

# The Holy War - Do we dodge enlistment?

By Dr Peter Masters

Christian Duties | *Sword & Trowel*

November 2007

‘For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places’ (*Ephesians 6.12*)

The devil’s self-assumed task is to bring down the human race in order to prove that God has failed in its design and creation. He has brought about the Fall by his lies, and if he can keep all people in rebellion against God’s standards and desires, then the Lord will appear to have failed. Of course this is impossible, but Satan, in blind hatred, seeks to score over God and wreck his handiwork.

However, Christ has come, taking the punishment of sin for his people, so that they cannot be condemned. The human race will survive eternally in Christ’s people, and the devil is therefore thwarted. But doubly enraged, and determined not to accept that he is defeated, Satan aims particularly to bring down Christ’s people so that he can accuse them before God, and claim them for destruction. He denies their sincerity and salvation, and schemes their backsliding and apostasy.

No wonder Paul is inspired to use the terminology of combat, saying – ‘For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities.’ There is no hiding from this battle.

We read that in World War II, among the courageous band of first volunteers, there were some self-interested people who thought that if they offered themselves early as cooks and accountants, they would not find themselves in the front line facing death. Whether true or not, astute people can find ways out of most predicaments, but there is no way out of the spiritual battle against the devil and his hosts.

Sadly, some Christians think that they can shrink away from battle and live calm, peaceful lives. They do not want to think about the hard aspects of the Christian faith, and they willingly become weak, compromising Christians who will contribute nothing to the Lord’s service, and lead many others down their chosen pathway.

Writes Paul: ‘We wrestle not against flesh and blood’ – not against feeble people like ourselves, with all our limitations. We fight against a vast number of demons (fallen angels), under the orchestration of Satan. They are called *principalities*, *powers*, and *the rulers of the darkness of this world*. These bring massively intelligent power against us, augmented by centuries of experience in tempting men and women. No Geneva Convention applies in this battle, and there are no holds barred. There is no mercy or compassion with the hosts of Satan, just hate, venom and malice, threatening to consume us.

What, precisely, are Satan’s aims? We know that as far as believers are concerned, he aims to lure us into personal sin and faithlessness, so that our walk with God is broken and we are no use to him. At the same time he seeks to ruin churches, making them powerless in winning souls.

In attacking churches, Satan aims at perverting the Truth, bringing in what Paul calls ‘doctrines of demons’, and taking churches off the foundation of sound teaching and practice. We observe in our day how he is deflecting churches away from sound, biblical worship, doubtless as a preparation for taking them from sound doctrine in time. How he labours to bring the church into backsliding, and to hinder and handicap the mission for souls!

Many Christians, however, do not realise that another of Satan's objectives is to bring society away from decency and dignity, plunging it into turmoil, degradation, filth and outright rebellion against the standards of God. In this he thinks he strikes a horrendous blow at Almighty God, defiling further the human race and offending its Creator.

It is sobering for us to learn from Paul about the command structure of the devil's army, because this information impresses upon us the power that confronts us, and our need of divine help. Paul mentions principalities, powers and rulers, at the heart of whom is Satan as commander-in-chief.

His highest subordinates are 'principalities', which means – the first in line, or archdemons. This term suggests that these (under Satan) design the strategies and their implementation. In earthly terms, we may imagine senior generals gathered round charts, deciding which will be the most effective policies to achieve their ends in region upon region, and in age after age, of the world. They plot how they will move their despicable campaign forward.

They orchestrate it worldwide, deciding that in some regions they will employ scientific humanism, while in others they will promote Islam or some other false and soul-destroying religion. Every strategy is conceived with immense cunning, nothing being haphazard.

The second rank in the command structure is called 'powers', meaning rulers of particular jurisdictions. It follows that these are not so much the planners but the regional enforcers of the policy. If high command determines that Islam will seize minds in one land, while Catholicism will consume souls in another, and atheism in yet another, then 'powers' will apply this policy with devilish ferocity and cunning.

'Powers' implement 'locally' the details of how people will be tempted to personal sin, and how society will be dragged down into an increasingly debased condition.

After 'powers' we learn of 'the rulers of the darkness of this world', evidently a level of command whose specific duty is to keep the people in spiritual blindness, and dazzled by alternative things. If people should be inclined to be religious, so that scientific humanism will not succeed with them, then 'powers' will implement a works religion, or some sophisticated religious superstition. The rulers of the darkness arrange the darkness that will descend upon minds and confuse people utterly.

The apostle also uses a term which would seem to sum up all the hosts of Satan, speaking of 'spiritual wickedness in high places'. 'High places' in the original Greek means 'above the sky' – in other words the realm of spirits, in this case fallen angels, or demons.

There are vast numbers of these 'footsoldiers' in Satan's army, constantly tempting, and implementing the policies of their superiors, and they are intensely cruel. They have been humiliated by the victory of Christ on Calvary, but they will not accept that humiliation. In their fury and jealousy they are desperately determined to bring down the church, and also society in general. They have been doing it for centuries, organising the infiltration of sound churches by weak or corrupt influences, and persuading the unsaved world to reject God's revealed morality.

How many times in church history has the cycle of corruption and decay been used effectively in groups of churches! We see it happening yet again before our eyes at the present time.

With all this in mind Paul gives his great appeal: 'Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day.' In a sense, every age is an evil day, but Paul probably refers to times when Satan's officers launch a special and particularly vehement assault on either church or state. How will churches stand? Only by preparing for war.

We are reminded of Britain in the 1930s, when most political leaders turned a blind eye to the gathering storm-clouds of war, and failed to prepare. Some Christians are like this with the spiritual warfare. They do not want to think of such things, and fail to grasp the power of the enemy, and how seriously they should take matters.

In the 1980s there was a very prominent and famous figure in the charismatic world, now deceased, who promoted charismatic practices so vigorously that very many churches still follow his ideas. More than anyone else he popularised the idea of casting out demons, demonstrating how easily it could be done. He would stroll into a room, confront the supposedly demonised person, and dismiss the demons. It seemed to be so easy for him as he sent them packing with a casual, drawled dismissal.

But his approach absurdly underestimated the powers of darkness. You cannot play pantomime tricks with the devil and his hosts, approaching them nonchalantly, and telling them what to do. And while the super-exorcist behaved in this way, the demons made a fool of him, filling his head with unbiblical teachings and methods. The devils had their way in the end. They did not mind him underestimating them, for by this they achieved their objectives.

We need to be very cautious with the powers of darkness. We do not have to be terrified of them, because Christ will protect us, and so our work cannot be stopped. But we have to be careful of them, vicious and hateful as they are, praying for help and deliverance, and not attempting face-to-face confrontation. We combat the demons of hell not by speaking to them, or even shouting at them, but through Christ, who alone has the power to reprove them. We withstand them by praying for strength to resist personal temptation; by teaching the Word as clearly as we possibly can; and by exhorting and admonishing one another with love and patience.

We must especially warn God's people about the sinfulness of the world, so that they are not drawn into it, because the devil will strive to mix the church with the world, so that there is scarcely any distinction between them.

Satan aims to bring to a stop our mission for souls, and therefore we must constantly emphasise the necessity of evangelism and service for the Lord, especially the persuasive preaching of the Gospel.

Great care is required when we take people into church membership to ensure that they have a real testimony of conversion and love the Lord. Too often slackness in this matter has filled fellowships with wood, hay and stubble, and these merely nominal Christians have brought with them their worldly tastes and preferences.

The hosts of darkness watch us closely, and we must be aware of this. We are watched as individuals, and some monitoring demon soon notes if we skip private devotions, and classifies us as vulnerable. Soon we will be manoeuvred into some inappropriate, sinful pursuit, until eventually it takes hold of us and rules our life.

Demons soon note if a church dabbles in worldly entertainment and methods. They then move the style very slowly but inevitably to the point of full-scale sinful compromise. Usually, or so it seems today, satanic policy leaves in place for the time being the sound preaching of a church so that the pollution of worship is less offensive to the people. They continue to think they belong to a sound church while the methodology is taken over by worldliness and the devil.

Sometimes the tastes of the pastor are corrupted first, and I have been amazed to see some weblogs of reformed pastors openly trumpeting their favourite 'tracks' of secular groups, and their favourite worldly films.

It is unquestionably a 'perilous time' when the devil's strategies easily capture pastors, who fall so far that they do not mind publicising their worldliness. Do they not know about the warfare? Do they not realise what has happened to them? And these things can happen to us also if we do not keep in mind the enemy's wiles.

To young people reading this article I would like to give some direct advice. Never forget that your distinctive Christian character is immensely precious. Don't sell it for a 'mess of pottage'. In some Christian circles young adults may be heard talking together about their favourite groups, having defected back to worldly culture almost immediately after their conversion. You have left the world. Destroy those things that belong to your past; get rid of them. There is now a mighty chasm between you and the world. How can we walk with one foot in the world, and the other in the kingdom of Christ? Do we think that we are strong enough to compromise with worldly things and be unaffected?

Your old, pre-conversion tastes and ways will soon ruin your spiritual walk, and make you a weak believer who makes no real progress, and who cannot be used by the Lord. Christ wants you completely out of the world, and every minute of compromise gives him great offence.

You remember what happened to the Israelites of old when, after their deliverance, they sought after the pleasures of Egypt, disdaining the miraculous manna that God gave them? They were punished, but chiefly to warn subsequent generations how greatly God hates compromise.

If we do not come completely out of the culture of godlessness we are being astonishingly foolish, and walking straight into a snare. If we do not distinguish between the sin-saturated culture of the world, and the standards that God wants in his people, we will definitely suffer great spiritual loss.

Even some nationwide groups of churches have allowed their annual assemblies or conventions to be dominated by the musical styles of this world's anti-moral, anti-God culture. By doing this they allow the contaminating strategy of principalities, powers and rulers of darkness to succeed to an horrific extent.

Down the ages, the commanders of Satan's army have tended to use the same methods repeatedly. Always they have engineered infiltration by those who are the carriers of contamination, both of doctrine and methods, the latter being frequently the first in line for corruption. It is no use being 'reformed' in doctrine, and at the same time offensive to God in practice.

In Britain evangelical churches are falling at an unprecedented rate into spiritual compromise and worldliness. Who will stand for the Lord in the defence, maintenance and building up of congregations which are truly loyal to Christ, and proving his power?