

Mystical Spiritual Warfare

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Introduction

In order to justify some of the un-Biblical beliefs and practices involved in the Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare movement, certain “apostles” and “prophets” have to base their teachings on subjective “revelations” they maintain they had received directly from God. One of the modern “apostles” of NAR (New Apostolic Reformation) says: “The rhema is regarded as a more immediate word from God which we do not find in the 66 books of the Bible” (Engaging the Enemy, by C. Peter Wagner. (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1991, pp.15-16). They seem to ignore the written Word which states that *“all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work”* (2 Tim.3:16). They also ignore the warning given by Paul *“not to go beyond what is written”* (1 Cor.4:6).

What is mystical spiritual warfare?

Many Christians are involved in a type of spiritual warfare whereby through intercession, the strongholds of “territorial spirits” over certain areas are identified, named, bound and pulled down through united prayer and speaking a word of authority. The victory obtained in this way over these spirits is then supposed to enable believers to “take towns and cities for Jesus.” Those who are involved also believe that greater power can be exerted by getting all the denominations of a particular area to participate in unity. The victory that is thought to have been won is often then celebrated by having a combined victory march through the streets.

The dedication and sincerity of most of those involved cannot be questioned. Their enthusiasm and zeal is an example to all of us. But is what they are doing Biblical? Is it effective and does it have any real spiritual power?

As we try and find a Biblical base for “the pulling down of strongholds” and “spiritual mapping”, we discover that it is based on flawed hermeneutics.

The only place in the New Testament where the term *“strongholds”* is used, refers to lies in the minds of people (2 Cor.10:4).

What is a “Stronghold?”

We can be sure of the fact that when Paul wrote to the Corinthians he knew exactly what he meant by *“strongholds”*. If we are going to use the term we must use and understand it in the context of what God meant when He inspired the Scriptures. Ministries involved in the modern spiritual warfare movement define a stronghold as evil spirits that have established a sphere of influence in the atmosphere over a territory, town or city. It is also believed that

they can lodge themselves in objects from where they can exert their evil influence. Some of these demons are called by names such as spirits of “lust”, “anger”, “jealousy”, “alcoholism”, “greed” or “materialism”. We acknowledge the fact that demons of all kinds can and do have a negative influence where they are given the freedom to control the lives of sinners, but they are definitely not the topic of the discussion of “strongholds” that we find in 2 Cor.10:4. Demons can control and demonize a person, but it is something entirely different from what Paul is referring to in the context of his letter to the Corinthians.

What is Paul referring to when he speaks of a “stronghold?”

Scripture is its best own interpreter. “*Strongholds*” cannot refer to demons because nowhere in the entire second epistle to the Corinthians are they mentioned. Paul defines “*strongholds*” as “*arguments*”, “*theories*”, “*reasonings*” and “*thoughts*” that are not in line with Godly Truth (2 Cor.10:4-5). What Paul is saying is that he is involved in a war fighting against false ideas in the minds of people. When people believe lies and wrong doctrines, they are allowing a “stronghold” of deceit to be formed in their heads.

What weapon does Paul use to bring these strongholds down?

Paul uses “*the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God*” (Eph.6:17). Through preaching and teaching the true knowledge of God found in Scripture, Paul “*refutes*” erroneous patterns of thought resulting from believing false doctrines and teachings (2 Cor.10:5, Ampl. Bible). The helmet of salvation mentioned in Ephesians 6:17, speaks symbolically of a renewed mind – a mind renewed as a result of the influence of God’s Word. Some are of the opinion that the mind cannot be considered when it comes to spiritual things like preaching and teaching because it is darkened and fallen. The New Testament apostles were of a different opinion. Words used in the Book of Acts to describe their preaching and teaching refer to an appeal to the intellect e.g. *didasko* (to teach, Acts 19:9), *sunécheon* (to confound, Acts 9:22), *dialegomai* (to reason, to argue, Acts 17:2), *diakatelégchomai* (to overcome thoroughly in disputation, Acts 18:28), *peitho* (to persuade and to convince, Acts 19:9). Therefore we read that as a result of this didactic preaching people were “persuaded” (Acts 17:4, 18:4, 19:8, 26, 28:23, 24). They sought to convince their hearers in order to convert them. Through their preaching they sought to pull down strongholds in the minds of their hearers. This approach to spiritual warfare is confirmed by what Paul did in Ephesus. Instead of mystical methods he argued daily in the hall of Tyrannus, some translations add, “*from about ten o’clock till three*” (five hours daily!), “*for two years*” (Acts 19:9-10, Amplified Bible). Further confirmation of the fact that apostolic preaching contained much intellectual content is the fact that conversion is often referred to as a response to truth (“*...believing the truth*” 2 Thessalonians 2:10-13, “*...acknowledging the truth*” 2 Timothy 2:25, “*...obeying the truth*” 1 Peter 1:22, Galatians 5:7, “*...coming to know the truth*” John 8:32, 1 Timothy 2:4.) The ignorance in appreciating the role that the understanding of Biblical truth plays in

spiritual development is demonstrated by the answer given by a well-known man ministering on a world-wide platform – to defend strange physical manifestations and antics taking place in his meetings he says: “God is offending our minds so that He can reach our hearts.” It is difficult to understand how people can be encouraged to by-pass sound thinking in order to get drunk in the spirit so as to “experience more of God”.

New Testament teaching

In dealing with the subject of demons it is important to keep the following facts in mind; the Bible does say that our fight is not against flesh and blood but *“against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”* (Ephesians 6:12). Here we are in agreement with those who are involved in mystical spiritual warfare, but we do not agree with their methods. Demons do have the ability to influence a person’s way of thinking. Peter therefore warns: *“prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled;...and alert. (a state of mind) Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him...”* (1 Peter 1:13, 5:8). (Why did Peter not just instruct them to bind their enemy, the devil?) The Bible gives us several examples of people who had their minds influenced by thoughts injected from sources which were not from God. After Peter’s declaration that he would never allow Jesus to be taken and killed, Jesus’ reply was: *“Out of my sight, Satan! You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men”* (Matthew 16:23). Here we have a case of what is called the law of double reference – a human being is confronted, but an invisible entity is being addressed! Judas is another example of someone who allowed Satan to seriously influence his mind (John 13:27). Eve is the classic example.

As it has already been stated: the strongholds mentioned in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 are *“arguments and theories and reasonings and every proud and lofty thing that sets itself up against the true knowledge of God”* (Amplified Bible). From the context of the scripture references we can see what these forces have in mind – to alienate people from the truth concerning the Word of God. The mind is the seat of all knowledge. The enemy, who knows this, therefore aims to build strongholds in it in the form of thoughts, opinions, arguments, doctrines and philosophies which are contrary to the truth of the Word. The Bible does not call the devil the father of lies for nothing. This strategy of Satan is confirmed by scriptures such as 2 Corinthians 4:4 and Colossians 1:21: *“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers...”* and *“Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds.”* The battle for the mind still rages on. True spiritual warfare consists of prayerful preaching and teaching aimed at correcting erroneous patterns of thoughts that prevent people from seeing Truth. In this there is nothing mystical.

As far as spiritual warfare is concerned, it is not so much a power struggle as it is a struggle to persuade people to accept the Truth.

Dan.10

A sound exegesis of this passage will show that it cannot be used as an example of what is being practised in Strategic Level Spiritual Warfare circles. The angel that was sent to Daniel gave no indication that it was because of spiritual warfare done by any human-being that resistance to his coming was broken. What Daniel did was to pray for understanding of the vision that he had received, not to defeat or bind any demon. Furthermore, the visiting angel gave no instructions to Daniel on how to go about defeating territorial spirits or what he had to do in order to prevent the coming of the prince of Greece after the defeat of the prince of Persia. The angelic messenger mentioned that it was the angel Michael, not Daniel, who helped him resist the “forces” (Dan.10:21). Also note that at no stage do we read that Daniel addressed any of these princes directly with a “You prince of Persia I bind you and pull you down.” Furthermore, nowhere in the New Testament do we read that any of the apostles first had to bind devils before they could enter and preach in cities like Ephesus, Corinth, Athens or Rome. All of them were known for their idols and false gods, yet no mention is made of having to pull down the strongholds of Artemis, bind the spirits of Diana, or any other demon.

Binding and loosing

A common practice amongst many Christians is the binding of Satan and demons. I myself did it for many years, but I started doubting whether it had any effect, because I realised that if there was any power in it Satan and his evil forces would have been rendered ineffective long ago. Today, however, I realise that only God can bind Satan and that he is being allowed to be god of this world until the appointed time when he will be bound and thrown into the lake of burning sulphur (1 John 5:19, Revelation 20).

But doesn't the Bible say that we can bind and loose on earth? Again we see how a traditionally wrong interpretation of a scripture has misguided believers for a long time. The Amplified Bible helps us to understand Matthew 18:18 correctly; *“Truly, I tell you, whatever you forbid and declare to be improper and unlawful on earth must be what is already forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit and declare proper and lawful on earth must be already permitted in heaven.”* It is clear from the context that this verse refers to the decisions of the church when conflicts and disputes between members of the body have to be settled. The church has the responsibility to resolve conflicts amongst believers by discerning what is right and wrong by applying the principles of God's Word. The context of the verse shows that it has nothing to do with the binding of demons.

What about the binding of the strong man in Matt.12:22-29?

In this piece we read that the Pharisees are accusing Jesus of making use of the power of Beelzebub to drive out demons. Again the answer is found in the context. In the parable Jesus explains that because He is stronger than “*the strong man*” He is able to enter his house and free those who are being held captive. This section of Scripture contains no

teaching on how believers ought to bind Satan or demons. It is all about Jesus and the power that He has.

Identificational repentance

Some Christians think that they can repent and apologise on behalf of others, who in the past, have sinned and wronged other people. They believe that by doing this, strongholds are broken and that opposing groups can be united. What they do not realize is that it is an un-biblical act which has no spiritual effect. Many are involved in the Reconciliation Movement because it seems like the right thing to do and moreover, it makes them "feel good". The Bible, however, states very clearly that sinners must repent for their own sins: Deuteronomy 24:16: *"The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin."* Ezekiel 18:20: *"The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son".*

Forgiveness and restitution is always a personal action (Matt.6:14, Luke 6:37, 2 Cor.2:7). In the New Testament it must always take place between individual people; it can not be applied to cities or nations.

What about the Transformation Video's of George Otis's Sentinel Group showing transformed communities?

Research and follow-up work by various parties have shown that many of the claims about the transformation of communities like Cali in Colombia; Kiambu in Kenya; Alomolonga in Guatemala and Hemet in California, are exaggerated and in some cases, false (TRANSFORMATION OR DECEPTION, Tom Smith, smithtj@geocities.com).

Some more terminology and practices used in the Strategic Spiritual Warfare movement that can not be found in the teachings of the New Testament.

Community Transformation, High Places, Prayer Walking, Spiritual Mapping, Victory Marches, Unity Meetings

Conclusion

One of the dangers of "strategic-level spiritual warfare" is that it distracts the attention of Christians who otherwise, could have been involved in building the body of Christ through sound Biblical preaching and teaching. The false experience of subjective excitement can cause Christians to lose genuine spiritual discernment, and disillusionment may eventually set in as result of the unfulfilment of unbiblical expectations concerning the transformation of society.

This modern teaching on spiritual warfare places more emphasis on the powers of satanic forces than on the victory that Jesus achieved over them on the cross. Instead of the emphasis being on the issue of individual sin as being the root cause of all the problems experienced in communities, the blame has now shifted to principalities and powers. By the emphasis placed on organization and planning, it is almost as if the use of the right methods has now become the agent of salvation. The impression is given that the right techniques and strategies need to be followed in order to get the desired results. The fact, according to Scripture, that the sinful nature of man is Satan's biggest ally in causing problems in life, plays a secondary role in this modern campaign against evil. The Biblical answer lies in the fact that the individual sinner has to repent, taking full responsibility for his own sins.

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