



Media Spotlight

A BIBLICAL ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR MEDIA

SPECIAL REPORT

SPIRITUAL WARFARE FOR PARENTS

by Albert James Dager

There are many areas in which we engage in spiritual warfare. The battle is not easily delineated as "Christian vs. demonic forces." In fact, demonic forces are not always the immediate problem. Our own sin nature or the sin nature of those with whom we find ourselves in conflict may be the immediate problem.

Whatever the source of conflict, however, there are many battlegrounds upon which we all wage spiritual warfare daily. For example, a man holds many positions at the same time: husband, father, son, employer, employee, church elder, counselor, counselee—the list is virtually endless considering the many responsibilities that enter into his life each day. One day he may have to place heavy emphasis on his role as a counselor to a friend in trouble; the next day, or even the next hour, he may be involved as a parent in his children's school curricula; he may at the same time have to guard his family from deception entering into their lives in the form of teaching through the religious media.

The wife also has to fulfill many responsibilities toward her husband's welfare, as well as her children's welfare; if she works outside the home, she has another battleground upon which she must contend.

This study will concentrate primarily upon the spiritual warfare that faces parents—a warfare that requires constant diligence and the continual application of faith. The battleground for this warfare is the mind of your child. If you have more than one child you have more than one battleground; and the application of your spiritual warfare may be different for each one. Yet there are basic strategies which must be applied in each case, in conjunction with whatever specific strategies are required according to the wisdom and understanding that God grants you through the Holy Spirit.

KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING

In any warfare, there are some things you must know: 1) why you are fighting; 2) who you are fighting; 3) the strengths and weaknesses of the enemy; 4) your own strengths and weaknesses 5) how to employ your weapons effectively.

The advice we offer here does not consist of a lot of mumbo-jumbo mystical demon-fighting tactics. Most spiritual warfare is really practical application of God's Word to situations that threaten one's spiritual welfare.

In all areas of spiritual warfare, wisdom from God is essential. And it is ours for the asking:

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. (James 1:5-8)

It is one thing to have a zeal for warfare; it is another to engage in warfare with wisdom. The former begets casualties; the latter begets victory.

Why Are You Fighting?

Unless we are aware of the nature of the warfare between God and His enemies we will not perceive the full reason for our engaging in spiritual warfare. God is in the process of redeeming His creation from the fall caused by Satan and his followers. Satan is working to unite humanity in order to challenge the Lord Jesus when He returns to establish His Kingdom on earth (Revelation 19:17-21).

All spiritual warfare should be engaged in with the understanding of this conflict. The effectiveness of your battle for your child's mind will ultimately determine

whether or not he will succumb to Satan's delusion and become an enemy of God.

Therefore, the reason you are fighting is to protect your child from becoming God's enemy, and to ensure that his or her eternal welfare will be in God's household.

Who Are You Fighting?

The primary enemy against whom you are fighting is Satan and his emissaries in the spirit realm who are implementing tactics designed to turn your children's hearts away from God and toward their own self-determination. It isn't necessary that they even believe in Satan or consciously determine to rebel against God. Their own sin nature draws them toward rebellion. And self-determination apart from the will of God is the enticement we must all battle. Satan's work in this area is not difficult in view of man's natural affinity toward self-love and selfishness.

But there are other enemies with which you must contend in your battle for your children's spiritual welfare. These enemies might very well consist of 1) their teachers at school; 2) their friends; 3) the media; 4) other relatives; 5) anyone with whom your children come in contact during their years under your guidance.

You should become familiar with the tactics Satan uses through others to accomplish his goals.

Teachers

In order to earn their credentials, today's teachers must undergo rigorous and consistent exposure to humanistic philosophies. Even those who teach in private schools must receive their accreditation from the secular powers that govern education in general. The vast majority of teachers in both the public and private sectors have received the bulk of their own education under a secular school system that is predominately humanistic.

Therefore, your children's teachers are good candidates for qualifying as spiritual enemies. This isn't to say that they have a conscious design or desire to subvert your child's faith (although some do), but by virtue of their secular training, unless they are truly born again believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, their value system is to a large degree in direct conflict with Scripture.

Wisdom dictates that parents should get to know their children's teachers and to do what they can to affect the curricula of their school. Christian parents should also fellowship with the other Christian parents whose children attend the same school. As

close an association as possible between these parents should be cultivated so they can be a spiritual support to one another. They can also present a united front in challenging any ungodly influences from teachers and/or the school system itself.

Friends

Your child's friends may be his worst enemies. Peer pressure has brought down many otherwise decent kids. You should get to know your child's friends. And even that may not be enough; you must get to know their friends' parents.

There are many parents today who care very little what their children do or believe. Some even provide opportunities for their children to sin. This is not necessarily the result of premeditated evil-mindedness; it is the result of the secular attitude that permeates society today. That attitude says that children are going to get in trouble anyway, so it's better that we at least know where they are and help them avoid the consequences of that trouble.

When your child asks if he can spend the night at a friend's house, how do you know for a certainty that he will be where he says he'll be? Even checking with the parents might not be enough; some will lie in order to protect your child from your discipline; some will rent video cassettes of the most ungodly nature for their children to watch. Some might even be sexual abusers of children. Unless you know the parents, and are convinced beyond any doubt that they hold the biblical values you hold, you are risking your child's spiritual welfare by allowing him or her to come under those parents' influence.

Some might think such statements reflect an extreme paranoia. But one need only look at the statistics reflecting the phenomenal increase in child crime, drug abuse, sexual promiscuity, pedophilia, disappearances of children, and myriad other evils that plague children today, and a little paranoia would be preferable to one incident of carelessness that can cause a child his life or, worse yet, his very soul.

Again, wisdom dictates that your child and his friends enjoy their company under *your* influence rather than under the influence of the friend's parents unless they have demonstrated like faith and wisdom in rearing their child. Invite your child's friends to your home; get to know their parents and what they believe. If they are unbelievers, make an effort to bring them to Christ and to disciple them in the Faith.

At the least this may instill in them a sense of responsibility to you and your child.

There are some enemies you will not even be aware of: those your child fraternizes with at school, in the neighborhood, in clubs or organizations that provide social and athletic opportunities. And it would be unrealistic to think that parents can keep a tether on their children twenty-four hours a day. But as much as is in your power to control your child's environment, you must take every measure to see to it that that environment is not ungodly.

The Media

The most influential environment in which your child will grow up during the most formative years of his life is, or should be, your own home.

Now, you must ask yourself what influences there are in your home that might contribute to ungodly attitudes in your child. What television programs do you allow your children to watch? Are they violent, sexually explicit, or promote attitudes of disrespect and rebellion? What kind of music do you allow them to listen to? To a great extent, today's most popular music instills aberrant attitudes toward sex, drugs, and rebellion.

Some say that it's better that the kids listen and watch evil in their home than that they do it apart from the watchfulness of their parents. This is an ungodly, humanistic belief that has permeated society and has even encroached upon the Church. For Christians to believe such an idea demonstrates a lack of faith. True faith in God allows that, if parents will control the environment of their home, and do all that is in their power to keep their children from evil influences, God will take care of them outside the home.

This isn't to say that they may not succumb to the world's evils; but if God's Word is true, then Proverbs 22:6 is a promise that only those who obey can count on: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

PREPARE YOURSELF FOR BATTLE

You would not think of engaging in physical combat without proper training. Likewise, in the realm of spiritual warfare you must be prepared to engage the enemy—whether men, demons, or Satan himself. If you expect to instill attitudes of godliness in your child, you must first recognize your own sins and failings, and take the steps necessary to correct them.

As much as is in your power, you must divorce yourself from the world's influences in your own life. For how can you hope to separate your child from them if you will not separate yourself from them?

What examples do you set before your child? Do you sanction evil in your life while insisting that your child not do certain things contrary to your desires?

Do you require your child to obey the laws you lay down for his life while disobeying the laws of the land? Do you hedge on your income tax return; do you disobey traffic laws; do you neglect to tell the store clerk that he gave you back too much change? Do you denigrate authorities in your life—your boss, government, etc.—and expect your child to respect your authority? If you pursue lawless attitudes, how can you rightfully expect your child to obey you?

It is not unusual to hear Christians denigrate government authorities or candidates with whom they disagree on issues. This is an evil practice that hinders our walk with the Lord. If we believe that all authority is ordained by God, we will respect that authority regardless of how ungodly or contrary to our perception of righteousness they may be. If you denigrate any authority you undermine your own authority. We must guard our speech and speak only that which edifies. Even the most ungodly in authority must not be spoken evil of, although we are permitted to address issues in a humble spirit.

In what other areas may your child perceive hypocrisy? Is the secular music you listen to perhaps a little mellower, but no more godly in its messages than those your child listens to?

A parent may insist that the only music allowed in the home is country-western, some mild rock, or even classical. But their child perceives that that has nothing to do with godliness. Why should their parents listen to country-western or rock music that is just as ungodly in its messages and deny the child the opportunity to listen to his own music? Are the television programs you watch conducive to godliness in your own life? After shooing the kids off to bed, do you watch programming designed for more "mature" audiences?

Do you believe that movies rated "R" or "PG-13" are alright for you, but your children must not see anything worse than "PG"?

You may be trying to do what's right for your children, but they are very capable of perceiving hypocrisy.

Did Jesus not say that, if we would enter into the Kingdom of Heaven we must become as little children? The world has convinced Christians that certain evils are alright for their entertainment if they've reached a certain age, but must be withheld if they are too young. The reason for this paradox is that evil is equated with "maturity" and innocence is equated with "immaturity." And as a result, children are striving to attain what they have been told are the evidences of maturity.

In point of fact, however, God's standard is just the opposite. Those who are mature in Christ shun the evil of the world. And parents who expect their children to refrain from evil must keep themselves from that evil as well.

David said, "I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me" (Psalm 101:3).

How many wicked things come before our eyes, not because they catch us unaware, but because we purposefully set them there? If we enjoy the evil portrayed on the television or movie screen, we are guilty of that evil in our hearts. How then can parents expect God to honor their prayers for their children if they cleave to that evil?

It isn't enough that we clothe ourselves with the helmet of salvation, the belt of truth, and gospel of peace. We may have salvation; we may know the truth to the fullest extent; we may proclaim the Gospel wherever we go, and be engaged in a mighty ministry to the lost. But Paul exhorts us to put on the *whole* armor of God, which includes the breastplate of righteousness. And the first ministry of every parent is to his children.

It may be argued that we have the righteousness of Christ; our own righteousness counts for nothing. This is only partly true. Our own righteousness counts for nothing in terms of our salvation; but in terms of our warfare, our righteousness is an important element. It is our own righteousness in obeying God's Word that makes up that element of our armor, and demonstrates that we truly are in the Faith.

What is the purpose of the armor? To enable us to wage successful warfare "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this

world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

This has nothing to do with what's lawful for us as Christians. It may be that something we hold dear is completely lawful for us. But it may be a stumbling block to others. And parents may be holding to things that are not necessarily sinful, but may be stumbling blocks to their children.

It may be difficult for some to swallow, but if they will examine their own lives and the examples they set for their children, they will discover that they are one of their children's worst enemies.

Yet harping on righteousness has little effect without examples. It is wisdom to present for children positive examples of godliness that they can emulate. Proverbs 13:20 states that "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."

If parents will establish a righteous standard for themselves as well as for their children, at least the children will not perceive hypocrisy on the part of their parents.

Yes, this may mean sacrifices. It may mean giving up your favorite music, or movie star; it may mean giving up any number of things your child should not see you embracing. But that is an essence of spiritual warfare that cannot be avoided: sacrifice for the sake of those we love.

I suggest that parents discuss this with their children and let them know that they themselves are going to give up certain things in order to establish a pattern of godliness in the home. Their demands upon their children will carry far more weight if they do this. And certainly no one will be deprived of anything essential if the television set is gone, or at least tightly controlled.

BREAK THE HABIT

Christians, no less than unbelievers, are addicted to today's lifestyles. They can no more relate on a personal level with their children than they can with a stranger because, for years, the television set has been the great divider. And rather than forsake one's favorite programming, the family is further divided by every member having his own personal set so he can watch his own thing apart from the others.

Parents have become little more than supervisors of a waystation called "home" to kids who pass through between school, club activities, youth groups, and personal social outings. Those supervisors are expected to have ready for them clean beds,

meals, and enough financial resources to provide for whatever is required by the activities in which they are engaged.

But it isn't the child's fault as much as it is the parents' fault. We can expect the world to treat family life with contempt; self-determination regards any attempt at discipline and control as detrimental to one's self-esteem. But Christian parents must throw off the world's belief system and return to God's Word for direction on how to raise their children.

We must realize that spiritual warfare is not between two equals, but is the result of rebellion on the part of one who would like to be the equal of another. But just as God has the edge over Satan, parents, by virtue of their anointing as parents, have the edge over rebellious children, provided they act in accordance with God's will.

KNOW GOD'S WILL

In order to engage in spiritual warfare for your child, you must know God's will—his "battle plans," so to speak. This you will only learn by studying His Word.

Study does not consist of a daily reading. It consists of diligent, and consistent reading and applying of the Word. Study requires sacrifice. It requires hours of work. It requires love of the subject. But without it, you cannot hope to know what God expects of you.

This doesn't mean that we must read the Scriptures twenty-four hours a day. But it does mean that we must demonstrate to God our desire to know His will in order to implement it in our lives.

For example, in order to know how to raise your child, you must not only know the Scriptures that apply to that specific area, you must know the Scriptures that apply to your own life and the other relationships you have at home, work, in the Church, etc. For if you are not living according to His will in one area, you are hampering the other areas in which you are trying to live according to His will.

IMPLEMENT HIS ORDERS

There are a few Scriptures that relate specifically to child rearing which, due to today's humanistic climate, have fallen into disrepute even among Christians. It has been a tactic of Satan to get Christians to act contrary to God's Word by suggesting that there is a more righteous standard than Scripture. Those who believe this demonstrate lack of true faith in God and instead have placed their faith in man's wisdom.

Many Christians have come to believe that every child must be his own person, and that it is wrong for parents to impose their values upon them. God's Word, however, tells parents to teach His Word, His laws and His statutes to their children, and to their grandchildren, in order that they will live godly lives and enjoy His blessings (Deuteronomy 6:6-7; 11:18-19). And with this is God's promise:

But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children. (Psalm 103:17)

The command to teach your children God's Word goes beyond Bible study; it involves application of His Word to every situation. When a child asks why he may not do something, speak God's Word to him; in every area possible, apply the Word in a manner that the child recognizes is predicated upon love of the truth and not a desire to be preachy or overbearing.

You must have enough faith to follow through on God's Word without regard to the world's philosophy of child-raising. If discipline is a bad word to you because you believe that it will stifle a child's creativity or hamper his self-esteem, you have denied the Faith. How so? Because God's Word tells us that "if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."

I acknowledge that this Scripture speaks of financial provision; but I believe the principle also applies to spiritual provision. And to withhold from a child what God's Word commands—whether financial support or spiritual discipline is a serious sin.

God's Word commands discipline—even harsh discipline if needed—in order to keep a child's sin nature from gaining the upper hand:

He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him. (Proverbs 13:24 NIV)

Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him. (Proverbs 22:15 NIV)

Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die.

Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death. (Proverbs 23:13-14 NIV)

The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to itself disgraces his mother.

Discipline your son, and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul. (Proverbs 29:15; 17 NIV)

If you find yourself wincing at these references to the rod, examine yourself and you will find that you have been infected by the world's values. God Himself is our example of a loving parent:

My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. (Hebrews 12:5-8 NIV)

Those who do not discipline their children are treating them as illegitimate; and that message comes through to the children. Discipline communicates an attitude of caring and cements the parent-child relationship. Lack of discipline communicates an attitude of disregard for the child's welfare and places the child in the category of one who does not belong to the parents.

Your children are your own, but they are not your own ultimately; they belong to God. If you raise them without regard to His instructions you are disobedient and lacking in faith; if they turn out badly you must answer for it. If they turn out badly after you have raised them in obedience to God's Word, you will be vindicated; their condition is God's responsibility.

If we do not have faith to believe that God's Word is true in this area, then we must question our faith in all other areas: are we picking and choosing which portion of His Word to believe? If so, we must question whether we are a true believer or merely a religious-minded person hoping to gain favor with God by not being so bad after all.

If the latter, our attempts at spiritual warfare are already doomed. Before we proceed any further, we must repent of our unbelief and determine to follow God's Word regardless of the immediate consequences which may not be to our liking.

If you fear that your children will leave if you are faithful to the Word of God and, therefore, choose not to put Him to the test, then you lack faith. If they do leave after you have proven yourself faithful, then they are in God's hands and you must trust Him with their welfare.

Now, there are children who are incorrigible in spite of their parent's efforts to raise them properly. If, after careful exam-

ination, parents can honestly say they've done their best, they should not allow guilt or feelings of failure to hamper them in life. Only God knows the end from the beginning; and it isn't as important where a child is today, as it is where he will be when he breathes his last.

THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER

Prayer is necessary in all spiritual warfare, and an element with which the armor of God must be applied (Ephesians 6:18). It is most imperative when your children are out from under your control or when, in spite of your best efforts to instill godliness and righteousness in your children, they persist in rebellion.

But prayer prior to discipline will save you from a lot of misery. Because discipline without wisdom, and without compassion, is abuse. It is necessary, therefore, that you be in constant, daily prayer for your children, and for yourself that you will have the wisdom, the love and the compassion necessary to discipline them justly (Ephesians 6:4, Colossians 3:21).

The key word here is "justly." Many parents provoke their children to rebel by their unrighteous and unloving attitudes. Proper discipline avoids provoking children to anger or rebellion (Colossians 3:21).

The consequence of obedience to God's Word will be victory. If in the final result there is no victory, it will be because either we were disobedient to God's Word, or we lacked knowledge of His Word in order to act in conformity to it. Our good intentions mean nothing apart from understanding God's Word, just as an infantryman's good intentions mean nothing apart from understanding his orders. While military officers are fallible and may give the wrong orders, God is not fallible; the orders He gives can be followed with full assurance of victory. Only we must know His orders; and that is possible only if we study His Word.

The consequence of disobedience or lack of knowledge will be defeat unless God intervenes by His grace. Are you willing to risk your child's eternal destiny on your own disobedience and/or lack of knowledge?



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