



Spiritual Warfare

by j.R. Owen, Jr.

Introduction

Spiritual warfare is just that, warfare. In order to understand spiritual warfare, it might be helpful to look at physical warfare and draw some comparisons. Let's take a look at two wars in which the United States has been involved: the Vietnam War and Desert Storm. Is it possible that the U.S. military was involved in both wars? How could a nation with the most powerful military in the world be defeated by a Third World country in a war that lasted almost a decade, but totally defeat an army, much more powerful than Vietnam's, in a matter of days?

In both wars, the United States clearly had the best-trained and equipped military in the world, but how different were the endings! At the end of the Vietnam War, we were desperately trying to pull the last of our people out of Saigon before the North Vietnamese Army invaded the city. We departed Vietnam, defeated, leaving many of our military personnel as POWs or missing-in-action somewhere in Vietnam. The U.S. victory of Desert Storm, however, might easily be considered one of the greatest in U.S. history with relatively few casualties and lasting only a few days.

An in-depth comparison of these two wars would be extremely complex, but there are two very important factors that help explain the differences in the results. First, victory was clearly defined in Desert Storm, but not in the Vietnam War. The commander at any level on the battlefield must know exactly what constitutes victory. On the strategic level, victory might be determined by the Commander-in-Chief, the President of the United States. The military commander in the theater of operations then employs his forces in such a manner as to achieve that victory. He, in turn, must clearly indicate to his battlefield commanders what victory on the battlefield will be so that they can employ their forces to achieve that victory. It doesn't take a lot of training to determine whether you have victory clearly defined or not.

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Take a little test yourself: Which of the following statements would you choose as clearly defining victory on the battlefield?

1. "Commander, I want you to go out and destroy as many of the enemy as you can."

or

2. "Commander, I want you to seize the 3 main cities of the enemy in order to disrupt his supply lines and destroy his capability to produce war materials."

If you chose number two, you are exactly right. In the Vietnam War, guidance from the chain-of-command was vague, much like the first command. The infamous "body count" became the measure of victory. But how many bodies? There was no answer to that question and so the "body count" became a never-ending, demoralizing process, which resulted in war atrocities and the intentional killing of civilians.

In Desert Storm, however, the guidance was very clear as to what victory was. Commanding General Schwartzkopf was told to get the Iraqi army out of Kuwait. When that was achieved, victory was achieved - very clear, very concise.

The second important factor, extremely vital to the battlefield commander is timely information on where the enemy is located, in other words, where the battlefield is located. An infantryman, from his first day of training, is taught to "close with and destroy the enemy." That's impossible to do if you don't know where the enemy is located. In Vietnam, timely intelligence on where and when the enemy was going to be was seldom known. The result was a continual search to find the enemy. This allowed the North Vietnamese Army and the Viet Cong to let us find him when it was advantageous to their forces.

In Desert Storm, however, the battlefield commander knew exactly where the enemy was located, often with pinpoint accuracy. The result was that U.S. and coalition forces were able to decisively engage the Iraqi army when conditions were favorable to the friendly units with disastrous results to the enemy.

There's an application of these two important factors that is critical to success on the spiritual

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battlefield, and that is what this book is all about. We are going to cover information, truths from the Bible, that will let us (Christian warriors) know:

1. A clear, concise definition of victory on the spiritual battlefield
and
2. Where we will engage the enemy or where the spiritual battlefield is located.

The importance of these factors on the spiritual battlefield reminds me of an illustration that will demonstrate how important they are to success in spiritual warfare. In the military, there is an amazing device called night-vision goggles. This wonderful device can literally turn night into day for the wearer. On a dark night, with no moon, you may be able to barely see your hand in front of your face, but with night vision goggles or NVGs as they are called, you feel like someone just turned the lights on. You can see everything!

Now picture this: It's nighttime, pitch black, and there is one well-trained, well equipped Marine standing with his weapon at the ready but with no NVGs and another equally well-trained, well-equipped Marine, only this Marine is wearing a pair of NVGs. If an enemy attacked both Marines, which Marine is going to be more effective in defending himself from the attack? Of course, the Marine with the NVGs! The NVGs would allow that Marine to see the enemy coming, even at nighttime, from a great distance. The Marine without the NVGs would not see the enemy until he was right on top of him, and then, it might be too late.

Are you getting the idea? You may be a well-trained, sincere Christian who wants to serve God and walk by faith. The only problem is, you keep getting blind-sided by the enemy and never seem to see the attack coming until it's too late. You never have a chance to successfully "engage the enemy." You see, if a believer does not know what victory on the spiritual battlefield is and where the spiritual battle is being fought, he is just like the first Marine without NVGs, perhaps a well-trained, spiritually well-equipped Christian, but continually defeated.

The scriptural truths discussed in this booklet will, when understood, become "spiritual NVGs" and will allow you to "see" the enemy approaching or attacking from a distance. You will then

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be able to, as a spiritual warrior, successfully engage the spiritual enemy.

The understanding of these truths has been life changing for me. I grew up in a loving, Christian home. My parents are both Christians and we went to church whenever our church had a meeting. We memorized scripture and studied our Bibles. In fact, my father was the pastor of the church we would attend through most of my life as a teenager. Here I was, a Christian who had received in my heart, the very life of God Almighty. I had been equipped from a young boy for my spiritual life, and yet, all I seemed to experience for years and years was continual defeat. I became tired of church, tired of the "Christian life," and really tired of Christians!

I found myself constantly asking the questions "Is this all there is?" Now how could a Christian with the very life of God in him, who had already achieved the victory over the enemy at the cross, be continually experiencing defeat? Have you found yourself in similar circumstances? You may feel that, as a child of God, you should be experiencing victory; but instead you spend most of your time wounded and defeated.

After struggling with this dilemma for many years, the Lord opened my eyes to some truths that have always been in the Word of God, but I had never understood. This is not a formula book! Christian bookstores are filled with books that outline a list of steps that you must take and then out pops a successful Christian life. I am not trying to replace the Holy Spirit in your life as these kinds of books do. You must ask the Holy Spirit to reveal these truths to you (1 Corinthians 2) and then trust Jesus. My hope and prayer is that ultimately this booklet will assist you in knowing your Savior, Jesus Christ, more deeply.

"I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe."

Ephesians 1:18-19

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A clear definition of victory on the spiritual battlefield.

As we have said, perhaps the most important information you can give a warrior is what constitutes victory on the spiritual battlefield. The warrior must have a crystal clear idea of what “winning” is on the battlefield. If he doesn't know what winning is, then there is no objective that enables the warrior to apply proper strategy and tactics.

Let's take the first step toward victory on the spiritual battlefield and find out just what victory is: Victory on the spiritual battlefield is nothing more, nothing less than keeping your eyes fixed on Jesus.

Very clear, very concise. In Hebrews 12:2, we read: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith..." You see, the only way that you or I can live the Christian life is by letting Christ live His life through us. That only happens when we, through faith, trust Him moment by moment. That's what it means when we read “fix your eyes on Jesus.” Paul illustrates this in Galatians 2:20 where he writes, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." When we live by faith in Jesus Christ, he lives through us and we experience the victory that only Christ can achieve. It always amazes me when I read the gospels and see the very peaceful, calm Jesus in the midst of constant turmoil. He was never hurried, never worried, and never had a moment of fear. Just the opposite of much of my life unless, of course, I'm trusting Christ step-by-step, moment-by-moment. Then I experience the same peace and victory that Christ did when he was on earth, because Christ is living his life through me.

Okay, victory is keeping your eyes on Jesus, trusting Him moment-by-moment, but what is defeat on the spiritual battlefield? This is also very simple, clear and concise: Defeat on the spiritual battlefield is taking your focus/faith from Jesus Christ and putting it on anything else.

A beautiful illustration of this truth is found in Matthew 14:22-34. Jesus' disciples were in a boat in the midst of a terrible storm that threatened to sink the boat and drown them all. At the peak of their fear, the disciples looked out over the waves and saw what they thought was a

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ghost and were really frightened. Of course, it was Jesus walking on the water. When they recognized Him, Peter called out and asked if he could walk to Jesus on the water. Jesus told Peter to come. Peter then climbed over the side of the boat and began walking on the water toward the Lord. As long as Peter kept his focus, his attention, his faith in Jesus, he did the impossible, he walked on water. As soon, however, as Peter took his eyes off the Lord Jesus and put them on the force of the wind around him and the crashing waves, he sank and Jesus had to reach down and grab him.

The same is true for our spiritual lives. As long as our faith is in Jesus Christ, our spiritual eyes are on the Lord, we will be doing the impossible; not because we are able to, but simply because now the Lord Jesus can live his miraculous life through us. As soon as we take our spiritual lives off the Lord Jesus and put our faith in anything else, we lose (Heb 11:6).

What do we mean by anything else? Just that - anything - else. Absolutely anything other than Jesus Christ that we put our faith in, our focus on, is defeat on the spiritual battlefield. As a 1st Lieutenant in the Marine Corps, I spent a short time as a liaison officer to the U.S. Special Forces in Panama to assist Marine Reserve units going through the Jungle Warfare Training. The jungle in the Panama Canal area where the training took place is called “three-canopy” meaning there are three distinct canopies of vegetation between the ground and the sky. What this means for the soldier on the ground is that even when the sun is shining, on the ground, it’s looks like dusk and that you must depend on your compass when traveling through the thick vegetation because you cannot see where you are.

One evening, we had to conduct a nighttime navigation exercise of about 1500 meters from a position on a road, through the jungle to a beach location. As an observer, I was supposed to let the Squad Leader navigate to the objective and was only permitted to intervene to prevent a dangerous situation. Well, we started hacking our way through the pitch-black jungle guided only by our compass. Another rule was that we could not use flashlights except in an emergency and it was dark!

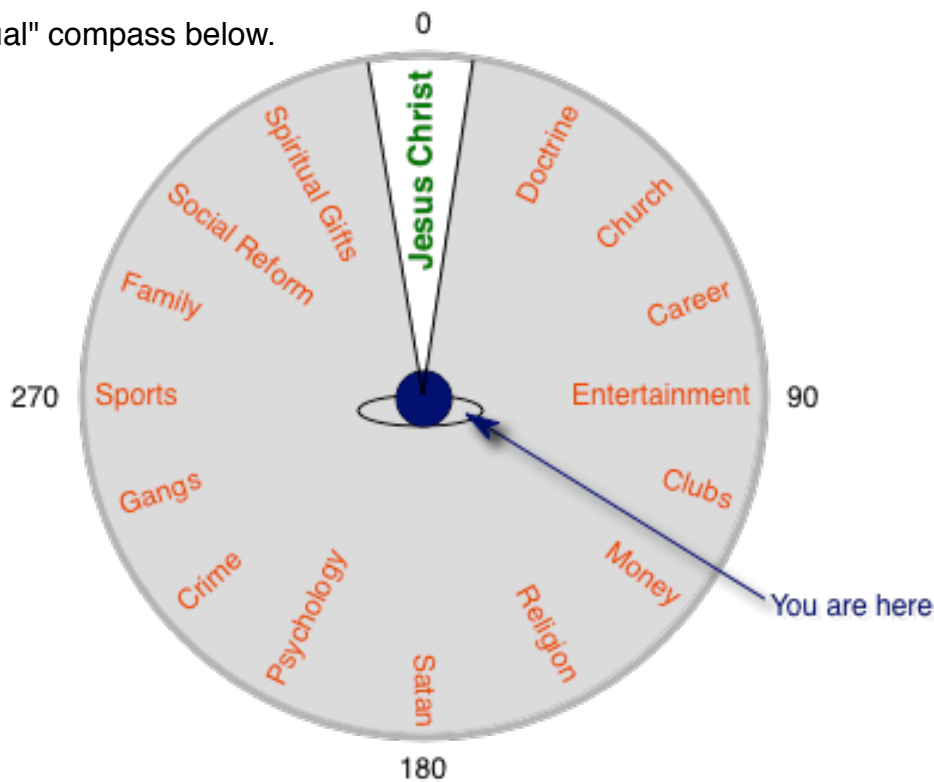
After a couple of hours of climbing one hill after another and slipping and sliding down the other side, we could hear waves and they sounded as if they were just a few hundred meters

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to our left. The Squad Leader came up to me and felt that he might have gotten a little off bearing and believed that we should head directly for the sound of the water, get to the beach and then travel along the beach to the objective.

I told him that I thought he should continue following his azimuth but that he was in charge and should make the decision he believed best, desperately hoping he would follow my advice. He didn't. Two hours later, we were no closer to the water and were really lost now! It turns out that the sound of the waves echoes through the jungle ravines and sounds close even though it's very far away. At the 6 hour mark, I finally took over the navigation, shot an azimuth I knew would take us to the water and we never varied from it until we hit the beach. We were about 500 meters away from our objective!

And so it is with keeping your eyes fixed on Jesus, our spiritual azimuth. Sometimes it will seem easier or more rational to go a different way, but the result will always be defeat. Check out the "spiritual" compass below.



Spiritual Compass

Illustration: If Satan can get us to take our focus off Jesus Christ and put it on anything else, no matter how good or bad sounding it is, he has defeated us on the spiritual battlefield. Many would say that focus on Bible doctrine is certainly better than on Satan, money, or other things in the shaded area and that's just what Satan wants you to think.

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Let's take a look at some examples of what we as Christians might fix our eyes on instead of Jesus Christ. These examples are divided into two categories: 1. Self-trust and 2. Trust in others or other things.

1. Academic abilities (self-trust). This area is often promoted early in a child's life and is therefore accepted without thought as to its validity. You will often hear statements like "Without an education, you won't amount to anything" or "The only way out of your situation is a good education," or "A Masters degree is great, but you really need a doctor's degree." Soon the Christian believes that if he doesn't have an education, whatever that may be, he is inferior to those more educated, or the well-educated person thinks that somehow he is superior to everyone else because he has attended 20 plus years of schooling.

The truth is, that whatever knowledge concerning this world that we have, it is mere foolishness when compared to the knowledge of Jesus Christ. The latter is the only knowledge that will be carried over to eternity. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 1:19-21 "For it is written: I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate. Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe." Now ask yourself, do you want to put your trust for your life in something God considers foolish or do you want to put it into something God considers important? Is getting an education wrong? No, just don't put your faith and trust in it.

2. Athletic ability (self-trust). This one again usually starts in school. Emphasis on athletics sometimes takes priority over education and the incentive to trust in athletic ability is greater now because the salaries that professional athletes receive are enormous. When a person takes a close look at athletics, however, trusting in your athletic ability seems foolish indeed.

Bo Jackson was without a doubt, one of our greatest athletes. Not only was he a star professional football player, he had equal billing as a professional baseball player. In his mid-twenties, there seemed to be no limit to the sports accomplishments he might reach. He had

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a book written about him, *Bo Knows*, and his picture was everywhere. There was even a Saturday morning cartoon feature with him as one of the cartoon's main characters. Then, a hip injury in football changed everything. His football career was immediately over and although he made a valiant comeback after his hip surgery, his baseball career was over a few years later.

A prominent golfer, Ian Baker-Finch won the 1991 British Open and was one of the top golfers in the world. About a year later, his swing mysteriously disappeared and he had trouble breaking 90 in the following British Open. Is there anything wrong with athletics or in being a professional athlete? No, just don't put your trust in your athletic abilities.

3. Church (Trust in other things). For years, one of the biggest complaints from anti-Christians has been that Christians check our minds at the door of the local church, meaning that we fail to think and accept everything taught without proof. Unfortunately, for many Christians, this may be true. Christianity has become a matter of attendance at the church building and programs instead of a relationship with the living Christ. When a Christian places his faith in his local church or pastor, he is open to all sorts of deception and error. Your trust must be in Christ, not in your pastor, church, or any other person or organization.

4. Doctrine. (Trust in other things) In my teenage years, I was exposed to a group of believers whose total emphasis was on knowing Bible doctrine. There was a doctrine for everything you could think of and knowing the appropriate doctrine would supposedly give you victory in that area of your life. The pastor who taught these doctrines was an outstanding communicator and much of what he said seemed to be so good, especially since much of it came right out of the Bible. Something always bothered me, though, because I saw little effect on my life or the other Christians who followed the teachings.

Later, I finally realized that the problem was that doctrine was being worshipped and focused on instead of Jesus Christ, who seemed to be rarely mentioned. The words of the Bible were being trusted instead of Jesus Christ. Jesus addressed the same problem when talking to the Scribes and Pharisees in John 5:39-41. No one knew the Scriptures better than the Scribes and Pharisees and yet Christ tells them " You diligently study the Scriptures because you

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think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."

In other words, if the scriptures (doctrine) do not always lead you to trust and dependency in Jesus, they are not helping you. We learn scripture for the purpose of knowing and trusting Christ.

5. Goals. (Trust in other things) An effective technique of Satan is to get us to adapt what on the surface looks like highly effective techniques or principles from the world and apply them to our Christian life. We see this throughout the church in the United States. An example of this is that of setting goals to achieve our life's dreams. In the Christian's case, this can mean anything from financial freedom to more giving at church, bringing more visitors to church, building a larger church, achieving a position at work, etc.

A favorite sports analogy is that of a football team striving to cross the goal line. Techniques often consist of writing down long-term life goals, then intermediate goals and finally short-term goals. We, as potential goal-setters, are to then let nothing get in our way of achieving these goals. The proponents of this teaching are often very wealthy and have lots of charisma.

On the surface, this looks like a harmless idea and you may have been caught up in it yourself, but it's another deception from the enemy. Jesus tells us in Matthew 6 that we are not to worry about tomorrow, not even concerning the basic necessities of life: where we'll live, what we'll eat, what we'll wear. Doesn't leave much room for goals, does it? In Ephesians 3:20, Paul tells us that God is working in us and is "able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us." So even if you accomplished a goal, it would be less than what God would have for us. Satan knows that if he can deceive us into setting goals, we will:

1. not be living by faith and
2. will not accomplish what God has intended for us.

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In Matthew 6:34, we read that we are "...not to worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." When the Lord first opened my eyes to this truth, I realized that I spent most of the present day either worrying or thinking about the future or regretting or reliving something in the past. Seldom was I fully in the present! If you keep your eyes on Jesus, you'll stay in the present day and Jesus will guide you to His objectives.

We can see an illustration of this truth in the Old Testament. In Exodus 13:4-5 we see that God had a plan for Israel. "Today, in the month of Abib, you are leaving. When the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Hivites and Jebusites, the land he swore to your forefathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you are to observe this ceremony in this month..." In other words, God's plan was to lead Israel to the promised land. Now God didn't drop this plan in Moses' lap and tell him to come up with a way of reaching His goal for Israel - the Promised Land. No, all Moses and the children of Israel had to do was simply, day-by-day, follow God's leading.

In verses 21-22 of the same chapter, we read that "By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people." All the children of Israel had to do to get to the promised land was fix their eyes on the Lord who was in the cloud of fire and follow wherever He led them.

And so it goes in our lives. As we fix our eyes on Jesus, He will lead us day-by-day and will accomplish in our lives all that He has planned for us. If there are goals, let God set them, let God accomplish them. Just keep your eyes on Him and He will do the rest. Oh, what freedom!

8. Profession/Job (Trust in other things) I think that it would be safe to say that a large majority of Americans have their lives and identities wrapped up in their jobs or professions. When those same Americans lose their job, the company goes under or they fail to get that promotion or raise, they are usually devastated and end up with all sorts of emotional and

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financial problems, Christians included.

During the writing of this book, while on a road trip to California, I received a call from my General who regretted to tell me that I had "failed selection" for promotion to the next rank in the Marine Corps. Although those were very tough words to hear, since my identity was no longer a US Marine, but a child of God who happened to be in the Marine Corps, I was able, in God's strength, to accept the news as part of God's plan for my life and move on. Was it tough? You bet it was, but it would have been a whole lot tougher if my trust had been on my military profession instead of the Lord Jesus.

The point is this, keep your focus on Christ who is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8), not your job or profession, which may or may not be here tomorrow.

9. Money (Trust in other things) This may be one of the most difficult ones. Most all of us have a tendency to want to place our security in money. Practically everyone you talk to and most of the infomercials on TV are about finding "financial security." Of course, there is no such thing as financial security. The richest person in the world could die in a plane crash tomorrow and there's nothing his money can do to save him. What kind of security is that?

Let's read what the Word of God has to say about the search for financial security. "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." 1 Timothy 6:10

Also "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is there your heart will be also." Matthew 6:19-21

If you put your trust and focus in financial security, you will have sorrow, insecurity, and you can't take it with you, even if you do achieve financial success.

These are just some of the things you might put your focus, your trust in other than Jesus.

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You can probably think of many more. To review, let's look again at what God tells us about victory. In 1 John 5:4 we read "This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith." As we have discussed earlier, "faith" is of no value by itself. Faith is only as effective as the object of that faith. And what is the object of our faith? Galatians 2:20 tells us "we live by faith in the Son of God." So victory in the Christian life and on the spiritual battlefield is nothing more, nothing less than faith in the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. That's it, step-by-step, moment-by-moment faith in Jesus Christ.

In other words, our focus, our preoccupation, our goals, our aspirations are nothing more, nothing less than Jesus Christ. Our "spiritual eyes" are to always be focused on Jesus Christ. It is logical, then that if victory on the spiritual battlefield is focus or faith in Jesus Christ only, then defeat is placing our focus and faith on anything else.

Where is the Spiritual Battlefield?

As we saw earlier in our two war illustrations, knowledge of exactly where the enemy is or where the battlefield is, is vital to victory. The pin-point accuracy of the enemy's location in Desert Storm greatly contributed to the United States and coalition forces victory there. Not knowing specifically where the battlefield was in the Vietnam War contributed to a demoralizing defeat; a continual search for an enemy who was able to determine where and when he wanted to fight.

So it goes, in the spiritual realm. If you do not know where the spiritual battlefield is, where the spiritual enemy is waging war against you, frustration will build as you continue to get hit by the enemy, but are never able to "fight back." Despair will eventually creep in and most Christians finally raise the white flag in defeat, often wondering why their life seemed so much more peaceful before they became Christians.

The Spiritual Battlefield is in the mind!

Please never forget this truth. Yes, the mind is where our spiritual enemy, Satan, attacks us and where he must be fought. As the "father of lies," Satan's objective is to persuade us to

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believe that his lies are truth. If the battlefield is in the mind, is Satan able to affect us in the physical realm? You bet he can.

The first chapter of Job will give no doubt as to Satan's power in the physical dimension. But that is not where the battle is fought. You and I make decisions based on what we are thinking. Our thinking may be based on truth or lies. Satan knows that if we think and believe truth concerning Jesus Christ, our response may be to accept his free gift of life, and then allow his life to live through us. Satan's objective is to hide the truth in clever lies to get us to focus our trust on anything/anyone else so that our decision-making capabilities are impaired and we make faulty decisions that lead us away from truth (Jesus Christ).

You see, all of life can be boiled down to two decisions that affect us for eternity:

The first decision is whether to receive the free gift of life, Jesus Christ, and thereby, our salvation or not to accept the free gift of life and believe any one of a thousand lies of Satan as to our ultimate destiny. The decision to accept Christ is only made once, for once we have received eternal life we will never lose it and never need ask for it again. (John 3:16)

The second decision is only for those who have accepted the free gift of life from Jesus Christ and that is to rest in the grace of God and trust him to live his life through us or to trust in our own abilities to live our lives. All of the New Testament epistles in some way address this decision, especially those letters by the Apostle Paul. This decision is made continually as we are faced with the many issues of life.

You might respond that you make a myriad of decisions a day: what clothes to wear, what to eat, what to read, what route to take to work, etc. What do you mean, "two decisions?" Let's put it this way. There are only two decisions that impact our spirit and soul for eternity, the two previously mentioned. In Mark 8:36 Christ says "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" You see, a person may make thousands of decisions that result in his being the richest, most powerful person on earth. Once he dies, however, the only issue is whether he accepted God's free gift of life, Jesus Christ.

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Both of these decisions have measurable results that will be judged by God in the future. In Revelation 20:15, the first decision is judged. We read "If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." For those whose names are in the Book of Life, their works will be judged after they have received the free gift of Life. These works are not for the salvation that they have already received, but to determine rewards given in Heaven.

This second decision, however, is one that is made continually throughout the Christian's life: Whether to trust Christ to live his life through you, or to trust in anything else. In 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 we read:

"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames."

In 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, we read "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age (Satan) has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." Do you realize that Satan was attempting to hide the light of Christ's gospel in his myriad of lies from you before you heard the gospel? Also notice where Satan works - in your mind. Once you've accepted the precious gift of life, he'll attempt to hide the truth of the love and grace of God for your daily life in a myriad of legalistic lies or anything else that sounds like the truth.

To better understand the spiritual battlefield, the mind, it will help to see how the mind fits into mankind's total makeup. In his gigantic study of the spiritual life, *The Spiritual Man*, Watchman Nee indicates through scripture, the three elements that make up mankind. In Hebrews 4:12, we read "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Here we see the soul and spirit differentiated from each

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other and the need for both to be separated from each other by the word of God.

Do you realize that your mind is separate from your brain? It is amazing how many people I talk to do not understand this fact and who are thereby open to a myriad of Satan's lies. This important point must not be overlooked. There is no doubt that the mind and brain communicate back and forth, but the two are totally separate entities. A simple illustration of this fact can be seen in the story of the beggar, Lazarus and the rich man found in Luke 16: 19-31. There we see the rich man separated from Lazarus and Abraham in Hades. The rich man is in great torment and asks Abraham to send Lazarus to dip his finger in water and touch it to his tongue to ease the pain.

Abraham answers that he could not do so because a great gulf separated them. The rich man then asks Abraham to send Lazarus to talk to his five brothers in order to warn them not to come to this terrible place. Abraham answered that if they would not heed Moses and the prophets, they would not be persuaded from the one risen from the dead.

In this illustration, we see some important truths. First, all three of the individuals were dead and their bodies decaying in the grave. Their bodies, of course, include their brains. Second, we see that even though their brains were decaying with the rest of their bodies, they still had complete use of their minds and could remember faces, former family members, their past life and were able to reason concerning their current situation.

Why is this separation of mind and brain so important? Psychiatrists and psychologists would have us believe that "mental" problems can often be treated with drugs, hypnosis and other treatments in much the same manner that a medical doctor treats the body. The mind is a non-physical entity that never dies and is part of the soul of man. We all die physically, we are all born spiritually dead, but our souls continue forever. The soul may continue in Heaven, forever with Jesus Christ or in Hell-fire forever, but it does continue.

Why does Satan attack our minds? This is a very important question and the answer is the first step in understanding how the enemy is working against us. First, we must look at "free will," the ability God has given us to choose His way or some other way. God does not make

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us choose His way. If he did, that would make us robots. Satan understands our ability to choose and he also understands that our decisions are based on conclusions that our mind believes are accurate. Therefore, if he can get us to believe that his lies are truth, then the decisions that we make will lead us away from the real truth, Jesus Christ. Satan is not picky. He'll be satisfied with getting us to believe anything, as long as it is not the truth. What I mean is that Satan doesn't mind if we believe the so-called "good things" as long as those "good things" keep our eyes off of Christ.

An illustration in the church today is the trend to either be heavily oriented to teaching and doctrine or heavily oriented to spiritual gifts. Both groups will have a tendency to replace focus and trust in Christ with focus either on doctrine or spiritual gifts - Satan doesn't care which one you want to focus on as long as it's not Christ!

It reminds me of my time on the rifle range in the Marine Corps. Marksmanship was extremely important in the Corps and pressure to qualify as an Expert, the highest qualification, is intense. It is very interesting, that when you are aiming at the target, you must aim in such a manner so as to hit the bull's-eye. Aiming in a general direction will always result in a miss. If you turned around and faced in the exact opposite direction of the target, besides getting kicked off the range, you would miss the target just as if you barely missed it to the right or left.

As we previously discussed, Satan desires to get our focus off of Jesus Christ and on anything else. The only way he can get us to exercise our free will and choose to take our eyes off of Christ is by attacking our minds with lies and deceit. He may use physical/external circumstances to give his lies credence, but the actual battle is being fought in our minds. Are you ready to wage war on the spiritual battlefield? Read on and find out who the spiritual warriors are.

Me, A Spiritual Warrior?

There's a war going on and you're in the middle of it. Now, you may not believe at this moment that you're in a war. You may not even believe there's a war at all. You may realize

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that there is a spiritual war but not want to participate in it. You may be presently seeking the Switzerland of spiritual combat or the neutral zone. But the fact is, there's a spiritual war going on and you're either a victorious warrior or unwittingly fighting for the other side or a casualty on the spiritual battlefield. If you had a choice, which one of those options would you choose? Hopefully, you chose the first option. The purpose of this booklet is to expose you to the truth in the scriptures that will take you out of the 2nd and 3rd options and put you in the victorious warrior category.

Let's take a look at this spiritual war that we are in the middle of and see what God has to say about it. Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:11-12 to "Put on the whole armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 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."

Notice that the Lord does not say that only some of us will struggle or that we will only struggle if we decide to participate. The Lord does not say that once spiritually mature, you will no longer experience struggles in your life. He doesn't say that only special chosen warriors will fight against these spiritual forces. No, whether you volunteered or not, you are in the war, so you might as well learn how to be victorious.

Also note that God does not ask for us to put on the armor - it's a command! It is very clear that there's an enemy and that we, as Christians are in the war. I'm sorry, there are no conscientious objectors in this warfare. Later in the book, we will look at the enemy and his tactics, but for now rest assured that the enemy knows that he is our opponent and is probably fighting right now to keep you from understanding these spiritual truths!

Another important scripture concerning this warfare again comes from Paul in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5. "The weapons that we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 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." Not exactly tea and crumpets at the local Auxiliary, is it? No, this is real warfare with real weapons against a real enemy.

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There may be some of you saying to yourself about now, "Me, a warrior? We're in big trouble now! I'm the original 90 pound weakling, or I can barely get my kids dressed for school in the morning, much less wage spiritual warfare." If that's you, don't worry about it. That's an appropriate response. If you thought that you were up to the task, then you'd really be in trouble! Let's look at a person in the Bible, probably very much like you and me, who had a similar response and see what God told him.

In Judges 6-7, we read about the great victory God won through the warrior, Gideon. Israel had been taken over by the Midianites who were practically destroying everything that the Israelites owned. Finally, they cried out to God, who with compassion, then called upon Gideon to lead the fight against the Midianites. Let's pick the story up at Judges 6:12. "When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior."

If you stopped reading there, the impression you might have would be of a beautiful angel, shining white, addressing a huge Hulk Hogan of a man. Of course, he would be shirtless, with huge, bulging muscles and a few well placed scars indicating battles that he had survived. But let's read on and see how the real Gideon responds to the angel in verse 15: "But Lord, Gideon asked, how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." Wow! Hulk Hogan just dissolved into someone who looks a lot like me, and maybe you. Not only was Gideon a member of the weakest family in all of Israel, he was the weakest member in his family! In man's eyes, he was the weakest of the weakest! But evidently God had a different viewpoint from all of Israel. In God's eyes, Gideon was a "mighty warrior."

This is an important principle to remember. Your physical appearance, physical talents or abilities mean nothing in spiritual warfare. The simple fact is, that any victory you experience as a spiritual warrior will be a result of you trusting Jesus Christ for the victory. In verse 16, we read "The Lord answered, I will be with you, and you will strike down all of the Midianites together." You see, when God Almighty is allowed to fight through you, you are a mighty warrior on the spiritual battlefield (the mind).

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The conclusion: It doesn't matter who you are - child, teen or adult. It doesn't matter the color of your skin or in what country you were born. It doesn't matter if you are rich or poor, educated or not. If you have accepted Christ as your life and your savior, you are a warrior on the spiritual battlefield. The battle is being waged in YOUR mind as well as mine. I can't fight your battles and you can't fight mine. But don't be afraid. Just as God achieved a mighty victory with Gideon and his 300 men against an army of over 100,000, he can do the same through you also.

Spiritual Bootcamp

In Ephesians 6, the Apostle Paul equates the Christian life to a warrior waging a very real battle. If you've been a Christian for any time, you know why Paul says this. Life very often is like a battle - a losing battle! Just when you think you have things under control, bam, you're flat on your back and wondering what hit you. Now that you realize that you are in a very real war, let's take a look at some of the training you must have before you will be effective on the spiritual battlefield.

As a Marine, I not only trained to be successful in combat, but trained many other Marines to be the same. The training is building-block in approach, meaning that you must successfully learn and apply the first step before you can move on to the next. Any break in the training process, any failure to learn a basic training truth will ultimately cause failure in practically every other area. Before you can learn advanced combat techniques, you must learn the basics.

The future Marine learns these basics in "boot-camp," a dreaded place where Drill Instructors (DI's) take the civilian out of the recruit and replaces it with the military. The picture of a lean, mean, drill instructor with the infamous "campaign hat," filling the aisle of the Trailways bus that was filled with a bunch of scared recruits, including me, is forever burned in my mind. It was just after midnight and the air on Parris Island was thick with humidity. In an inhuman voice, the DI barked "You have 10 seconds to get off this bus, and woe to the person who is last!" People were climbing out of the windows and over each other to get out of that bus! And so began my training to become a United States Marine.

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So it goes in the Christian life. If you want to be a successful Spiritual Warrior and live a victorious Christian life, you must learn the basics first. God wants to take the world's perspective and goals out of us and replace it with his perspective, his truth, Jesus Christ.

The Basics

1. Jesus Christ is God.

If you don't recognize Jesus Christ as God, then throw the Bible away and make your own way. However, if Jesus Christ is who He claimed to be, then the Bible must be accepted as truth. In John 5:17-18 we see that Jesus himself claimed to be God: "Jesus said to them, 'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too, am working.' For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."

2. All Scripture points to Christ.

You can study the Bible all you want but if it doesn't lead you to Jesus Christ then all that study is worthless. This was the situation in which the Scribes and Pharisees found themselves. In John 5:39-41 as Christ confronted them saying, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."

3. We are all dead in our sins.

No matter how hard you try to keep God's commandments or be acceptable in God's eyes, there's a simple, inescapable fact, that because of sin, we're spiritually dead. We see in Ephesians 2:1 that "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,..."

4. The Law points us to Jesus Christ.

There are millions of people in the world desperately trying to keep the Biblical law in order to

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somehow please God so that hopefully their good deeds will outweigh their bad deeds and they will get into Heaven. The problem is, if you violate one law, you are guilty of all. The law is simply a big arrow pointing out our desperate condition (death!) and pointing us to the answer, Jesus Christ. In Galatians 3:19-24 we read,

"What then was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed(Jesus) to whom the promise referred had come. The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator. A mediator, however, does not represent just one party; but God is one."

"Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe."

5. Christ's death provided the forgiveness for all sins and paid the penalty, death, with His own life. Sin is no longer an issue with God.

The familiar passage in John 3:16-18 states "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

6. The only issue with God now is life.

In John 14:6 we read, "Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one come to the Father except through me.'" You see, because we are dead, we need life. Jesus Christ is that life. This life is salvation and it is a free gift from God. In Ephesians 2:8-9 we read that "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast."

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7. We have a new identity in Christ.

Before accepting Christ, our identity was found in whatever person, place or thing that seemed appropriate. But after receiving the free gift of God's life, Jesus Christ, we now have the wonderful identity as children of God. John tells us in his gospel "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." Galatians 3:26-27 We are now truly free from the former control by whatever we are identified with and now can truly say that "I am a child of God who happens to be a _____." Fill in the blank - housewife, fireman, policeman, lawyer, etc.

8. We can't live the Christian life.

The Christian life is Christ. We live by faith in Jesus Christ. Gal 2:20 tells us "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

These are the critical basics of our lives as children of God and must be spiritually discerned before moving into the battlefield successfully. Without an understanding of these spiritual truths, defeat on the spiritual battlefield will be the result.

Spiritual Armor

In Ephesians 6:10-18, Paul gives us a description of the armor the spiritual warrior has available to him. Let's take a look at the passage:

10 "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 authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

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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 word 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 saints.”

What does Paul mean here when he tells us to "put on the full armor of God...?" First, in verse 12, we see that the battle is against spiritual forces, so the armor is spiritual armor - it can't be seen. So how do we put it on? It's really quite simple, but let's take a look at how the modern-day soldier dresses for combat. When the soldier today reports to a unit, he goes to the unit supply depot and receives all of the equipment that he will need to protect himself and fight in combat; things like a helmet, cartridge belt, body armor, compass, rifle, etc. Now it would be ridiculous for a soldier to go into combat carrying all of his equipment in a footlocker.

Platoon Sergeant: "Hey, Private Smith, what are you doing carrying that foot locker on your back? We're getting ready to move out!"

Private Smith: "Sarge, it's all my combat equipment. I've got it all, just like you told me."

Platoon Sergeant: "What? Is this a joke? You don't carry your gear around in a foot locker! You put it on! It won't do you any good in your footlocker. Now get that gear on and leave it on. We're goin' into combat!"

Sadly, the same situation is often true in the spiritual realm with many Christians. When we

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accepted Christ as our savior, it was just as if we went through the spiritual supply depot and received all of our spiritual armor, but we're still carrying it around in our spiritual footlocker. It doesn't do us a whole lot of good in there - we've got to put it on. That's what Paul is telling the Christians at Ephesus more or less in these words: "Get your spiritual armor out of your foot locker and put it on so you can stand against the devil's schemes."

How many times has a situation caught you by surprise and you reacted in a manner just like any unsaved person might have? Later, you thought to yourself, "Why did I act like that. I'm a Christian and yet I'm certainly not acting like one!" If that's happening to you, it's probably because you're still carrying your armor in your foot locker. Now let's put it on.

Putting the armor on is nothing more than understanding the spiritual significance of each piece of armor and then placing our trust in Jesus Christ (sound familiar) that the armor will perform it's intended task. Example: The helmet of salvation obviously protects our head. A Christian however, who does not understand the spiritual significance of his salvation, his eternal life, hasn't yet put it on.

When Satan attacks, this type of Christian will often doubt his salvation, wonder if he really did receive Christ, wonder if there is something else he needs to do so that he can gain favor with God. In other words, he behaves like a non-Christian. The Christian who understands his salvation, who knows that it is eternal, can never be taken away and was completely accomplished by Jesus Christ (Boot Camp), has placed his helmet on his head and Satan's attacks glance off harmlessly. In other words, this believer responds like the child of God that he is. Let's see what the Word of God says about each piece of spiritual armor so that we can get it out of our footlocker and put it on!

Belt of Truth:

John 8:2, John 14:6, John 17:17

In John 14:6 we read "Jesus answered 'I am the way, the truth, and the life.'" In John 8:32 we read that, "...the truth will set you free." In John 17:17 we read "Sanctify them with your truth, thy word is truth." So we see that Jesus Christ is the truth and the word is truth. We

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understand that when we study the word, we are knowing the truth, which is Jesus Christ, and the truth, Jesus Christ, sets us free. Now this belt, the truth (Jesus Christ) is holding the breastplate of righteousness in place.

Breastplate of Righteousness: We know that this is not our righteousness, because Isaiah 64:6 says that "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." Romans 4:24 states that "...God will credit righteousness - for us who believe in him who raised Jesus Christ our Lord from the dead." Righteousness is only available to us because of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ and we can only receive it by faith. In other words, righteousness comes from Jesus Christ.

Gospel of Peace

The word gospel means "Good news." The good news is that Christ died for our sins so that we could have eternal life by placing our faith in Jesus Christ (John 3:16-18) The peace is peace with God. Romans 5:1 tells us "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." So the Gospel of Peace is that, by faith in Jesus Christ, a person may receive eternal life with his sins forgiven and experience peace with God.

Helmet of Salvation: The new Kevlar helmet that the US military uses is one of the most important pieces of armor. It is light weight and protects the head of the soldier. The Helmet of Salvation protects the mind of the spiritual warrior. When a person receives the free gift of life (salvation Ephesians 2:8-9), it is forever (1 John 5:11), they are adopted as God's children (Galatians 3:26) and no person, place or thing can take away this salvation (John 1:28/ Romans 8: 38-39). When the spiritual warrior truly understands this truth, he begins to see things from God's perspective and not the world's, allowing him to now trust in Christ moment-by-moment.

Shield of Faith: Satan's message is that man must live by his own efforts, by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). As we have already shown, defeat on the spiritual battlefield is taking our eyes off of Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). We know that without faith (in Jesus) it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Satan is always attempting to

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draw us away from living by faith. Only faith can extinguish Satan's darts that question, as Satan did, the truthfulness of God's word.

The Sword of the Spirit: The Word of God. Hebrews 4:12 tells us, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." The word of God is one of our two spiritual offensive weapons.

Prayer: Prayer is our other offensive weapon, the privilege of coming to God with our cares (1 Peter 5:7) and requests (Philippians 4:6-7) in order to obtain peace in the midst of an unpeaceful world.

When we look at this armor, we see two kinds: Passive and Active. They would be broken down as follows:

Passive: Belt of Truth, Breastplate of Righteousness, Gospel of Peace, Helmet of Salvation

Active: Shield of Faith, Sword of the Spirit, Prayer

Passive armor is armor that once put on, requires no more manipulation. In other words, it performs simply by staying in place. Active armor, however, requires action in order to be effective. Let's take a look at how we employ our active armor on the spiritual battlefield.

The Spiritual Sword and Shield

During the Roman Empire's world domination, the Roman army was almost invincible. The foot soldier was extremely effective with two weapons: the short, double-edged sword and the fairly large, square shield. When engaging the enemy in combat, the Roman soldier would parry the enemy's blow with his shield and then attack with his sword. This illustrates beautifully what should happen when engaging the spiritual enemy. When Satan sends his fiery darts (lies) our way, the only way to keep them from affecting us is by "raising the shield of faith" or simply trusting in Christ. Then we "attack with the sword" or recall a scripture that applies to the attack of Satan and sends him packing (James 4:8).

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Illustration (fiction). Susan, a 19 year-old high school dropout really had problems throughout her teenage years: gangs, drugs, rebellion, etc. One day, she accepted Christ as her Savior and began trusting her Lord Jesus. A few months later, her Aunt came to visit the family and Susan realized that her Aunt had never trusted Christ for her salvation.

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The Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit prompts Susan to tell her Aunt about Jesus Christ.

Satan: (Fiery Dart) "Who are you to tell anyone about Christ? Not only do you not know enough about the Bible, you are not GOOD enough! Who's going to listen to a failure like you? You'd better let someone more qualified do the talking and you'd better be quiet before you mess up your Aunt's life too."

Susan (defeated): "There's no way I can do this. I'd better let Mom or Dad or maybe our pastor talk to my Aunt. I think I'll go for a walk to the store."

Susan (victorious): Wait a minute! I know what Satan is trying to do here. He wants me to take my eyes off of Jesus and put them on myself. No way! If you want me to talk to my Aunt, Lord, then you will give me the words to say. 1 Thessalonians 5:24 says "The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it." Philippians 4:13 says "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Lord please give me the words to say.

"Auntie, can I talk with you a minute?"

Do you see how the victorious warrior engages the spiritual enemy? First he or she keeps their eyes on Christ. Then they strike back with an appropriate scripture and Satan flees. Obviously, if your shield of faith is still in your spiritual footlocker, you are going to get hit with some fiery darts (lies). Also, if you are not continually renewing your mind with the truth, your "sword" will be about the size of my 11/2" Buck pocket knife. You don't want to go into combat with a penknife. You want a long, broad-sword that can "reach out and touch someone!" The more scripture which the Holy Spirit has given you understanding of (which leads to knowing

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Jesus!), the more effective your sword will be.

Prayer, the Cruise Missile of the Spiritual Warfare

We have seen that we have a sword, the word of God, as an offensive weapon in spiritual warfare. The sword is an effective weapon when used correctly and will drive the enemy away. When the sword was the primary close-in weapon of Rome's armies, they also had a long-range weapon: the bow and arrow. Today, we have many long-range weapons. There is artillery, ground-to-ground rockets, bombers, strategic missiles and the very effective Cruise Missile. The Cruise Missile has a computer brain that navigates the missile over thousands of miles at low level and then detonates precisely on the target. It can be launched from many different platforms: aircraft, ships, submarines, land-vehicles and is extremely difficult to shoot down.

We have a "Cruise Missile" in spiritual warfare: Prayer. There have been many books and writings on the subject of prayer, but we want to look at it in light of spiritual warfare. It seems that much prayer today has to do with changing some physical aspect of our lives. By physical, I mean what we can see, feel or touch. That's exactly where Satan would love to keep our focus. Why? Because, that's where the spiritual battle is not being fought. He knows that if he can get us to place our attention and concerns on our physical circumstances, he has defeated us.

To get a correct perspective on the physical world, let's renew our minds with the following passage: 2 Peter 3:10-14.

"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this,

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make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and be at peace with Him.

Right now, take a look around you. Look in a mirror. Everything that you see is going to be destroyed - everything! Your favorite piece of furniture, your body, your house, your car, the ground, the trees - everything! What God is telling us in this passage is, since you know everything is going to be destroyed, don't waste your time treasuring these things, but fix your eyes on Christ and look forward to the new heaven and new earth that will not be destroyed.

Following this train of thought, our prayers, which can be launched anytime and anywhere should primarily be focused on either achieving victory on the spiritual battlefield or praying that someone else can achieve victory on the spiritual battlefield. My favorite prayer verse is Philippians 4:6-7 which says "Do not be anxious about anything but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Where is that peace and what is it doing? It 's not in your circumstances or physical life. There will seldom be peace there. But no matter what our physical circumstances of life are, when we pray, peace will guard our hearts and minds, and that's where the spiritual warfare is being fought.

Spiritual Pillboxes

"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." 2 Corinthians 10: 4-5.

During World War II, some of the most ferocious fighting occurred during the island campaign in the Pacific. The Japanese had fortified many of the islands with concrete, camouflaged machine-gun bunkers commonly called "pillboxes." The pillbox was made of reinforced concrete and had narrow slits in the enemy's direction through which the barrel of a machine gun was placed. Even after hours of naval gunfire, many of the pillboxes were unaffected and caused thousands of US casualties.

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We have our pillboxes of the spiritual warfare also. You have probably noticed by now that we fight Satan with truth (the sword) and he fights us with lies (fiery darts). But Satan often camouflages his lies so that we do not suspect that we have believed a lie. In other words, he has built a pillbox or stronghold on the battlefield, camouflaged it and only opens fire when we get near it. These are the strongholds that 2 Corinthians 10:4 is talking about. They are lies that somewhere along the way we have accepted as truth and so far have not recognized the error. It is only by the continual renewing of our minds with the truth (the Word of God) that these strongholds are torn down.

Even Watchman Nee's life, the mighty Chinese spiritual warrior, illustrates this tactic of Satan. In his early 20's, Watchman was a well-educated young man with a zeal to teach the Word of God. He believed that his education was a key factor in his ability to teach and understand spiritual principles in the Bible, especially to the poor, illiterate village people. Angus I. Kinnear writes in his biography of Watchman Nee, *Against The Tide*:

“With an advanced education and being well-versed in the Scriptures, Nee considered himself thoroughly capable of instructing village folk, of whom the women in particular were mostly illiterate. After several visits to one group to help confirm them in their faith, his self-esteem was sorely deflated. These women had come, he discovered, despite their illiteracy, to an intimate knowledge of the Lord. “I knew the Book they haltingly read; they knew the One of whom the Book spoke,” Watchman said.

Satan had been able to subtly convince the young Nee that education was a key ingredient to spiritual understanding. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 2:12-13 "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual." KJV This stronghold that Satan had built in Watchman's mind, was torn down.

How many strongholds has Satan been able to establish on the spiritual battlefield, our minds? However many there are, the truth is what tears them down. The more we expose

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ourselves to the truth and allow the Holy Spirit to teach us, the more strongholds will be torn down on the spiritual battlefield.

The following stronghold is one that I think is perhaps one of the most destructive in the body of Christ today: Commands in the Bible.

I was having a conversation with a local pastor of a large church about grace and the Christian life and expressed my concerns about some legalistic teaching in the church. It went something like this:

Pastor: "You are taking this grace thing to a place where it is disgraceful! You are giving people a license to go out and do whatever they want and that's dangerous. What do you do with all the commands in the New Testament? What about obedience?"

The conversation went on, and we left on friendly terms, but what about the commands and obedience of the New Testament? I believe that Satan has very subtly built a stronghold in the minds of believers everywhere and it goes something like this: You were saved completely by faith, no works involved. Now that you are a Christian, however, the way to live the Christian life is to note all the commands in the New Testament and obey them the best that we can.

The result is always defeat and frustration because the Christian life is not a series of things we do, it is a life, the life of Christ! The fact is, most of these well-meaning Christians, not understanding the real Christian life, are attempting to be Christ-like through obedience. They do not realize that obedience only comes as a result of Christ living in us. Anything else doesn't work. It is the old cart before the horse problem. The following incident may help to illustrate how obedience fits into the Christian life.

We had a beautiful black German Shepard. Although our dog was a female, she was quite large and it quickly became evident that if we did not begin training her, she would soon rule the home. I attempted to teach her a few obedience commands like sit, stay, and stop chewing our shoes. Sometimes she would seem to get it, other times she would just ignore

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me completely.

Finally, in desperation, I bought a dog-training book. After a few moments of reading, the light came on. To start training a dog, there is an exercise that you must accomplish before obedience training. First you put a choke-chain on the dog and then attach a 20 foot leash with the trainer holding the other end. Then you do the strange thing of simply standing still staring off into space, but never looking at the dog for about three minutes.

Suddenly, you march quickly off in any direction for about 50 feet without saying anything to the dog. Now, usually, the dog has gotten bored with watching you stare off into space and starts sniffing around. If he is not aware that you have taken off on your rapid march, he gets a big surprise as he's jolted in the direction you are going when the slack in the leash runs out.

After about three days of this (only 20 minutes a day) an interesting thing happens. No matter how hard I would try and fool my dog, she would always be right with me when I started marching off because now she was always watching me! You see, before a dog can be taught obedience, the dog must be attentive to every move of her master.

Although we are certainly not dogs, the principle is very much the same with Christians. Before we can be concerned with obedience to God, we must first be attentive to our Lord Jesus, our spiritual eyes constantly focused on Him and trusting Him each moment. It is only then that we will experience obedience in our lives, not as a result of our efforts, but as a result of the life of Christ now evident in our lives. Obedience under any other system is not obedience to God and ends up being man's poor attempt to be like Christ. It's never consistent and always in our own strength.

Attentiveness to Christ is our first and last concern. As Hebrews 12:2 says "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." As I read the scriptures and come across a command, if I do not see the obedience in my life that a particular scripture calls for, it simply means that somewhere I've taken my eyes off the Lord and am looking elsewhere. In other words, commands are warning signs that can tell us when we have taken our trust from the

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Lord and have placed it on something else. My response is not to try harder to obey the command next time, but simply to get my eyes back on Christ - obedience will be automatic when my eyes are on Christ. The truth has torn down this dangerous stronghold.

Remember, the weapons of the spiritual warfare are spiritual. The weapon for pulling down the strongholds of Satan is the sword (truth), the Word of God.

"...casting down imaginations..."

2 Corinthians 10:5a

It was a perfect day! The temperature was around 78 degrees with just a slight breeze from the Pacific Ocean. The ocean waves could be seen less than a hundred yards off the 18th green on one of America's most famous golf courses, Pebble Beach. As an amateur, I had one of the most incredible privileges in golf. It was Friday, and I had the unbelievable fortune of having a chance to make the cut and play with the pros on Saturday and Sunday.

I had hit my tee shot in perfect position about 255 yards in the middle of the fairway. Although Fred Couples had out driven me by 60 yards, he was in the right rough. With a good 3-wood shot, I just might give myself a chance to make birdie and if I make a birdie, I make the cut!

My 3-wood was better than I had hoped for and was no more than 80 yards from the green. Walking toward my ball, I noticed it was sitting up - an easy lob wedge. Couples hit a tremendous shot from the rough and was just off the green. I was shaking all over as I addressed my approach shot. As I looked up, several fans in the gallery gave me a thumbs up. I knew it was all or nothing. I had to get a birdie!

As I swung, I felt tremendous concentration and felt the ball jump off the clubhead and knew it was a solid shot. Then I saw the ball with a beautiful arc, land 10 feet in front of the pin and roll towards the flag. It stopped inches from the hole and the gallery erupted with clapping and cheering!

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"Please stand and turn in your hymnals to number 436 as we sing the invitational hymn."

"Oh, shucks!" I thought to myself, "I was just about to make a birdie and the cut at the Pebble!"

"What was that number, Honey?"

Does this story sound familiar? Okay, maybe you don't like golf, but you could probably replace my story with your favorite daydream.

Why does this passage talk about casting down imaginations? Just what are imaginations? Webster's Dictionary defines imagination as "the act or power of forming a mental image of something not present to the sense or never before wholly perceived in reality." My experience has shown that my imaginations usually start with something I've remembered, something that actually happened. Then, it progresses into the area of "never before wholly perceived in reality." Some sort of revenge for a past injustice was one of my favorites. When the Lord opened my eyes to the truth in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5, I started noticing the amount of time I spent daydreaming and was astonished! I would often spend a solid hour in a make-believe world in which I always came out on top.

During my time in the Marine Corps, I spent a lot of time training in martial arts. As a young Lance Corporal, I was on liberty when three bad dudes approached me wanting to fight in front of a whole crowd of people. Debating for a second on whether to apply some of the martial arts training I had received, I wisely chose to walk away, their taunts stinging me. Eighteen years later, I noticed that I would spend hours imagining a different ending in which I bested all three of those bullies and despite a few bruises, became a local hero. The anger I felt all those years later was as intense as it had been when the confrontation had occurred. I wasted hours on something that wasn't even real or true!

Satan knows that if he can keep us in this dream world, that decisions we make will not be based on truth but on an imaginary world we've created in our minds. Paul knew how destructive imaginations are and because they are in our mind, they are part of the spiritual warfare. How do we cast them down? First, recognize them when they come and realize that what we are thinking is a lie and not the truth. When we are focusing on a lie, our eyes are

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not on Christ. Where do lies come from? Satan, of course. How do we fight lies? With the truth. Dwell on, meditate on God's word instead of imaginations. You will have cast down the imagination and replaced it with the truth.

"...and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of Christ..."

As we have already noted, Satan will do anything to get our focus off of Jesus Christ and place it on anything else. He knows that then we are defeated on the spiritual battlefield and ineffective. Satan, the Father of Lies, knows that once we truly begin to know the Lord Jesus, that we will be set free from the bondage of the world and will begin to put our faith in the God of the universe.

So, Satan does everything he can to get us to believe anything, any lie that will replace the knowledge of Christ. These lies will often be very subtle; they will sound so good, so right, but the lie will always "exalt itself against the knowledge of Christ." Despite that fact, the Bible states in 2 Peter 1:3 "His divine power has given us everything that pertains to life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness."

Christians are continually being deceived into taking philosophies of the world (foolishness of man) and combining it with what little truth they may know, and the result is a dangerous hybrid that puts the focus on anything but Jesus. The best ideas that man can produce will always exalt itself against the knowledge of Christ.

The Apostle Paul, having lost his respected, high position in the Jewish religious community, destitute, beaten, in prison, considered the knowledge of Jesus Christ superior to anything that the world had to offer. In Philippians 3:7-9 he writes: "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ..."

Visualization is an example of a subtle lie that exalts itself against the knowledge of Christ. The focus of this New Age doctrine is changing your current circumstances by visualizing the

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change you desire in your mind. Supposedly, when your mind is focusing on this new image, it will release inner power enabling you to change things into the circumstance that you desire. Notice that the focus is not on Christ, but on a mental picture that we create. In other words, visualization is a world philosophy that exalts itself against the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

As a Christian, not only does this philosophy exalt itself against the knowledge of Christ, but obviously, if you buy into it, Satan has succeeded in defeating you. What if Joseph, sold into slavery and then thrown into prison, had bought into this lie? Can't you see the Egyptian jailer telling Joseph "Now, Joseph, your praying to your God is okay, but what you really need to do is visualize yourself as a trustee in this prison. You'll have more privileges than any other prisoner!"

How ridiculous! Do you think that Joseph would have visualized himself to be the second most powerful person in Egypt? I don't think so. No, Joseph had his trust in God and left his physical circumstances in God's hands and the results were beyond anything that anyone would have predicted.

This is just one of thousands of examples of world oriented knowledge that attempts to replace the knowledge of Christ.

"...and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

The first time the Lord opened my eyes to this portion of 2 Corinthians 10:4-5, I remember my thoughts were "I've got a pretty good thought life - every once in a while I'll stray, but most of the time I'm thinking "good things." I decided to monitor my thoughts for about a week just to see on what my thoughts were dwelling. That week was a real eye-opener! I noticed that probably 99% of my thoughts were definitely not captive to the obedience of Christ.

After that week of monitoring, I went back and read 2 Corinthians 10:5. My response this time was "You've got to be kidding - every thought? No way!" The reason, of course, that my thoughts were not in obedience to Christ was because my focus, my trust was on everything

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else but Jesus Christ. It's really quite simple. When your eyes are on Jesus Christ, your thoughts are captive to the obedience of Christ. When your focus is on anything else, they are not in obedience to Christ.

My initial response to understanding this scripture, however, was to try and flood my mind with scripture and "good" thoughts so they would push any "bad" thoughts out. This was no more than another form of works and did not work. Our response must always be to shift our focus from whatever it is on and bring it back to Jesus Christ.

Let's look at a couple of scriptures that talk about thoughts. Philippians 4:8 says "Finally brethren, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things." If after recalling or reading this scripture, you notice that you have not been thinking such things, what do you do? Do you make a list of true, noble, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy things and then think about them? No, you realize that Satan has been able to get your eyes off of Christ and you get them back on Christ. Then, in the power of Jesus Christ, your thoughts will reflect those indicated in Philippians 4:8: "true, noble, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy

In Romans 12:1-2, Paul tells us "Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." As we trust Christ to reveal himself to us through the Scriptures, the strongholds will be torn down, the imaginations will be cast down, and we will be transforming our thought life from that of the world to that which is in obedience to Christ. Then, as our thoughts are in obedience to Christ, our decisions will be those of Christ's.

May you be victorious on the spiritual battlefield!