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SPIRITUAL WARFARE—GOD’S WAY

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Hank Hanegraaff has done it again. After first providing an extremely concise, accessible, and engaging treatment of prayer (*The Prayer of Jesus*, W Publishing Group, 2001), he has now provided the same service with the topic of spiritual warfare (*The Covering*, W Publishing Group, 2002). In both cases he brings a refreshingly biblical perspective to subjects in which Christians show great interest, but also great misunderstanding. Just as we complemented the publication of *The Prayer of Jesus* in the JOURNAL with Lee Strobel’s dynamic interview of Hank on prayer, in this issue we feature an equally profound discussion between Strobel and Hanegraaff on spiritual warfare.

Like prayer, spiritual warfare is of great practical importance to Christian growth. It is critical to accurately understand and apply what the Bible has to say about overcoming temptation and withstanding the wiles of the Devil. If the Evil One could convince a large enough percentage of Christians to substitute a superstitious¹ approach to doing battle with him in place of the biblical model, he would largely neutralize the witness of the church. This scenario may sound preposterous, but there is good reason to believe it is well underway.

There seems to be no end to the subjective, sensational, and superstitious fare on spiritual warfare that dominates the Christian book market. Pay a visit to your local Christian bookstore. Chances are you will find 10 to 20 books on spiritual warfare themes. Two radically different approaches will be represented. The vast majority of the books will advocate the relatively new *deliverance* model for spiritual warfare. This model affirms the capacity of evil spirits to possess or “demonize” Christians. It assumes the existence of, and need to identify, spirits associated with various sins (e.g., the “spirit of lust”), spirits attached to specific physical locations (e.g., “territorial spirits”) or objects, and spirits of various sins passed down through human blood lines (i.e., “generational spirits”). In any of these cases, it emphasizes that God has given Christians authority to confront these demons directly through rebuking them, verbally “binding” them,² and commanding them to leave whatever person or place one believes they inhabit. The use of this authority is considered central to both spiritual warfare and Christian sanctification or victory over sin. This direct confrontation can take the form of “warfare prayer” — in which one primarily addresses the Devil and his legions, not God — as well as deliverance sessions (i.e., exorcisms) performed on Christians, including sometimes oneself.

Unless your Christian bookstore is under unusually discerning and conscientious ownership, you will only find a few books at the most that will not teach these concepts and practices but will rather advocate the historic *discipleship* model for spiritual warfare and sanctification. There probably will be only one book in the latter group that will clearly dissociate itself from the former group and call those recent innovations in spiritual warfare *biblically false*. That book would be *The Covering*.

At CRI we are comforted by the realization that there actually are many Christians who agree with us. In terms of the publishing world, however, we often feel like voices in the wilderness as we continually stand for the largely obscured discipleship model for battling against sin and the Devil, described in detail by Hanegraaff and Strobel in this issue.

In the past this magazine has responded to the deliverance teachings of such authors as C. Fred Dickason, Mark Bubeck, Frank and Ida Mae Hammond,³ Neil T. Anderson,⁴ and Bob Larson.⁵ These articles may be accessed at our Web site (www.equip.org). Since the publication of these articles, new authors have come

to the forefront with best-selling books that spread further into evangelicalism the errant spiritual warfare ideas and approaches of the deliverance model.

Some of these authors, such as Stormie Omartian and Beth Moore, are likable personalities with obviously sincere faith in, and love for, Christ. It is especially hard for me to write critically of Omartian, since she was one of my favorite lyricists in the 1970s when she contributed to her husband Michael's progressive Christian rock albums. Her series of books on the power of prayer⁶ have dominated the Christian nonfiction bestseller's lists in recent years, breaking records in the process, and they show no signs of abating.⁷

Much of what Omartian has to say about prayer and the Christian life is good, and there's no disputing that her books have helped many people. What's the problem, then? Despite Omartian's good intentions, when she touches on spiritual warfare issues, she repeats the errors she imbibed at her church of 23 years (until she moved to Tennessee), The Church on the Way in Van Nuys, California (associated with the Foursquare Gospel denomination).

The Church on the Way, whose pastor, Jack Hayford (Omartian's "spiritual father"⁸), is highly respected in the charismatic/Pentecostal movement, is a dynamic and in many ways fruitful church.⁹ It has, however, embraced, or at least failed to take a stand against, many of the errors that have spread through much of the charismatic movement. It recently has become a leading dispenser of the deliverance model of spiritual warfare through its Cleansing Stream Ministries (CSM). The mission statement of CSM states that it is "committed to partnering with pastors and churches in teaching and training leaders and maturing believers in personal cleansing, *deliverance*, and spiritual warfare so they can be released to serve, minister, and disciple others in the Body of Christ" (emphasis added).¹⁰ All of the distinctives of the deliverance model mentioned above — along with the errors of the word of faith movement concerning the creative power of human speech — are taught by CSM in seminars and retreats to local churches across North America and around the world.

Like CSM, Omartian affirms that Christians can be demonized and need to seek deliverance from this affliction.¹¹ She assumes the existence of, and need to identify, spirits attached to physical locations and objects, generational spirits, and specific demons associated with, and assigned to, specific sins.¹² She further teaches that God has given Christians authority to directly address, rebuke, command, and bind demons, and that using this authority is central both to spiritual warfare and sanctification.¹³ Several of these points can be demonstrated from just one quote, taken from *Lord, I Want to Be Whole*:

The first step in renouncing sin is to ask God exactly what you need to be delivered from. If you're dealing with evil spirits, ask Him to show you which ones. Say, "God, give me revelation. Show me if an evil spirit is causing my fear." Then speak a Scripture from the Word of God that backs up your authority to cast out this spirit. Choose a Scripture that applies to your own life. For example, say, "God has not given [me] a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7).

Then cast out the spirit. Speak directly to the evil spirit with confidence and boldness and the full knowledge that Jesus has given you authority to do so in His name. Be specific. Say, "I address you, spirit of fear. I will no longer entertain you. I renounce you and remove your right to stay. I say you have no power over me. I bind you in the name of Jesus Christ and in the authority He has given me. I cast you out of my life and command you to be gone."¹⁴

Much of the confusion that exists over spiritual warfare arises from taking Bible passages that have a limited application and treating them as if they have no limits. The Bible does say that Christ has unlimited authority over demons, and He gave His disciples the specific authority to cast demons out of possessed individuals and to overcome any other manifestations of the Evil One they might encounter in the work of preaching the Gospel (Matt. 10:1; Mark 3:13-15; Luke 10:17-20; cf. Acts 13:7b-12). In that context, we do find believers in the Gospels and the book of Acts directly addressing demons, rebuking them (not Satan himself; cf. Jude 8-10), and casting them out of people. Jesus never even hinted, however, that this authority carried over into our personal battles with sin and Satan.

Nowhere do we find the apostles or disciples addressing invisible spirits (i.e., spirits that are not inhabiting a human body). We *are* promised victory over the Devil in James 4:7: if we resist him, he will flee from us; but we are never told that we resist him by commanding him to leave us alone. In the larger context of James 4, it is clear that this resistance involves submitting to God, drawing near to Him, becoming serious about repentance, and humbling ourselves in the presence of the Lord (James 4:7-10). The same applies to all other Bible passages that speak of resisting Satan (e.g., Eph. 6:13-18; 1 Pet. 5:5-10). Spiritual warfare does not consist in addressing the Devil but rather in addressing God in prayer; it is not a matter of asserting one's own authority to use Christ's name over the Devil but rather of standing firm and unmovable in one's faith in, and obedience to, God. This sustained commitment in the face of spiritual opposition — a moral exercise that causes us to grow in the image of Christ — is what makes the Devil go away. Satan will be "bound" and cast out of our presence at the Second Coming (Rev. 20:1-3), but in the meantime he serves a purpose in God's development of our character,¹⁵ and it is only our steadfast resistance of evil that makes him flee — not the mere utterance of words or the assertion of our authority in Christ.

This more restricted view of the believer's authority over demons does not mean that the believer is less equipped to prevail against "the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12; NASB) than he or she would be in the deliverance model. In this issue's discussion, as in *The Covering*, Hank Hanegraaff takes the focus off of errant views of spiritual warfare in order to provide a positive presentation of what God has provided to ensure our spiritual victory: the "armor of God" (Eph. 6:11-18), which Hanegraaff calls "the covering."

One part of this armor, Scripture, is correctly noted by Omartian as playing a critical role in spiritual warfare; it is the "sword of the Spirit," our one offensive weapon (Eph. 6:17), and Satan must yield to its authority. This happens naturally, however, as we stand in faith upon the Word during times of temptation and trial and use it properly when communicating with both the lost and the saved. There is neither need nor biblical basis for quoting Scripture to the Devil.¹⁶ When Omartian says we should look for Scriptures that apply to our situation, she is right. When she tells us to find Scriptures that will back up *our* authority, she is wrong.

It is the authority of God's Word and Christ on which we stand. That is more than sufficient.

— Elliot Miller

NOTES

1. By superstitious I mean belief in powers and principles that are more akin to magic than to anything that can be substantiated from Scripture or science.
2. This practice is based on a misunderstanding of Matt. 18:18, which is actually talking about dealing with sinning Christians (see vv. 15-17; cf. John 20:21-23), not dealing with demons.
3. For a general treatment of Christian deliverance teachings up to 1993, see Brent Grimsley and Elliot Miller, "Can a Christian Be 'Demonized?'" vol. 16, no. 3.
4. For an in-depth analysis of the teachings of Anderson on spiritual warfare and sanctification, see the four part "The Bondage Maker" series by Elliot Miller and Bob and Gretchen Passantino that appeared in vol. 21.
5. See Steven Parks, "The Devil Is in the Details: An Examination of the Teachings of Bob Larson," vol. 24, no. 2.
6. See *The Power of a Praying Parent* (1995), *The Power of a Praying Wife* (1997), *The Power of a Praying Husband* (2001), *The Power of a Praying Woman* (2002), and *The Power of a Praying Nation* (2002), all published by Harvest House (Eugene, OR). See also *Lord, I Want to Be Whole: The Power of Prayer and Scripture in Emotional Healing* (2000) and *Praying God's Will for Your Life* (2002), both published by Thomas Nelson (Nashville).
7. See "Prayer Power: Omartian's Popular Series Breaks Best-Seller Records," *Book and Bible News and Reviews*, CBA (Christian Booksellers Association) Web site (<http://www.cbaonline.org/>), http://204.71.129.243/MarketPlace/_sep02bnr.jsp.
8. *Parent*, Acknowledgments, v.
9. At least that was the case when I visited it a few times in the 1970s.
10. http://www.cleansingstream.org/intro_to_CSM.html.
11. See *Lord, I Want to Be Whole*, 77-78, 83ff. Like many deliverance teachers, Omartian makes distinctions that are supposed to reassure Christians about the limits of the Devil's power over them but that, in fact, make little or no difference. She makes a distinction between a demon indwelling a believer's spirit — which she says can't happen — and a demon attaching itself to a believer's life — which she says does happen frequently and is the reason why believers need deliverance. She also qualifies that Christians cannot be possessed, but only oppressed. On the one hand she maintains, "Jesus is in you. Evil spirits are not in

you.” (Ibid, 79.) On the other hand, she affirms, “Deliverance, then, is evicting the Devil and refusing to be crippled by him” (ibid., 78; emphasis added), and she instructs believers to “cast out the spirit” and “remove [its] right to stay.” (Ibid., 86.) Omartian is using biblical terminology when she speaks of casting out or evicting a demon, but she fails to realize that this necessarily implies something much worse than attachment to one’s life. Whenever the Bible speaks of deliverance, it is always referring to evicting a demon from a person’s body, which the demon had made its home, and from which the demon was able to exert complete control of, and inflict extreme affliction on, the wretched, lost victim. There is, furthermore, no biblical ministry of deliverance to believers. Christians who are overcome by temptation are consistently instructed to put “to death the deeds of the body” (Rom. 8:13; NASB); they are never told to cast out the demons of various sins. Omartian teaches that demons can control believers against their will, and this is the biblical doctrine of demon possession by another name. For a fuller development of these points, see Elliot Miller, “The Bondage Maker: Examining the Message and Method of Neil T. Anderson (Part Two: Spiritual Warfare and the ‘Truth Encounter’),” *Christian Research Journal* 21, 2 (1998): 10–21.

12. See *Lord, I Want to Be Whole*, 81–82, 85–86; *Parent*, 94–95, 133–34, 174, 176.
13. See *Lord, I Want to Be Whole*, 86. Cf. *Husband*, 24–25.
14. *Lord, I Want to Be Whole*, 85–86.
15. See, e.g., 2 Cor. 12:7–9. Paul did not rebuke Satan for giving him this “thorn in the flesh” or command him to take it away, but he rather besought the Lord to remove it from him, and graciously accepted the Lord’s answer that “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (v. 9, NIV). Paul was able to appreciate that this satanic affliction served a divine purpose in keeping him humble, despite the great revelations he had received (v. 7).
16. The one biblical instance in which the Devil was addressed directly, and Scripture was spoken to him, was when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1–11). It should first be noted that no one is disputing that Jesus has the authority to address and rebuke the Devil (see, e.g., Jude 8–10). Jesus is God and Lord of all creation, including Satan, and so it does not necessarily follow that what was proper for Him is also proper for us, John 14:12 notwithstanding. The very point under dispute is whether all of Jesus’ authority transfers over to us or only that specified in Scripture, and so it would beg the question to use this verse as a proof text without establishing the practice of addressing and rebuking the Devil elsewhere in Scripture. It is clear enough, furthermore, that Satan appeared to Jesus in some sort of visible form. If the Devil visually manifests himself to you, then perhaps you will have a biblical basis to quote Scripture to him! If not, quote your Scriptures to yourself or those who are with you, for the only invisible being you have a biblical basis for addressing is God. If Scripture provides no justification for speaking to angels or departed saints, why should we think it is OK to talk to Beelzebub and his demons?