent.
The Bible is clear about his mission:

The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. John 10:10

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 1 Peter 5:8

The devil is not interested in coexistence. He is not looking for a peaceful relationship with humanity. His purpose is oppression, torment, deception, and destruction.

If he cannot ultimately destroy your soul, then he will work tirelessly to hinder your purpose, steal your joy, weaken your faith, and make your life on earth as miserable and ineffective as possible. Even those who willingly align themselves with darkness often discover that the enemy they thought would empower them eventually turns against them. Those who pursue witchcraft, occult practices, or Satan worship have frequently testified that the powers they sought to serve brought bondage, fear, and torment instead.

This reveals something important about the character of our enemy: he is destructive even toward those who choose to follow him. It is his nature. He cannot do otherwise. From the very beginning, Satan has been working to oppose the purposes of God. His strategy has not changed. He continues to resist God's plans, attack God's people, and attempt to prevent believers from walking in their identity and calling.

One truth has helped me tremendously when facing seasons of trial and spiritual warfare: the enemy's attacks are often evidence that something significant is being opposed. What an amazing encouragement this is!

When we experience hardship, disappointment, or spiritual resistance, one of the enemy's greatest desires is that we withdraw. He wants us discouraged, distracted, wounded, and sitting on the sidelines of God's purposes while we focus only on recovering from the battle.

I once heard a preacher say, "Anything the devil tries to keep me from doing, I do twice."

While the wording may be simple, the principle is powerful. We must learn not to allow opposition to accomplish the very thing the enemy intended. Instead of retreating when attacked, we can recognize the resistance and respond with greater determination to remain faithful to God and move forward.

Throughout Scripture, we repeatedly see this pattern: when the enemy rises up with intense opposition, it is often because he recognizes something about God's people that they themselves do not yet understand. He sees a potential threat because he understands the power of a people walking in covenant with God.

Consider the example of Israel in Egypt:

Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, "Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we; come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land." Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread of the children of Israel. So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage—in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve was with rigor. Exodus 1:8-14

Notice something significant: Israel was not placed into slavery because they were weak. They were placed into slavery because Pharaoh recognized their strength.

Pharaoh's strategy was to oppress them, intimidate them, and break their confidence so they would never recognize their ability (as God's people) to rise up. Oppression was designed to create a mindset of helplessness. And this is still one of the enemy's strategies today.

He seeks to convince God's people that they are powerless, insignificant, and incapable of walking in the authority God has given them. He attempts to keep believers focused on their struggles rather than their identity in Christ.

We see another example when Balak, king of Moab, attempted to have Balaam curse Israel. Numbers 22 records:

Now Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. And Moab was exceedingly afraid of the people because they were many, and Moab was sick with dread because of the children of Israel. So Moab said to the elders of Midian, "Now this company will lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field." And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time. Then he sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which is near the River in the land of the sons of his people, to call him, saying: "Look, a people has come from Egypt. See, they cover the face of the earth, and are settling next to me! Therefore please come at once, curse this people for me, for they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed." Numbers 22:2-6

Again, the enemy's response was not based on Israel's weakness. It was based on the recognition that Israel carried something powerful—the blessing and presence of God. The same principle applies to believers today.
The enemy does not oppose us because we are insignificant. He opposes us because of what God has placed within us and what God desires to accomplish through us.

The opposition itself reveals something: there is something worth fighting for.

HOW DOES HE FIGHT AGAINST US?

I have heard it said that one of the enemy's greatest strategies is to convince the world that he does not exist. There is a great deal of truth in this. Not only has the enemy convinced much of the world—particularly in Western culture—that he is not real, but he has also influenced a significant portion of the Church to minimize or dismiss the reality of spiritual warfare.

There are entire segments of Christianity that give little recognition to the reality of demonic activity beyond the accounts recorded in Scripture. Many spiritual problems are explained exclusively through natural means, and many physical or psychological solutions are applied to situations where there may also be a spiritual dimension that needs to be addressed.

While natural solutions can have value and should not be dismissed, they cannot address a spiritual problem at its root. At best, these approaches may provide relief from the outward symptoms, but they cannot bring complete freedom from the source of the oppression. As a result, numbers of people live under spiritual bondage simply because they are unaware of the enemy's activity and the authority God has given His people to confront it.

The Church has been given the answer, yet too often we live as though that answer does not exist. Instead of engaging spiritual realities through the power and authority of Christ, we often rely on the same methods and solutions as the world around us—and then wonder why we remain bound by the same struggles.

Think about it: How can you resist and fight an enemy you do not recognize?
We cannot effectively oppose what we refuse to acknowledge. We must awaken to the spiritual realities around us rather than automatically accepting natural explanations for everything we encounter. There are circumstances, patterns, struggles, and bondages in people's lives that are not simply random difficulties. Scripture teaches us that there is an unseen realm actively influencing the visible world.

When the Word of God reveals what the believer's life is intended to look like, and our experience consistently falls short of that reality, we should not simply accept the discrepancy as normal. We should pause and ask questions.

- Why is there a difference between what Scripture says is available and what we are experiencing?
- Could there be areas where the kingdom of darkness is opposing God's purposes in our lives?
- Could there be deception, bondage, or spiritual resistance that needs to be confronted?
- How do we know?

The enemy has strategies. He has methods. He has patterns of operation.
Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 2:11:

lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

This statement reveals something important: the enemy's strategies are not unknowable mysteries. God has not left us powerless or uninformed. Through Scripture, we are given insight into how the enemy operates and how we can stand against him.

The pages of the Bible contain numerous examples of his tactics—deception, accusation, temptation, intimidation, fear, division, oppression, and attempts to hinder the purposes of God.

We will examine many of these examples in later chapters, but the first step is simply recognizing that the battle exists. An enemy who remains hidden is difficult to resist. But an enemy exposed by the light of God's Word can be confronted with the authority of Jesus Christ.