

SPIRITUAL WARFARE & THE ORDINARY CHRISTIAN

OUTLINE:

- Part I - Introduction**
- Part II – Our Attitude to Evil**
- Part III – What the Scriptures Say**
- Part IV - The Christian Soldier**
- Part V – Lifestyle Changes**
- Part VI – Keeping Things in Perspective**
- Part VII - Conclusion**

Part I – Introduction

Much of my writing is to 'fill gaps', and this is particularly so of this article. There is a lot of teaching for the specialist Christian minister on deliverance from evil and exorcism, but hardly anything available for the Ordinary Christian on how 'Spiritual Warfare' touches our ordinary everyday living. Yet when folk open their lives to the Holy Spirit it inevitably follows that they find themselves right in the 'spiritual life'. Often there is no understanding of the 'spiritual warfare' which is so much part of it.

What follows has, therefore, *nothing whatsoever* to do with deliverance and exorcism, but it does help us understand the 'pressures' we find ourselves under, and sets us on the road to victory over them.

There are two opposite errors that Christians fall into. A few get preoccupied with evil and seem to talk of nothing else! Others – the majority, I suspect – have a healthy disregard for evil, but this has resulted into such woolly thinking about it that they fail to recognise it and really do not know how to fight it.

For the last three hundred years it has been demanded of the majority of Christians at their Baptism, that they renounce *the devil and all his works, the pomp and vain glory of the world, and the carnal desires of the flesh so that* [they would] *not follow nor be led by them*. This is obviously important stuff as far as being a Christian is concerned, yet I suspect that the majority of Christians would be hard-pressed to

- say what this really means
- know how to do it in practice.

What we want is a balanced way of looking at evil that will not get us hooked on it, but will enable us to fight it and be free from it. The key word is **contempt**.

Part II – Our Attitude to Evil

I recall once at a conference that a speaker began in prayer with the words: ‘*Satan! I want a word with you!*’ The person next to me said in a ‘stage whisper’ for all to hear: ‘You talk to *your* friends, and I’ll talk to *mine!*’ We, his listeners, also acknowledged the reality of evil, but squirmed at the place he gave it. We would have started with God!

Churchill instinctively knew how to react healthily to evil. When asked what he had to say about Hitler, he replied: ‘*How can I have anything to say about one with whom I am not on speaking terms?!*’ This is a fine and clear example to us.

Churchill’s attitude was due neither to ignorance of Hitler nor to minimising the evil he personified. It was precisely because Churchill grasped the full nature of the evil that he knew the only way to be victorious over it was not to minimise or magnify it, but to be contemptuous of it. This placed him in a position of superiority over it

If we minimise evil we put ourselves under it, if we maximise it we promote its growth! Contempt allows us fully to acknowledge evil for what it is, but enables us to remain free of its clutches.

Disarming or Re-arming?

Here are two true stories of would-be bank-robbers which have much to teach us –

1. A robber went into a bank with a loaded gun and threatened the staff. They treated him with contempt, and laughed at him or ignored him! Their attitude broke any power he might have had over them. He fled in confusion. Their contempt *rendered his power, powerless.*

This second story is also true:

2. A would-be robber had no gun so was powerless. He thought he would bluff his way with a plastic toy. The staff did not treat him with contempt, but behaved as if the evil was much greater than it really was. They *rendered the powerless, powerful!* He was no fool! He used the power their fear gave him, and successfully robbed the bank with a powerless toy.

In the first story the contempt of those present *disarmed* the robber.

In the second story the fear of those present, and their unfounded assumptions about evil *armed* the robber.

These stories show a fundamental principle that many Christians have not grasped. When we attribute power to evil we can easily re-arm evil, but our calling is to confirm Christ's victory over it. Paul in Colossians tells us how Christ by his Cross, ***disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them.*** [Colossians 2:15] We must not rearm them!

Theology – yes; demonology – no!

An ‘-ology’ is an *ordered* analysis of a subject; its logical exposition.

We can have an ‘-ology’ of God, and of Jesus (*theology* and *Christology*) because God is a God of order, and Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever [Hebrews 13:8].

But there are some things e.g. a raging storm, madness, anarchy, confusion, deception, chaos, which by their disorderly nature cannot be ordered without *changing them into something else!* Demon-ology is therefore, in my view, a contradiction-in-terms! Evil is chaotic, as Jesus said ‘...*if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come.*’

[Mark 3:26. The meaning of the word ‘devil’ – dia-bolos - is the one who ‘throws-apart’; the one who brings dis-unity and dis-order.]

My point is that if you want to know more about evil, beware of tidy demonologies which may say more about the tidy minds of their authors than they reveal about the nature of evil!

No belief in

We make the distinction between *believing that* God exists, and *believing in* him. The same distinction is useful regarding evil. We may – and should – believe that evil *exists*, but we do not believe *in* it. Scripture reveals God, not the devil. Evil has never formed part of Christian belief or part of the Christian Creeds. We are not called to affirm evil but renounce it. To demand, as some do, that other Christians share their precise beliefs about evil runs contrary to Scripture and Christian history.

Part III – What the Scriptures Say

Evil is only mentioned in Scripture, it is not revealed. There is no systematic teaching about evil, its source, its composition, or its nature. The following verse puts it neatly: ***The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.*** [1 John 3:8]

If, in Scripture, the devil is mentioned in passing, the references fall into three main groups –

1. References that describe the devil's **power and position**, e.g.

...the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ... [2 Corinthians 4:4]

2. References that describe the devil's **evil nature**, e.g.

'He [the devil] was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth.' [John 8:44]

3. References that describe the devil's **defeat**, e.g.

The God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. [Romans 16:20]

We do well to keep these three in their true Scriptural balance.

- If we over-stress the devil's **power** we will become *defeatist*.
- If we over-stress his **evil nature** we will become *depressed*.
- If we over-stress his **defeat** we will become *unrealistic*.

A soldier who is *defeatist*, *depressed* or *unrealistic* is not much use, and will not win battles. Exactly the same is true of the soldiers of Christ.

If *contempt of evil* is the right attitude we should expect to find it

- in the life of Christ and
- in the attitude of the New Testament writers – and we *do*.

Four examples of Christ's attitude to Evil

1. In the Wilderness [Luke 4:1-13] Christ **rejected** every evil suggestion. He did so by drawing on and applying his knowledge of Scripture and its revelation of his heavenly Father's nature and purposes. Christ used Scripture to take authority over and against evil. He did not dialogue with evil, but on three consecutive occasions 'squashed' its suggestions. [See especially verses 4:4, 4:7 and 4:12, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:13 and 6:16]

2. My second example of Christ's contempt for evil comes after his dramatic deliverance of 'Legion', during which a local herd of pigs stampeded into the lake and were drowned. [Mark 5:2-20] Christ commanded the man ***'Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.'*** [Mark 5:19] In view of what had happened, it is clear that the man (like many Christians since the event!) could easily have centred on the drama around the evil. Jesus knew that this tendency would tend to *inflate* evil,

so he stressed the need for Legion to focus on *how much the Lord had done for him*, rather than on the destiny of the demons, the fate of the pigs or the anger of their keepers!

3. A similar example of Christ's contempt for evil is shown when the Seventy return from their successful mission. [Luke 10:17-20] *The seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!'* We can sense their excitement! Jesus's response to them is at once wise and ruthless. He

- affirms their authority over evil,
- but forbids them to dwell on it!

Here is what Jesus said:

'I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you.

Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.'

Jesus *forbids them to rejoice* because he knows that their authority over evil will be eroded if they allow themselves to dwell on their confrontations with it. Christ immediately prevents their getting too interested in evil. Even to rejoice over the defeat of the demonic is too risky lest in doing so it infiltrate our thoughts and get a foothold on our minds. Christ therefore switches their attention away from evil to God, away from the demonic to the heavenly, away from the negative to the positive.

4. My fourth example of Jesus's contempt for evil is when he discerns that Satan is at work in Simon Peter's rebuke [Mark 8:32-33]. Jesus does not enter into any dialogue with evil, but uses his authority to rebuke it, and then exposes its influence.

'Get behind me, Satan!

For you [Simon Peter] are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

These four examples show that -

1. Christ knew the power of evil
2. Christ used the authority of God's Word in Scripture against evil
3. Christ did not hesitate to expose evil
4. Christ ruthlessly and regularly diverted attention away from evil to God.

Christ's attitude to evil is taken up by his followers in the New Testament. They continue Christ's contempt for evil by exposing it and declaring God's crushing defeat of it.

Exposure of evil

Those who are frightened of evil, and allow themselves to feel dwarfed by its power and size, do not expose it. Evil is only exposed by those who know they stand above it.

It is no surprise, therefore, to find that so many New Testament writers ruthlessly expose the true nature of evil, for *in Christ* they stand above it.

Here are some examples:

- Satan is our **accuser** [Revelation 12:10]
- He is our **enemy** [Matthew 13:39]
- He is our **tempter** [Matthew 4:3]
- He is a **murderer** [John 8:44]
- He has the power of **death** [Hebrews 2:14]
- He is a **liar** and the father of lies [John 8:44]
- He **blinds** the minds of unbelievers to the light of Christ [2 Corinthians 4:4]
- He has been **sinning** from the beginning [1 John 3:8]
- He is the **deceiver** of the whole world [Revelation 12:9]

The Defeat of evil

Most New Testament authors refer to God's defeat of evil; for example: - Matthew 25:41, Mark 3:26, Luke 10:18, John 12:31, 16:11, Colossians 1:13, 2:15, Hebrews 2:14, James 4:7, 2 Peter 2:4, 1 John 3:8, Jude 6.

There is one theme on the defeat of evil that is particularly interesting because it has always had such a secure place in Christian devotions.

In the story of the Garden of Eden, human disobedience of God results in the curse of the serpent, and enmity between its own later stock and the children of Eve [Genesis 3:15]. The Lord says to the serpent:

*I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel.*

The **head** and **heel** distinction is important. The battle of good and evil is not between equals! From Eve will eventually come the one who will fatally bruise the serpent's **head**, while only the **heel** of Eve's victorious descendant will be hurt. The one will be defeated, the other only wounded.

Christians have always related this to Christ and Satan.

In the temptations of Jesus, the devil attempts to reverse this by enticing Jesus to fall at his feet [Matthew 4:9]. Jesus – to use a highly appropriate phrase – ‘gave him the boot’!

St. Paul concludes his letter to the Roman Christians with a reference to the Final Coming of Christ – *The God of all peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet* [Romans 16:20].

The place of evil is that place of contempt – **under foot!**

There is a seventh century evening prayer that is still widely used and includes the verse:

*From all ill dreams defend our eyes,
From nightly fears and fantasies:
Tread under foot our ghostly [i.e. spiritual] foe,
That no pollution we may know.*

Charles Wesley’s well-known hymn, based on Ephesians 6, has a verse -

*From strength to strength go on,
Wrestle and fight and pray;
Tread all the powers of darkness down,
And win the well fought day.*

The Epstein statue at the entrance to Coventry Cathedral depicts evil in chains and under foot of God's Angel.

Part IV - The Christian Soldier

For most Christians, if they think about spiritual warfare at all, it is when the reading comes up from Ephesians about putting on the whole armour of God. [Ephesians 6:10-17]

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power.

Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

*For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh,
but against the rulers, against the authorities,*

against the cosmic powers of this present darkness,

against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Therefore take up the whole armour of God...

...the belt of truth

...the breastplate of righteousness

...shoes of...the gospel of peace

...shield of faith

... helmet of salvation

...sword of the Spirit...

Some Christians prayerfully apply each piece of armour and I commend them for their diligence. But it is possible that in so doing they are applying the armour of Ephesians chapter 6 but ignoring the military training of chapters 1-5! Paul's injunction to put on armour for the spiritual fight begins with the word **finally**. What then should precede it?

Military equipment is no use whatever to a soldier who is not already disciplined, trained and obedient. At school a friend of mine dropped a pencil down a rifle barrel and fired a 'blank' cartridge. The pencil didn't shoot off like a rocket as he imagined. It stayed still while the rifle blew up and injured him! My friend was armed, but his military equipment did not make a soldier of him! He should have learned to be a soldier first.

This is true for the Christian soldier. There's no point considering the spiritual weapons available in Ephesians chapter 6 unless he/she first has been thoroughly trained according to Ephesians chapters 1-5.

Here, therefore, in briefest outline are some of the main points that for Paul should characterise us as Christians.

1. We must know where we are.

God has made us *alive together with Christ...and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places*. [Ephesians 2:6, see also 1:3] This symbolically indicates that we share in Christ's victory over evil, we share his reign, and we share his authority.

2. We must be enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

So that with enlightened hearts we may know our *hope*, our *inheritance*, and *the greatness of God's power*. [Ephesians 1:17-23]

3. We must know ourselves to be members of God's household.

We fight against evil, therefore, not as individual commandos but as part of Christ's massive army who are our fellow citizens. [Ephesians 2:19]

4. We must 'grow up' and live worthy of our calling.

We are to do this both positively and negatively. Paul spells out this new style of life in some detail. Positively we are to be **humble, gentle, patient, forbearing**, and *making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*. We are to be *tender hearted* and *forgiving*. [Ephesians 4:1-3, 32]

We must *grow up in every way into...Christ* [Ephesians 4:15], and this requires the negative: *You were taught to put away your former way of life*. [Ephesians 4:22] The items to put away include *falsehood, sin, stealing, evil talk, bitterness, wrath, anger, wrangling, slander* and *malice*. [Ephesians 4:25-32]

5. We must not make room for the devil.

Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them [Ephesians 5:11, but see 7-14] *Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise*. This means not being *foolish*, or *drunk*.

The main way we can avoid making room for the devil is by having no distortions in our behaviour and in particular our relationships. So before Paul talks about armour he first set out positive guidelines for **wives, husbands, children, parents, slaves and masters** [Ephesians 5:21-6:9].

Paul's approach may be summed up in his words *Be careful then how you live...because the days are evil*. [Ephesians 5:15-16]

Paul's teaching all hangs together. Because **evil is distorted and chaotic, it is overcome by discipline and order, just as darkness is overcome by light**.

The individual who ignored Ephesians 1-5 would be so evil-dominated and vulnerable to it, that there would be no point in giving him weapons to fight it!

As the picture unfolds we see that **ORDER is the antidote to EVIL**, because order is the opposite of chaos. Every distortion in our lives provides the devil with a foothold. What do I mean by a foothold?

The Devil '*has no power over me*'.

That is what Jesus once said to his disciples. '*...for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; but I do as the father has commanded me...*' [John 14:30-31]

The phrase '*has no power over me*' gets variously translated as –

- *nothing in me* [NASB]
- *no hold on me* [NIV]
- *no claim on me* [Beck]

Each translation is helpful. **Our aim must be so to live in Christ that the devil has no power over us, nothing in us, no hold on us, and no claim on us.**

How can he get a hold on us? In my local sports centre there is a brick wall used for climbing. It is not completely smooth, it has the occasional ‘misplaced’ brick. What would ordinarily be impregnable can without much difficulty be conquered, because of these few distortions. This helps us to see how the devil can get a hold/foot hold/grip on a Christian life, and how it is not the massive size of the distortions in our lives that render us vulnerable, but the fact that they are there at all.

Paul's teaching that I have outlined in Ephesians is designed to help us deal with distortions in our beliefs, in our behaviour and in our relationships.

For defence or attack?

It has often been pointed out that Paul mentions no armour for the *back*. This indicates that our spiritual armour and weapons are primarily for us to attack evil. We are not in retreat before an all-powerful enemy. We are called to advance God's Kingdom. The Victory has already been won. What we endure for a time are the mopping-up operations and the erratic violence of our mortally-wounded foe.

Wholeness and holiness

We can now begin to see that if the ‘ordinary Christian’ wants to be a good ‘soldier of Jesus Christ’, this does not mean looking closely at devils and demons, but closely at himself/herself.

The main battles of 'spiritual warfare' lie deep within the ordinary rather than the extraordinary. Our victory lies in our willingness to let the Holy Spirit make us more holy and more whole. It is the Christ-ness of Christians that terrifies the hosts of evil. Evil finds holiness horrific! The chaotic forces of evil are combated by the **right-ordering** of our lives by the Holy Spirit.

Unfortunately we live in a society where one's right to be disordered and distorted is almost regarded as a virtue, and is a sure-fire way of getting publicity for those who seek it. The right-ordering of our society (and thus of us and our families) is undermined by the intolerance of authority, and by the massive promotion of 'alternatives' to the traditional values and virtues of public and family life. Christians should question the wide-spread assumption: **'If it is shocking it must be good!'**

Often a complete inversion of morality is reached. This happens when the promoters of evil brand themselves as blameless, while they ensure that the protester against evil gets branded as the only 'evil' party because of his/her alleged 'intolerance'! Very nasty, that!

Private’s Progress

To insist in a barrack room in Aldershot on a soldier’s unquestionable obedience over shining brass or boots must feel irksome and irrelevant to international warfare. Yet we know that on the obedience about boots and buttons will be built the obedience on which the soldier’s safety and victory will depend.

So too in the spiritual life a great deal of our training for spiritual warfare is tiresome and irksome, because it concerns the nitty-gritty areas of our lives.

Part V – Lifestyle Changes

The Christian Experience of Wilderness

After a particular Blessing in/by the Holy Spirit he is likely to throw us out into the Wilderness. The Wilderness-experience is where the moulding, making and breaking occur for which we pray. It begins our military training. [See the article **Wilderness: the Christian Experience** – on this website.]

Every Christian is personally trained and thus differs in his experience from his neighbour. The following, however, are some of the typical changes that folk experience who really open themselves to the Holy Spirit’s training for service.

All change!

1. A shaking of our foundations so that we find a more secure foundation in the Father through Jesus Christ.
2. A breaking of our individualism and self sufficiency, and a new strength in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, i.e. with God and others.
3. A clearer view of the distortions in our lives, and so a greater pain at Christian disorder and disunity at every level.
4. A painful and thorough process of rejecting completely the left-overs of the pre-Christian life from which we have come, and a new commitment to grow in the new life of Christ.
5. A much deeper awareness of both personal and corporate sin.
6. A profound questioning and ‘re-thinking’ of inherited assumptions.
7. A far greater thirst for God. and for learning more about him.

Cosmic powers, etc.

St. Paul teaches that –

*For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh,
but against the rulers, against the authorities,
against the cosmic powers of this present darkness,...* [Ephesians 6:12]

What are these ‘powers’?

They are **the great impersonal forces in creation and society**. They are the pressures and forces which God has created which make individual and social life possible, e.g. community spirit, race, sex, religion, communication, finance, etc. These are the forces that make society ‘tick’ and enable us to live together.

Why then, do you ask, are we fighting them?

The reason is that while they were made to serve us, if we fail to dominate them, they dominate *us*. If we do not make them our servants they rise up and enslave us. They are not ‘evil’ as such, but, like horses: harnessed by us they can be useful, but in runaway mode they can be destructive.

Christ Triumphant!

The Epistle to the Colossians teaches of Christ that *in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers...* [Colossians 1:16]. They were *disarmed* by Christ on the Cross [Colossians 2:15]. Just as a first century Roman General would return to the capital city in Triumph with his captives in chains behind him, so Christ made a public spectacle of these powers, dragging them in chains behind him when he celebrated his Triumph procession – this is the meaning of Colossians 2:15.

Other references to these ‘**powers**’ in the New Testament teach us that

- those not living ‘in Christ’ live in obedience to them [Ephesians 2:1-2]
- that Christ is enthroned above and over them for all time [Ephesians 1:19-21]
- that they cannot separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord [Romans 8:38-39]
- that in the end they, together with death itself, will be abolished [1 Corinthians 15:24-26]

The Task of the Church

The task of Christians, individually and corporately, is three-fold:

1. Publicly to expose the powers,
2. Strip them of their power over us,
3. Submit the powers to Christ’s Victory.

The first two – the exposing of the powers and stripping them of their power - are often accomplished by **comedy**. When we are made to laugh at things they lose their power over us. British T.V. viewers will have experienced the exposure of the power of **politics** and the power of **materialism** in such comedies as *Yes Minister*, and *The Good Life*. Such programmes - and think of the ones *you* are familiar with – enable us to laugh at things which tend to dominate us, and when we do that we begin to break their power over us. Laughter is important: the enslaved cannot laugh at what enslaves them.

Many powerful things can be undermined by laughter. Racism is dethroned more effectively by coloured comedians than by Leftist councils banning the use of the word ‘*blackboard*’!

Sometimes the reality of these powers is almost tangible. The London Underground has an appalling spirit of heaviness and depersonalisation. It was in an attempt to break these that Spike Milligan once took a piano down to an Underground station! He was doing by instinct what Christians should be doing by prayer.

I suspect that drop-outs and anarchists are not always negative aspects of society, but include those who do really sense how sick and enslaved society is, and who wish to avoid it or challenge it. (The opposite response is apathy!)

Poverty, Chastity and Obedience

These are not fashionable nowadays, but these traditional Christian virtues (and life-promises of those living in monastic orders) are of immense importance, and of the utmost relevance to our spiritual warfare today.

I have said that the powers are neutral, but that they will enslave us if we do not conquer them. This is where poverty, chastity and obedience come in!

Christian **poverty** is the major way in which to break the power of possessions and materialism. Things cannot dominate your life if you do not have them! There is a real sense in which renouncing possessions gives you a freedom which is denied to most of us.

Chastity is a similar way in which to break the domination of sex over us. So many in our society are sex-dominated, that the existence of those who are chaste (and we should include faithful marriages within chastity) demonstrates that it is not all-powerful, and can serve us and enrich us rather than enslave us and degrade us.

Obedience. The supposed 'right' of the individual to do whatever he/she wishes and to satisfy every urge, dominates many lives. A type of self-fulfilment, which puts self first, is widely assumed to be normal and necessary for survival. Many assume that they are diminished if they serve another. The Christian way shows that this is not true.

Christ said '*For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.*' [Mark 10:45] The channelling of one's will to serve others rather than serve self is the highest form of behaviour. Obedience to God and response to the needs of others *frees* us from the domination of self-will, and perhaps also from self-destruction.

There are other well-tried ways of breaking the power of the powers over us, **fasting** is one. An increasing number of Christians are fasting nowadays, and it is a simple but effective way to dethrone the power of appetite. It helps to have a broad understanding of the term. If our lives are dominated by an insatiable appetite for, say, computer games, T.V., coffee, or some sport, then the discipline of fasting from it, can break its domination over us. Fasting breaks addiction.

Regular **Tithing** is another traditional and very positive way of breaking the domination of money over us. I have stressed 'regular' since the powers are all like Jack-in-the-boxes – they'll pop back up again unless we stay firmly seated on the lid!

Increasingly Christians are hearing the Holy Spirit speak to them about these principles, and calling them to simpler life-styles and the celebration of discipline.

Unfortunately a failure by many Christians to understand these things has led them to assume that rules and discipline are the *opposite* of grace and freedom. In using such disciplines we are not seeking to merit favour with God in order to earn our salvation! We use such disciplines because we are called to be soldiers of Jesus Christ in his fight and triumph over evil.

Part VI - Keeping Things in Perspective

Domination

I have deliberately written of the **domination** of the powers over us.

The word ‘dominate’ comes from the Latin ‘dominus’, which means ‘**Lord**’. You will immediately realise that that which dominates us ‘*lords* itself over us’, and thus, for Christians, usurps the role of Christ in our lives.

There are many things which rightly have a great part in our lives: our homes, relations, job, family responsibilities, hobbies, and so on. There is a real and important difference between something/someone having a large place in our lives, and something that distorts our life by *dictating* to us so that we are enslaved to it. This kind of domination removes our freedom and choice, and we do things because we are manipulated from outside.

It is the rightly big things in our lives that are most likely to become the wrongly big things in our lives! We need to keep a careful eye on them lest they are slowly moving to enslave us.

Detection

The word ‘**TOO**’ provides a useful warning concerning the devil’s work. **TOO** much or **TOO** little indicate *distortion* of some sort. It follows that the devil not only works against us, but *encourages* us if, in so doing, he can introduce the **TOO MUCH** by which our enthusiasm becomes fanaticism, and beliefs become heresy.

Religion is a major power.

Christ’s ‘Cleansing of the Temple’ [Mark 11:15-19] needs to have its modern and regular counterpart if religion and the *things* of God are not to dominate us. We can, and do, make idols of *anything* Christian, eg. Scripture, experience, tradition, ministries, charisms, groupings, structures, movements, saints, tradition, past events, doctrine, leaders, etc. Their goodness and godliness do not prevent our enthroning them in the place of Christ. Idolatry, after all, springs from love.

Critics

We probably hate them, but sometimes they can see our distortions and dominations clearer than we can. We need to be given the grace to ponder and listen to what God might be saying through them.

Status Quo

From the point of view of God’s Kingdom we may find ourselves at odds with the ‘world’, *even when it is at its most reasonable*.

It was natural and reasonable enough for Simon Peter to protest when Christ foretold his Passion [Mark 8:31-33], but because Peter was not [in Phillip’s translation] ‘looking at things from God’s point of view’, Jesus rounds on him *as the agent of Satan!*

It is a difficult lesson to learn that what is acceptable to the world may be quite contrary to God’s will [Isaiah 55:8-9]. The Church is in grave danger when it hopes to serve society by ‘adapting’ to it, for it soon places itself under the same powers. Why the church is strongest

when it is persecuted and weakest when it is socially acceptable is because persecution *sets it apart* from the social powers that usually dominate it, and sets it free!

Happy release!

We are happy and blessed, therefore, when we are persecuted [Matthew 5:11-12]. In the same way the earlier Beatitudes can promise happiness to the poor, the grievous, the humble, the spiritual, the merciful, the pure, and the peace-makers because the attitude/experience of such folk *sets them free* from the powers of wealth, relationships, status, materialism, greed, pleasure and rights - which dominate so many of us.

Part VII – Conclusion

The Place of Victory

Is it possible fully to experience the rebellious powers in submission? Emphatically YES. We all do so regularly. When we **Pray as Christ himself taught us** (rather than as we want to!) the powers of status, work, self-will, arrogance, sin, influence and evil are all put in their place [Matthew 6:9-13]. But it is above all as we **worship** and break the Bread together that we proclaim the Lord’s death, i.e. his victory over the powers, and experience freedom from the domination of wealth, race, status, politics, sex, class and power.

Worship is the place of Victory, and the Cross of Jesus at its centre is our proof that the Victory has been won.

We’ve travelled together some way since the start of this article!

It has not been possible to cover every aspect of ‘Spiritual Warfare’ in so brief a space. I hope you will not feel that the subject has been ‘done’ once you have finished reading this, but that it is about the whole *context* in which we live our lives. Its issues, its tensions and its victories will be with us until we die. You are not alone, all other Christians are in this with you. Try to get some group study on the subject with discussion and sharing. Consider downloading this article so that it can help get the ball rolling.