

Spiritual Warfare

By Pastor Alan Utting



'The Christian life is not a playground; it is a battlefield.' Warren Wiersbe

There are times of joy in ministry, but it can also be demanding and exhausting. Scripture warns us that Satan's strategy is to 'wear out the saints' (Daniel 7:25 KJV). His attacks may come in many forms—fractured relationships, financial pressures, crippling illnesses, leadership disunity, and other difficulties. Some of these challenges simply arise from living in a fallen world. At other times, we make unwise choices and we fail to recognise that Satan and his workers are actively seeking to bring down our effectiveness. Tragically he sometimes succeeds especially when Christian workers remain unaware of these spiritual attacks. But don't live in fear or become a casualty of war as through the finished work of Christ on the cross, we are assured of victory. Hallelujah! In the power of the risen Lord, we find confidence, truth and become bondage breakers for others!

Biblical Perspective

Manifestations of Satan: a snake (Genesis 3:1), beauty (Ezkiel 28:17), pride (Ezekiel 28:2), a deceiver who so often works through people (2 John 1:7), a possessor of people (Luke 9:41), tempter (Matthew 4:1) and destroyer (Mark 5:15) etc.

Manifestations of Jesus: liberator (1 John 3:8), giver of peace (John 14:27), healer (Mark 1:34), forgiver (Luke 5:24), teacher (John 3:2), one who lays down His life so others may receive life (John 10:15) and love (1 John 4:9) etc.

C. S. Lewis is right when he says, 'There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them'.

I once ministered in Kenya and spoke on the topic of blessings and curses. Afterwards, a pastor came up to me and remarked, 'I didn't think you people in the West believed in this sort of thing!' Sadly, his observation is often true. 'They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony' (Revelation 12:11).

Further observations – Satan tempts us in several ways:

1. **He seeks to deceive us.** Jesus said, '... for he is a liar and the father of lies' (John 8:44). Something or someone may appear good to us emotionally or intellectually, but in reality may not be. That is why we must be discerning and remain open to the wise input of others.
2. **He causes disunity.** Disunity can arise when minor issues overshadow important ones, or when decisions are made hastily instead of seeking guidance. Satan can use pride or dominant personalities to influence discussions in a wrong way.
3. **He seeks to control us through fear.** Feeling fearful is natural, especially when we are asked to step into situations that are risky, unfamiliar, or beyond our control. But it is when we give in to fear that we fail. Every godly leader in the Bible wrestled with this same tension at times. Yet, instead of relying on feelings,

they chose to move forward in faith, trusting God. God says, 'So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand' (Isaiah 41:10).

4. **He tempts us by taking on offenses.** As John Bevere says, 'Our response to an offense determines our future.' We need to guard our hearts and avoid adopting offenses—both our own and those of others.
5. **He uses discouragement.** King David often felt discouraged 'but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God' (1 Samuel 30:6 KJV). Don't make the decision to leave your ministry or any significant decision when at a low ebb. Nevertheless, don't stay longer than your call. How do you encourage yourself in the Lord?
6. **He often uses sexual attraction** as a weapon. This is one of his commonest strategies, beginning with subtle temptations that gradually grow stronger over time. Interestingly, in Christian ministry, it is often not physical attraction that first draws two people together, but a sense of spiritual closeness or empathy. Yet if these feelings are not guarded, they can easily develop into unhealthy attachments. If you go down this path, you are sitting on a time bomb!
7. **He uses a love of money.** 'For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil' (1 Timothy 6:10). Don't fall for Satan's deception in this matter. Jesus and His disciples model a correct attitude. The prosperity gospel is of the devil. A detailed study of Scripture makes it clear that God is on the side of the poor but can wonderfully use the assets of those with plenty. Consumerism is not a recipe for happiness.
8. **He uses prideful attitudes.** The saying 'Pride comes before a fall' is true. People not repenting of pride have made shipwreck of their lives. That's what also caused the downfall of Satan who tried to make himself above God (Isaiah 14:12-15).
9. **Through demon possessions and curses.** Demonisation can range from simply giving into temptation to full possession of a demon. It appears also that some cultures could appear more susceptible to demonic bondages than others, especially those with an animistic background. I well remember the first time I was confronted with a sincere Christian oppressed by a demon. I felt bewildered until I confronted that demon by name and claimed the victory in Christ!

The power of the cross. Decades ago, I dreamt of being trapped in a courtyard with snakes wrapped around me. Unable to move, I whispered 'Jesus' and gradually, as I called his name louder, the snakes released me. This dream illustrated how invoking Jesus and the work of the cross breaks Satan's grip: 'And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross' (Colossians 2:15).

Prayer team. A praying team is essential for protection in sustaining you for long-term ministry. Regular updates to team members make the team's prayer ministry more effective. 'Do not lose your confidence which has a great reward' (Hebrews 10:35).

Resources

John Bevere, *The Bait of Satan*

Thomas B. White, *The Believer's Guide to Spiritual Warfare*