Spiritual Warfare and Missions

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Consider the following scenarios from the mission field. First, a missionary distributes gospel tracts in a border town between Brazil and Uruguay.[1] The main street through the town divides the nations. Those in Brazil, where the church has been growing rapidly, gladly receive the tracts. Those in Uruguay, where the church has experienced little growth, refuse the tracts. The Uruguayans, however, often change their minds and receive the tracts gladly when they cross the street into Brazil. Accepting the missionary's conclusion that those who cross the street are leaving a "cover of darkness" that pervades Uruguay, one spiritual warfare writer presents the story as a contemporary illustration of "territorial spirits."[2]

Second, a team of North American believers travels to a creative-access country, where the gospel has taken little hold.[3] Passionate and committed, they prayerfully study the region's history in order to discover spirits of darkness that dominate the region.[4] Having identified and prayed against these spirits, these believers declare the strongholds broken and the region now ready for the preaching of the gospel.

Third, a missionary serving in an Asian country experiences an evil presence while attempting to rest. The perceived "spirit" is so strong that the missionary cannot move or speak aloud. Gripped with fear, the missionary prays a silent prayer for Jesus to "send it away"—and the presence departs.

Finally, a missionary in the same region

of the world decides that he and his family have endured enough. Lonely, hurting, and longing for friends and family, they pack their bags and head back to America. There, they believe, "the battle won't be so intense."

Each of these scenarios reflects an increasing interest in the role of spiritual powers in world evangelization.[5] While viewing the Christian life as a battle is not new (e.g., Eph 6:11-12), some authors suggest that this renewed interest began in the late twentieth century with a desire among missiologists to complete the Great Commission.[6] This focus led to a "growing concern that many missionaries lacked spiritual power and that one of the principal limiting factors in finishing world evangelization was the opposition of Satan, the archenemy of God."[7]

The primary goal of this article is to analyze this relationship between spiritual warfare and world evangelization. In the context of this discussion will be a critique of contemporary spiritual warfare methods. In addition, this article will offer guidelines for preparing missionaries to face the reality of spiritual warfare.

A Presupposition: The Reality of the Battle

In 1974, the Lausanne Conference on World Evangelization clearly articulated this spiritual struggle in an article entitled "Spiritual Conflict":

> We believe that we are engaged in constant spiritual warfare with the principalities and powers of evil who are seeking to overthrow the Church and to frustrate its task of

world evangelization. We know our need to equip ourselves with God's armor and to fight this battle with the spiritual weapons of truth and prayer.[8]

This position regarding the reality of the battle, although stated in various forms, has been reaffirmed at the International Prayer Assembly for World Evangelization (1984), the Intercession Working Group of the Lausanne Committee (1993), the North American Congress for Itinerant Evangelists (1994), and the Lausanne Consultation on Spiritual Conflict (2000).[9] It is not surprising, then, that "The Philosophy of Prayer for World Evangelization" adopted by the A.D. 2000 United Prayer Track also emphasized the spiritual battle involved in world evangelization:

> Two fundamental biblical premises underlie the various approaches to spiritual warfare as it applies to evangelizing the lost. They can best be stated by quoting relevant biblical texts: (1) The devil directly and explicitly attempts to obstruct the evangelization of the lost: "But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them" (2 Cor. 4:3-4, NKJV). (2) Our weapons designed by God to help remove these obstructions to evangelism are spiritual weapons. "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God" (2 Cor. 10:4-5, NKJV).[10]

One is, therefore, hard pressed to deny that this topic has garnered interest. The battle is indeed a real one as the church seeks to be obedient to the Great Commission.

Satan as the Opponent of Unbelievers

In his thorough study of Satan and demons, Sidney H. T. Page indicates that two Pauline passages describe Satan's activities toward unbelievers—2 Cor 4:4 and Eph 2:2.[11] The former verse, according to warfare advocates, describes Satan's primary strategy against unbelievers: "the god of this world" has blinded their minds. Also called the "prince of this world" (John 12:31) and "prince of the power of the air" (Eph 2:2), Satan does whatever he can to keep unbelievers in darkness. The unbeliever is by no means guiltless—"for the blindness spoken of is a consequence of unbelief"[12] —but the darkness is deepened by the enemy's efforts to maintain control. Satan himself is already defeated, but he still "has the strength to besiege human minds and to incite them to embrace and exalt evil rather than God."[13]

Satan's strategies for keeping unbelievers blinded are several. The enemy provides the lies to which unbelievers cling, such as "I'm good enough," or "I can always wait until tomorrow to follow God."[14] He makes sin attractive and alluring, convincing the unbeliever that following God will mean a loss of pleasure. He snatches away the Word of God before it takes root in an unbeliever's heart (see Matt 13:3-9, 18-23).

More specifically, Satan blinds unbelievers to the gospel by promoting distorted views of the gospel itself. Clinton Arnold recognizes that Paul originally used the term "strongholds" (a term commonly misused in spiritual warfare circles) to denote Satan's raising of "dangerous and wrong ideas about Jesus and his gospel" (see 2 Cor 10:4). False teachers, disguised as "apostles of Christ" (2 Cor

11:13), proclaimed "another Jesus whom we have not preached" (11:4). In response, Paul called the Corinthians to battle with spiritual weapons against the strongholds of false ideas (10:4). He "wanted them to commit themselves afresh to the true gospel . . . the gospel of the Christ."[15]

A general principle may, therefore, be derived from the text: Satan seeks to promote false teachings to direct attention from Christ and to weaken the message of the gospel. Ultimately, strongholds of false teachings (whether from inside or outside of the church) are designed to keep unbelievers in bondage. The words of J. Dwight Pentecost clearly emphasize this point in his discussion of the enemy's snatching away the Word:

> Satan, of course, would rather not have to do this work of taking away the seed that has been sown. He would rather so control the one who is doing the preaching that something *other than the good seed of the Word of God* is proclaimed.[16]

How important it is that we are aware of this strategy as we minister in an increasingly pluralistic landscape. The Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) mandates that we reach out to all the people groups of the world—a world that includes as many as 1.3 billion Muslims, 900 million Hindus, 376 million Buddhists, and millions of others who practice other religions.[17]

Against that backdrop, Satan seeks to undermine the biblical truth that exclusive, personal faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to God.[18] Exclusivity of salvation in Christ is largely rejected, with a growing number of American adults believing that good persons will go to heaven whether or not they know Jesus Christ as Savior.[19] God's "radical love" and His "boundless generosity" have been widely interpreted to indicate that a personal faith response to Christ is no longer necessary for salvation.[20]

Missions and evangelism thus become largely unnecessary if we believe and teach that a plurality of routes leads to God. While the church buys the lies of pluralism and inclusivism, Satan "disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Cor 11:14) and lulls unbelievers deeper into darkness.

Satan as the Opponent of Believers

Scripture affirms that Satan continues to attack persons who become believers.[21] For example, Jesus warned Peter that Satan demanded permission to "sift you like wheat" (Luke 22:31). Peter himself later warned believers, "Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8). The apostle Paul, who himself experienced "a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan" (2 Cor 12:7), likewise admonished believers to "put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil" (Eph 6:11). James, too, called believers to resist the devil, presupposing that the enemy would attack (Jas 4:7). If Satan does not attack believers, such recurrent warnings would seem irrelevant and unnecessary.

Though the enemy's schemes against believers are many, some are obvious. Satan entices believers with temptation, seeking to lure them into patterns of their former walk (Eph 4:17-32). After influencing believers to sin, he then heaps accusations on them; the tempter quickly becomes the accuser (Rev 12:10). His strategy—to "beat up on sinners" who fail to comprehend the meaning of real grace[22]—often leads to a cycle of defeat

and discouragement. As a result, ineffective, defeated believers carry little influence with non-believers who are held in the kingdom of darkness (Col 1:13).

Moreover, Satan endeavors to cultivate strife among believers, thereby weakening the church's united witness (see John 17:20-21). The challenge of world evangelization is so immense that God-centered, Bible-believing Christians must work together to accomplish our task. The enemy, however, will do all he can to sow seeds of discord among believers. In the words of the Puritan William Gurnall, "we by our mutual strifes give the devil a staff to beat us with; he cannot well work without fire, and therefore blows up these coals of contention."[23] Divided believers offer little hope to an already fractured world.

To summarize, the enemy works to keep non-believers in darkness. God calls missionaries to take the gospel of light into a world shrouded in this darkness, and the enemy aims his arrows at them. Discouragement is at times the result, especially when few non-believers are reached.

Overcoming the Enemy: Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare?

Scott Moreau describes "strategic-level spiritual warfare" (SLSW) as "praying against territorial spirits, seeking to 'map' their strategies over given locations by discerning their names and what they use to keep people in bondage, and then binding them so that evangelism may go unhindered."[24] One aspect of this process, known as "spiritual mapping" is "researching an area and identifying the spirit(s) in charge so that 'smart-bomb' praying may loosen their hold over the people, who may then freely come to Christ."[25] When the spirits are bound, non-believers are then assumed to be released to "process truth at a heart level."[26]

Strengths of SLSW

The weaknesses of this approach—to be discussed later in this article—are numerous. Thorough analysis, however, requires that we first recognize the positive aspects of SLSW. First, SLSW proponents assume the reality of demons and spiritual warfare. Just as the Bible "does not attempt to prove the existence of demons any more than it attempts to prove the existence of God,"[27] little attention in spiritual warfare literature is given to prove the existence of demons. Instead, proponents of SLSW take seriously the invisible forces behind the visible. This understanding is a needed corrective for many Westerners who tend to ignore—if not subconsciously deny—the reality of demonic forces.

Second, SLSW proponents believe that God still expects his followers to be obedient to the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). Indeed, they often emphasize evangelism as the goal of SLSW:

> • "If our vision of God aching for the lost is blurred by a commando operation against the gates of hell, we miss the point."[28]
> • "As accurate as spiritual mapping might be, it is my opinion that without an explicit focus on evangelization, it has little meaning."[29]
> • "If we bind every demon in town, but nobody gets saved eternally, we have done nothing."[30]

Third, proponents believe in the efficacy and necessity of intercessory prayer. For most SLSW adherents, intercession is more than a method of prayer; it is a way of life, a calling to engage in the battle on behalf of others.[31] SLSW, then, is a tool for intercessors who want to pray with

knowledge and direction.

Fourth, SLSW leaders recognize the importance of supporting evangelism and missions work with research. While the research primarily—and, in my estimation, too strongly—focuses on discerning demonic strongholds, three primary questions asked are helpful ones for a missionary: What is wrong with my city? Where did the problem come from? What can be done to make things better?[32] More specifically, the research examines six areas of interest in a given region: the status of Christianity, prevailing social bondages, worldviews and allegiances, spiritual opposition, evolution of current circumstances, and potential for spiritual breakthroughs.[33] Some aspects of this research, when focused properly and evaluated appropriately, can prove invaluable to a missionary attempting to reach a particular people group.

Finally, advocates of SLSW emphasize unity in the church as we work toward fulfilling our calling. Understanding that division weakens the army of God, they "seek co-operation rather than competition."[34] United against a common enemy, believers are thus challenged to join forces in the war.

Weaknesses of SLSW

Despite the above-mentioned strengths, several weaknesses of this approach are equally apparent. Seven are noted below.

A Lack of Biblical Support

First and foremost, the biblical evidence offered to support major concepts of this approach is weak at best. Daniel 10:13-20, the text most often cited to describe territorial spirits, does indicate the presence of evil spirits with some

sense of territorial connection; however, we are given no mandate or guidelines for naming or confronting such spirits. In fact, Clinton Arnold notes that Daniel himself learned about the battle between spiritual forces only *after* the particular battle was completed.[35] The evidence of Dan 10 (and later, Eph 6:12, where some assume a hierarchy led by spirits assigned to territories) simply does not offer sufficient support for the elaborate system of assigned spirits that some warfare proponents have developed.[36]

In a similar fashion, the proposed biblical support for spiritual mapping is dubious.[37] Moses sent men to spy out the land of Canaan and "see what the land is like" (Num 13:18). Joshua enlisted men to survey Canaan prior to settling the inheritances of the tribes (Josh 18:1-10). God instructed Ezekiel to depict the city of Jerusalem on a clay tablet, and he then revealed to the prophet his plans for the city (Ezek 4:1-5:17). Paul "mapped" the city of Athens when he viewed the altars to false gods throughout the city (Acts 17:16-21).

It would seem from the above verses that the Hebrews did at times survey the land and that God also at times revealed his plans to spiritual leaders. As well, the value of knowing a city in order to contextualize the gospel is apparent in the Acts 17 passage. None of the texts, however, suggests identifying spirits, and no general mandate to survey all cities is given. Robert Guelich has thus rightly determined that the current interest in identifying, mapping, and confronting territorial spirits reflects more the theology of Frank Peretti's fiction than it does the teachings of the Bible.[38]

Moreover, the use of Matt 12:29, 16:18-19, and 18:18 to promote "binding and

loosing" in SLSW misses the points of these texts.[39] Only the Matt 12 passage has a direct relationship to spiritual conflict, and that passage gives no clear authority to speak to and take control over demons. Thomas Lea has thus concluded, "We have no teaching, example, or exhortation in Scripture which encourages us to address prayer to the devil or to demons."[40]

A Questioning of the Power of the Gospel

At the core of SLSW is a belief that identifying and breaking powers will place all non-believers in a given region on an equal playing ground; that is, removing a territorial spirit makes it *possible* now for non-believers in a given region to believe.[41] Though not explicitly stated, this process implies that the "air must be cleared" before the gospel on the ground can be effective. The word of the cross as "the power of God" (1 Cor 1:18) thus apparently needs help in some situations. Such an implication demeans the power of the Word.

A Danger of Fascination with the Demonic

SLSW proponents have warned against a fascination with evil, perhaps stated best by Wagner: "Uncovering the wiles of the devil can become so fascinating that we can begin to focus attention on the enemy rather than on God. This must be avoided at all costs. If we do it, we play into the enemy's hands."[42] These warnings notwithstanding, SLSW appears to carry inherent risks toward an unhealthy focus on the demonic.

Involvement in discerning and praying against strongholds in a particular area automatically turns one's attention to the demonic. At times, intercession includes more rebuking Satan than speaking to God. The present battle often receives more ink than the victory already achieved in Christ. Hence, Gerry Breshears' critique deserves a hearing:

> The whole concept of strategic-level spiritual warfare misses the point of the kingdom work of Christ. Both Satan and demons must be seen in the light of the coming of Christ and his work on the cross. Christ has bound the demons at the cross. We do not bind demons but plunder the dominion of darkness, using the power of the proclaimed gospel.[43]

A Danger of Minimizing Human Depravity

Warfare advocates affirm humanity's need for salvation. Nevertheless, the emphasis on Satan's blinding of unbelievers risks neglecting the truth that human beings are fallen by nature and by choice (Eph 2:2-3). If demonic forces are accepted as the cause of all wrong, human responsibility and the sins of the flesh are ignored (Eph 2:3). Strategies for breaking the powers may, then, wrongly take precedence over evangelizing lost people in need of a Savior. To counter this faulty tendency, the doctrinal truth of the sinfulness of humanity must be more clearly asserted.

A Leaning Toward Animism

Gailyn Van Rheenen defines "animism" as

> the belief that personal spiritual beings and impersonal spiritual forces have power over human affairs and that humans, consequently, must discover what beings and forces are impacting them in order to determine future action and, infrequently, to manipulate their power.[44]

Such tendencies are evident in some of

the writings of the SLSW movement.[45]

Though more recently less so, early writings in the spiritual warfare movement emphasized gaining a demon's name in order to break its power. Of particular interest to this study are the names of ruling powers that intercessors have "discerned."[46] A spirit of pride hovered over Cordoba, Argentina. Spirits of depression hindered the work of missionaries in another foreign country. In Manchester, England, spirits of apathy and lethargy ruled the territory. Over Los Angeles reigned a spirit of greed. Seemingly, such "knowledge" is hardly revelatory, and the practice of naming demons borders on animism.

A Danger of Neglecting Evangelism

John MacArthur, a critic of the spiritual warfare movement, made the following observation in reaction to the concept of a prayerwalk:

> Is that how we are to win our neighborhoods? Did Christ instruct the Christians in Pergamos to walk the roads and say, "In the name of Jesus, I rebuke Satan"? Did He tell Christians there to command the demons of paganism and immorality to leave the city? Hardly. The Bible makes it clear we are to win our neighborhoods by presenting the Gospel to the lost (Matt 28:19-20).[47]

MacArthur's criticism of prayerwalking may be overstated, but he raises a significant issue. Do warfare strategies sometimes replace a simple presentation of the gospel? It would seem entirely possible that a SLSW proponent might become so involved in chasing spirits and mapping cities that he forgets to witness to his own neighbor. In that case—when the excitement of conducting SLSW in Judea and Samaria blurs one's responsibilities in Jerusalem—the focus of the Great Com-

mission is in danger of eclipse.

A Risk of Ignoring Contextualization

Juliet Thomas, who serves with Operation Mobilization, India, makes this astute observation about "prayer journeys" that are often a component of SLSW:

> Much labour, time and money goes into organizing these prayer journeys to distant cities. I accept that praying on site can help us understand the people and the situation better, but such intercessors often shut themselves up while on site, giving themselves to prayer without any effort to understand the people or their problems. Do they believe that praying on site while closeted in a hotel gives more power in prayer?
> Others go out and stand in front of temples and mosques during their prayer walks to pull down the strongholds of the gods worshipped there. This again causes much offense. In Calcutta, as in other places, local Christians were angry because such events cause hostility towards Christians who are trying hard to reach others in compassion with the love of Jesus.[48]

While never compromising the message of the gospel, the missionary must strive to understand the context in which he works. The best-prepared missionary is simply more culturally sensitive than the above examples portray.

A Question

If, then, SLSW is so wrought with weaknesses, why is this approach attractive to any missionary? Imagine again another scenario. A missionary who has served faithfully for more than a decade begins a new day, though he does so with little enthusiasm. Day after day and year after year, he and his family have toiled in this hard soil, with few results to show for their labors. Today, his loneliness is

overwhelming and his frustrations are mounting. He is ready to give up—except that he has recently read about spiritual mapping and territorial spirits, and now his interest is again piqued.

"Perhaps," he considers, "that's the missing element. Others have prayed against spirits, and I hear that their ministries suddenly become fruitful—and how I long for my ministry to make a difference!" Armed with new enthusiasm, he devours all he can read about these exciting approaches. His honest desire to reach the lost sometimes overshadows this missionary's willingness to critique new strategies.

Moreover, few missionaries have been trained to approach spiritual warfare from a biblical perspective. Indeed, a brief survey of fifteen international missionaries on stateside assignment in 2000 revealed that *all* believed that seminary had not prepared them for the reality of spiritual battles.[49] All suggested that seminaries should require a class on spiritual warfare, though several believed that no class could fully prepare a potential missionary for the battles on the field.

A Proposal

Given these findings, I propose the following suggestions for helping to prepare missionaries for spiritual warfare—whether they be candidates for career service or laypersons preparing for a short-term trip. Hence, this proposal may apply in either a seminary or local church setting.

Even as I write this proposal, I am reminded of a Southern Seminary graduate's reflections on his preparation to serve as a missionary:

> Upon reflection I wonder how I could have been more prepared.

How does an educational institution fully prepare a student to enter the Third World, live in an environment that is totally foreign, learn a new language, and adapt to a new way of life? Only experience will teach you all you need to know to make it on the mission field, but the classroom provided me with the foundation to do what I am doing today.[50]

Fully aware that no missionary training program is complete without practical experience, I offer these guidelines for preparing missionaries for the spiritual battles inherent in doing the work of the Great Commission.

Teach the Word

One would wish that this expectation would be a given for the evangelical church and college or seminary, but such is not always the case. This basic guideline serves as a reminder that the Word of God is a "divinely powerful, spiritually effective weapon."[51]

The Word is alive and powerful (Heb 4:12), converting the soul (Ps 19:7) and protecting us from sin (Ps 119:11). The Word is the "sword of the Spirit" (Eph 6:17). It is the weapon to which Jesus Himself turned when He faced temptation (Matt 4:1-11). Three times, the devil tempted Jesus in the wilderness, and three times the Son of God responded by quoting God's Word (Matt 4:1-11). The Word remains today a vital weapon in our battle against the enemy (Eph 6:17).

Furthermore, it is the systematic teaching of the Word that prepares the missionary to counter false belief systems encountered on the field. The best missionary is a practitioner driven by a theology that longs to see the true God glorified—much like the apostle Paul.[52] The most effective churches and educational institutions intentionally teach believers to

read, understand, interpret, and apply the Word in any missiological setting.

Teach the Truths of Spiritual Warfare, but Focus on God

This simple statement is as much a foundational warning as it is a guideline. More than sixty years ago, C. S. Lewis warned readers, "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."[53] The more likely danger in teaching about spiritual warfare is to fall into the latter error rather than the former.

Missionaries must, however, march into battle with their focus on God—not on the enemy. God is the warrior who led His people across the Red Sea (Exod 15:3). David fought the Philistine giant not with a sword and a javelin, but in the name of the Lord whose battle it was (1 Sam 17:45-47). Jehaziel likewise assured Jehoshaphat of God's presence in the midst of battle with these words: "Do not fear or be dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours but God's" (2 Chr 20:15).

God is our shield (Gen 15:1; Ps 28:7), and it is He who chose to wear the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation (Isa 59:17). We face a real enemy in spiritual battles, but we are armed in the armor of a God who is "greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Hence, the missionaries most equipped for spiritual warfare are those who have learned foremost to keep their eyes on Him.

Teach Holiness

In 2000, practitioners, theologians, and mission executives from around the world gathered in Nairobi, Kenya, for the "Consultation on Deliver Us from Evil." This consultation, convened by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and the Association of Evangelicals in Africa, produced the following statement that emphasizes holiness:

> Holiness is central to the Christian response to evil:
> a) In the exercise of spiritual authority, those who do not give adequate attention to character and holiness truncate the whole biblical picture of spiritual growth and sanctification.
> b) To practice spiritual conflict without adequate attention to personal holiness is to invite disaster.
> c) The pursuit of holiness applies not only to the individual, but also to the family, the local church and the larger community of faith.
> d) While holiness includes personal piety, it applies to social relations as well.[54]

Local churches and theological institutions preparing Christians for missionary service would do well to hear and heed this statement.

Regrettably, local churches often have few stated standards for church membership, poorly developed discipleship strategies, and little accountability among believers. From some of these same churches go volunteer and career missionaries who have themselves never been adequately discipled. Practical holiness has been more a goal than a daily reality. These same missionaries—at times serving with little direct support, and at long distances from home and accountability—often fall easy prey to spiritual attacks.

Moreover, it has been my experience that most Christian colleges and seminaries poorly teach the spiritual disciplines that characterize holiness. To be fair,

the home and the church should be the first loci of such teachings; nevertheless, one goal of theological education ought to be to reinforce solidly those teachings. Indeed, the essence of putting on the armor (Eph 6:10-17) is living daily in truth, righteousness, faith, and hope, while always being ready to proclaim the gospel of peace found in the Word. When theological institutions (as well as churches) *assume* that believers daily wear the armor, we risk sending ill-equipped missionaries into the spiritual war.

Teach and Model Healthy Relationships

The enemy's presence in the Garden of Eden quickly led to Adam's placing the blame for his sin on the wife that God had graciously given to him (Gen 3:9-12). Some time thereafter, brother killed brother as sin disrupted relationship after relationship (Gen 4:1-8). That pattern has not changed—the enemy still aims his arrows at relationships.

Marriages on the mission field face the same issues of those in North American culture, though the issues are often intensified by distance from extended families. Educational choices for children are likely limited on the mission field. Culture shock as well as reverse culture shock upon re-entry to the native country are often difficult for families. Having committed themselves to world evangelization, missionary families thus place themselves in the enemy's crosshairs. In most cases, there are also few trained biblical counselors in their immediate settings to minister to these families when under attack.

It did not surprise us, then, that one missionary in the previously mentioned survey encouraged us to offer a class "teaching students how to recognize when Satan is attacking your family and your marriage . . . and how to lead family devotions at all stages of family development."[55] Perhaps the most effective way to prepare missionary families for spiritual attack is to teach and model healthy, God-centered relationships *before* they enter the field.

Teach Dependence Even in Brokenness

The Apostle Paul, a missionary extraordinaire, faced the buffeting of a "messenger of Satan" (2 Cor 12:7-10) in his own life. The nature of this "thorn in the flesh" is debatable, but the intensity of its nature is not; three times Paul asked God to remove this thorn. God, however, left Paul in the battle, thus teaching him that "when we accept our own weakness, we then also learn that we must rely totally upon God. . . . It [weakness] does not denote God's disfavor, but rather the reverse."[56]

I am convinced that one of the enemy's primary goals is to lead missionaries to *mess up* (that is, fall into sin) or to *give up* (quit in the face of discouragement). The former can be countered by training in spiritual disciplines and holiness, and the latter by teaching that God is sovereign over every spiritual battle we face. The enemy has no access to us apart from God's permission (see Job 1-2; Luke 22:31-32); if so, God always has a purpose when he allows us to be under attack.

The answer, then, is not to shake our fist at the devil. Rather, it is to submit to God's plan and trust his leadership through the battle. Here, the words of William Gurnall again speak to the struggling missionary: "Not only is Satan's power derived and limited, it is also *subservient* to the overruling power of God. Whatever mischief he devises is appointed by God

for the ultimate service and benefit of the saints."[57] How important it is for missionaries to understand this truth *before* the enemy strikes!

Tackle the Difficult Topic of Worldview and Power

Reflect on these situations faced by missionaries who responded to our survey:

> • A young lady is vomiting, believed by the local leaders to be inhabited by a demon.
> • An indigenous prayer leader perceives that the ground moves when praying for a team prepared to distribute tracts in an area dominated by spiritism
> • A local witch places a curse on the missionary's family.
> • A new believer asks missionaries to destroy the idols of her former belief system because she is afraid to do so herself.
> • Another new believer takes his ill child both to the missionary for prayer and to the shaman for healing.

In each case, the missionary indicated that theological training did not prepare him for such an event. While it is clear again that no training can equip a missionary for every potential happening, we must prepare future missionaries to recognize such worldview issues and to filter these events through a biblical lens. To ignore such topics is to leave the missionary with only the grid of experience for evaluation—and experience alone can lead astray.

In addition, others with a less sound hermeneutic *are* often more open to considering these issues than are conservative evangelicals. If we leave the discussion of these difficult subjects to others, we risk our potential missionaries adopting poor theology and methodologies to address these issues. Ultimately, we then fail in

our responsibility to equip them with a solid (and always relevant) biblical foundation for their task.

Teach Believers to Pray for Missionaries

Paul concludes the book of Ephesians with a request for believers to pray for one another and for his evangelistic endeavors (Eph 6:18-20). Though Paul likely did not intend prayer to be a piece of the armor of God, the sense of urgency noted in verses 18-20 ties his request to the battle indicated in 6:11-12. The believers were to "be on the alert," praying with *all* prayer at *all* times with *all* perseverance and petition for *all* the saints (v. 18).

Paul's request for boldness also implies his recognition that evangelism and missions would not be easy tasks. Indeed, both Ephesians and Colossians—letters written to a culture dominated by the powers—include a request from Paul for continued prayer support.

Pray for an Open Door to Share the Gospel (Col 4:2-3)

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul requested the believers to pray that "God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ" (Col 4:3). Because he was in prison at the time (Col 4:18), it is possible that Paul desired a release from prison in order to preach the gospel. More likely, as Peter O'Brien indicates, Paul "did not regard imprisonment as a serious interruption of his missionary work."[58] Given his desire and skills to "turn any situation into an opportunity for witness," it seems plausible that Paul was simply requesting God to provide an opportunity for sharing the gospel within his present circumstances.[59]

Regardless of one's interpretation of the "open door," it is clear that Paul recognized God as the source of any opportunity for witness. Equally clear is Paul's understanding that prayer is the means by which God opens those doors.

Pray for the Witness (Col 4:3-4; Eph 6:19-20)

Not only did Paul request prayer for an open door, but he also sought prayer for himself as the messenger. Specifically, he asked for prayer that he might proclaim the gospel clearly and boldly (Col 4:4, Eph 6:19-20). The open door would not be enough if there were no messenger willing to proclaim the Word, and Paul understood that he had no ability to speak that Word apart from God's power.

When I ask my classes if they pray daily for missionaries, typically only a handful admit to doing so. Yet, what changes might occur if we intentionally trained seminary students and church leaders to pray strategically for missionaries as Paul requested for himself? Might churches be more missions-focused? Might missionaries on the front lines of the battle find themselves more effective and more victorious in the battles they face?

Conclusion

The "Deliver Us from Evil Consultation Statement" (2000) concluded, "There is an urgent need to incorporate the study of spiritual conflict into theological schools and training centers around the world."[60] At Southern Seminary, the students in our missions track are required to take a class entitled "Spiritual Warfare in Evangelism and Missions." That class, though, is only one class among other significant courses in biblical languages, Bible surveys, church history, theology, philosophy, ethics, preaching, spiritual disciplines, missiology, and practical ministry.

Our goal is not to focus on the enemy, but nor do we want to ignore his reality. In the end, we want to produce "discipled warriors" who wear the armor of God, who understand contextual and worldview issues, who operate from a sound biblical and theological base—and who are unafraid to take the gospel into the dominion of darkness (Col 1:13, Acts 26:18).

ENDNOTES

[1]C. Peter Wagner relates this story in at least four of his writings. C. Peter Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1988), 60-61; *How to Have a Healing Ministry without Making Your Church Sick* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1988), 201-202; "Territorial Spirits," in *Wrestling with Dark Angels* (ed. C. Peter Wagner and F. Douglas Pennoyer; Ventura, CA: Regal, 1990), 81; "Territorial Spirits," in *Engaging the Enemy* (ed. C. Peter Wagner; Ventura, CA: Regal, 1991), 47-48. Wagner cites the source of the story as Ralph Mahoney, "The Covering of Darkness," *World MAP Digest* (March-April 1983): 3. For a follow-up that negatively critiques this account, see Robert J. Priest, Thomas Campbell, and Bradford A. Mullen, "Missiological Syncretism: The New Animistic Paradigm," in *Spiritual Power and Missions* (ed. Edward Rommen; Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1995), 40, n. 16.

[2]"Territorial spirits" are defined as "demonic powers that have been given controlling influence over specific sites, peoples and areas." George Otis, *Informed Intercession* (Ventura, CA: Renew, 1999), 257.

[3]"Formerly referred to as a *closed country,*

a creative-access country is a nation-state in which traditional missionary work is illegal or banned." Michael Pocock, Gailyn Van Rheenen, and Douglas McConnell, *The Changing Face of World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 15.

[4]This process of identifying strongholds is generally known as "spiritual mapping." Cindy Jacobs, director of the Generals of Intercession organization, defines mapping as "the researching of a city to discover any inroads Satan has made which prevent the spread of the gospel and evangelization of a city for Christ." Jacobs, "Dealing with Strongholds," in *Breaking Strongholds: How to Use Spiritual Mapping to Make Your Prayers More Strategic, Effective, and Targeted* (ed. C. Peter Wagner; Ventura, CA: Regal, 1993), 77.

[5]I am equating world evangelization with "missions," defined as "the specific work of the church and agencies in the task of reaching people for Christ by crossing cultural boundaries." A. Scott Moreau, Gary R. Corwin, and Gary B. McGee, *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 17.

[6]Pocock, Van Rheenen, McConnell, *Changing Face*, 184-85.

[7]Ibid., 185.

[8]Lausanne Covenant, Article 12, cited in Thom S. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology, and Principles* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 82.

[9]See Charles Lawless, Jr., "The Relationship between Evangelism and Spiritual Warfare in the North American Spiritual Warfare Movement, 1986-1997" (Ph.D. diss.; Louisville, KY: The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997), 14-18; *Deliver Us from Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission* (ed. A. Scott Moreau, Tokunboh Adeyomo, et al; Monrovia, CA: MARC, 2002), vii-xxvii, 309-312.

[10]C. Peter Wagner, *Confronting the Powers* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1996), 256-257. The philosophy statement was developed in response to controversies raised over some of the new concepts promoted by the spiritual warfare movement.

[11]Sidney H. T. Page, *Powers of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 184-186.

[12]Ibid., 184.

[13]David Garland, *2 Corinthians* (New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman, 1999), 211.

[14]So David Kirkwood contends, "Satan assists people who 'love darkness' to stay in the darkness by supplying them with lies to believe" (*Modern Myths about Satan and Spiritual Warfare* [Pittsburgh: Ethnos, 1994], 110).

[15]Clinton Arnold, *Powers of Darkness* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 130-31.

[16]J. Dwight Pentecost, *Your Adversary the Devil* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1997), 114.

[17]See "Major Religions of the World Ranked by Number of Adherents," [cited 13 Dec 05]. Online: http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html.

[18]*Exclusivism* is defined as "the belief that (1) Jesus Christ is the *only* Savior, and (2) explicit faith in [Him] is necessary for salvation." See Ronald H. Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior*? (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 11. *Pluralism* asserts that there are many routes to God. *Inclusivism* (perhaps the most subtle deception) affirms that Jesus is the only way to God, while denying the need for an explicit, personal faith response to him.

[19]See the results from surveys conducted by Barna Research: "Beliefs: Salvation," [cited 13 Dec 05]. Online: http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=Topic&TopicID=4. Fifty-four percent believe that if a person is generally good, or does enough good things for others during his/her life, he/she will earn a place in heaven.

[20]For further examination of these concepts from a non-exclusivist position, see Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 153-155; John Sanders, "Inclusivism," in *What about Those Who Have Never Heard?* (ed. John Sanders; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 26-29; John Hick, "A Pluralist View," in *More Than One Way?: Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World* (ed. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 27-59.

[21]This statement is not to suggest that believers can be possessed by demons. Satan may oppress or harass believers, but I take the position that he cannot gain control over a believer.

[22]A. Scott Moreau, *Essentials of Spiritual Warfare: Equipped to Win the Battle* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1997), 85.

[23]William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour: A Treatise of the Saints' War against the Devil* (1864; reprint, Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1995), 1:128.

[24]A. Scott Moreau, "Gaining Perspective on Territorial Spirits," in *Deliver Us from Evil: An Uneasy Frontier in Christian Mission*, 260.

[25]Ibid. "Smart-bomb" praying is praying that narrowly focuses on particular needs or forces in order to defeat the enemy. See Bob Beckett, *Commitment to Conquer* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1997), 32-35.

[26]Thus George Otis defines "binding the strongman" as "neutralizing the deceptive hold or enchantment that demonic powers have achieved over given human subjects so that the latter can *process truth at a heart level*." See Otis, *Informed Intercession*, 247.

[27]Neil T. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1990), 102.

[28]Thomas B. White, *The Believer's Guide to Spiritual Warfare* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1990), 133.

[29]Victor Lorenzo, "Evangelizing a City Dedicated to Darkness," in *Breaking Strongholds*, 172.

[30]Dean Sherman, "Spiritual Mapping Philosophy," audiocassette.

[31]Dick Eastman, *Love on Its Knees: Make a Difference by Praying for Others* (Tarrytown, NY: Chosen Books, 1989), 30-1.

[32]George Otis, Jr., *Spiritual Mapping Field Guide: North American Edition* (Lynnwood, WA: Sentinel Group, 1993), 25.

[33]Ibid., 26-27.

[34]Moreau, "Gaining Perspective," 266.

[35]Clinton E. Arnold, "What about Territorial Spirits?" *Discipleship Journal* 81 (May/June 1994): 47.

[36]For example, see Gary Kinnaman, *Overcoming the Dominion of Darkness* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 1990), 54; Timothy Warner, "Dealing with Territorial Spirits," in *Engaging the Enemy* (ed. C. Peter Wagner; Ventura, CA: Regal, 1991), 52.

[37]For examples given, see Otis, *Spiritual Mapping Field Guide*, 15; Lorenzo, "Evangelizing a City," 178.

[38]Robert A. Guelich, "Spiritual Warfare: Jesus, Paul, and Peretti," *PNEUMA* 13, no. 1 (1991): 63.

[39]See, for example, C. Peter Wagner, "Twenty-one Questions," in *Behind Enemy Lines* (Ann Arbor, MI: Vine Books, 1994), 132-33; Cindy Jacobs, *Possessing the Gates of the Enemy* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 104-11.

[40]Thomas Lea, "Spiritual Warfare and the Missionary Task," in *Missiology* (ed. John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 634.

[41]Consider again Otis' definition for "binding the strong man" in note 26.

[42]Wagner, *Breaking Strongholds*, 21; see also Otis, *Spiritual Mapping Field Guide*, 21; White, *Believer's Guide*, 137.

[43]Gerry Breshears, "The Body of Christ: Prophet, Priest, or King?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37, no. 1 (1994): 16.

[44]Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 20.

[45]For examples of illustrations bordering on animism, see Wagner, "The Visible and the Invisible," in *Breaking Strongholds*, 62-63; Timothy Warner, *Spiritual Warfare* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 92-5; John Robb, "Satan's Tactics for Building and Maintaining His Kingdom of Darkness," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 10, no. 4 (1993): 178.

[46]For the following illustrations, see John Dawson, *Taking Our Cities for God* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 1989), 20; Dean Sherman, *Spiritual Warfare for Every Christian* (Seattle: YWAM, 1990), 109; C. Peter Wagner, *Warfare Prayer* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1992), 144-45, 172-73.

[47]John MacArthur, Jr., *How to Meet the Enemy* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), 49-50.

[48]Juliet Thomas, "Issues from the Indian Perspective," in *Deliver Us from Evil*, 149.

[49]Student-led survey by Brian Frye and Brandon Conner, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2000.

[50]Chris Abner, "Doing the Great Commission: Reflections of a Rookie Missionary," in *The Challenge of the Great Commission* (ed. Chuck Lawless and Thom S. Rainer; Crestview, KY: Pinnacle, 2005), 257.

[51]MacArthur, *How to Meet the Enemy*, 141.

[52]See Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 37-72.

[53]C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (rev. ed.; New York: Collier Books, 1961), 3. The preface to the first edition was written in 1941.

[54]"Deliver Us from Evil Consultation

Statement," in *Deliver Us from Evil*, xxiii.

[55]Frye and Conner survey.

[56]Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 525-26.

[57]William Gurnall, *The Christian in Complete Armour: Daily Readings in Spiritual Warfare* (ed. James S. Bell, Jr.; Chicago: Moody, 1994), March 22 devotion, n.p.

[58]Peter O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (Word Biblical Commentary; Waco: Word, 1982), 239. O'Brien refers to Phil 1:12, 13 for evidence of this statement.

[59]Richard R. Melick, Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 322. Melick notes Paul's varying evangelistic approaches at Mars Hill (Acts 17:16-34), Jerusalem (Acts 21:17-22:29), before Jewish and Roman officials (Acts 24-26), and even after natural disasters (Acts 27:13-26; 28:1-10).

[60]"Deliver Us from Evil Consultation Statement," in *Deliver Us from Evil*, xxvii.