

• HARVEST POCKET BOOKS •



WINNING
YOUR SPIRITUAL
BATTLES



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THE OPPOSITION IN THE BATTLE

The apostle Paul shows us a clip of Satan's game plan when he writes in a passage we referenced in chapter 1: "Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil" (Ephesians 6:10-11). The word "schemes" simply means "deceptive strategies." Satan's overarching strategy, which he carries out in many ways, is to deceive. He is the ultimate magician, operating not only with smoke and mirrors but also by sleight of hand.

In fact, we read in Genesis chapter 3 that when Adam and Eve were in the garden, Satan came to them in the form of a snake. The snake was the most deceptive of all the animals that God had created (verse 1).

The reason Satan took on the form of a snake is because he and his demons operate best when there is a physical presence through which to work. Remember this principle: While spiritual warfare is being waged

in heavenly places, our enemy is very skilled at locating available vehicles in the physical realm through which to influence, manipulate, and deceive.

Satan even comes to you in a form that you would not suspect. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 11:14, “Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.” This adds another dimension to the problems we face and fight in the spiritual realm because our problems do not exist only in the invisible spiritual realm; they also exist in the often unsuspecting vehicle Satan uses to get to you in the physical realm, which includes you – your mind, will, emotions, and body.

Satan’s Agenda

Just as God has a kingdom agenda that involves His comprehensive rule over every area of life, Satan has an agenda as well. Satan uses deception in order to accomplish his agenda of bringing the world under his influence and control. He also seeks to make Christians ineffective in the spiritual battles waging all around us, thus reducing the glory believers give to God. Satan pursues his agenda by intentionally penetrating the same four realms that God works through to manifest His glory: the individual, family, church and society.

The Individual

Scripture makes it clear whom Satan is targeting in his schemes. First Peter 5:8 tells us, “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” To put it another way; Satan is after *you*. No matter who you are, what your status is, what your income is, how successful you are, or how well known you happen to be, Satan seeks to overpower you. What’s worse is that he has become very successful at carrying out his schemes in an effort to do just that.

In fact, if we look closely enough in Christian circles today, we will find many brothers and sisters who are POWs in camps run by demons. Satan has overpowered them in the areas of drugs, alcohol, relationships, sex, bitterness, hopelessness, discouragement, low self-esteem, depression, arrogance, and codependency. Psychologists have fancy names for all of these and more, but essentially what Satan has done is turned an overcoming, blood-bought child of the King into a POW held hostage to mental instabilities and inaccuracies. If Satan can cripple or destroy an individual, he is that much further along in crippling families, churches, and societies.

The Family

The second realm that Satan seeks to penetrate is the family. We saw this initially when Satan tempted Eve and

Eve then tempted Adam, thus bringing the entire family under the authority of hell. We also saw it when demonized men had relationships with the women on earth, producing a generation of rebels (see Genesis 6). There have been countless ways that Satan attacked the family in the Bible and over the course of history.

Why is the family so important to Satan? Because in Genesis 3:15 we learn that God will use the seed of mankind to bruise Satan in battle. The spiritual battle will be waged by the offspring. This is one reason God has issued the command in Genesis 1:28 to Christians to “be fruitful and multiple; and fill the earth, and subdue it.”

Satan wants to destroy you as an individual, but he wants to destroy your family even more. If he can destroy your family, he can do more damage than simply destroying the present generation. By destroying your family, he increases the potential to destroy future generations. This is because if he can get to your children before you have a chance to mold, shape, direct, and guide them correctly, he not only has influence over your home but also has influence over their future homes. If they are given over to strongholds in their lives, they will be less equipped to raise their children in such a way that will teach them to live in obedience to Christ. If their children cannot raise their own children according to God’s principles, then those children will also be ill-equipped to raise their children well. A cycle will repeat itself down through several generations.

The tragedy today is that many Christians think they are fighting flesh and blood in their marital and parenting issues, rather than realizing that Satan has an agenda to destroy their home. Whoever controls the family controls the future.

The Church

The third realm Satan attacks is the church. He does this by manipulating and exploiting personality weaknesses and preferences in order to promote division, denominationalism, legalism, and other things. Satan wants to split the family of God because he understands something that many Christians do not: God's work and involvement is greatly reduced in a context of disunity. There must be harmony brought about through a genuine and authentic humility and a biblically defined love in order to witness the fullest manifestation of God's presence and power.

If Satan can divide the body of Christ along class, racial, gender, and personality lines, he can deceive entire churches into making governmental and functioning decisions based on personal partiality rather than on God's viewpoint.

Fellowship in the body of Christ is based on our allegiance to Christ. He is our standard. We may have different preferences of music, worship, or teaching, or we may even have idiosyncratic differences between various

branches of the faith, but our one unifying factor is Jesus Christ – His death, burial, and resurrection. This is why God tells us in Ephesians 4:3 that we are to “preserve the unity” within the body of Christ. Satan seeks to divide us because in doing so he lessens our effect in advancing the kingdom of God.

The Society

The fourth realm Satan targets is the society. In Daniel chapter 10, we see how Satan is behind the rulers of nations. He is behind the Hitlers, Mussolinis, Idi Amins, and countless other rulers who have wrought havoc on innocent people around them. Satan frequently strives to provoke, empower, and enable them to destroy entire nations and groups of people.

When sin entered the world, it corrupted not only individuals but also human institutions that comprise societies as well. Satan seeks to capitalize on this corruption to such a degree as to make societies into entities that oppress personal freedom and opportunity rather than serve as instruments, as they have been designed by God, to promote biblical justice. The Bible is clear that God has made distinct arrangements, or covenants, through which He works. He works with the individual, family,

church, and government. All have been created by God and are to be influenced by God.

When you understand Satan's agenda to overpower individuals, families, churches, and ultimately societies as a whole, you can understand the complex nature of the spiritual battle we're in. Until we trace the origin of personal POW status, family POW status, church POW status, and societal POW status, Satan has us defeated in the body of Christ because he has us wrestling against flesh and blood rather than against principalities, powers, and world forces located in the heavenly places.

Satan's Strategy

Just like any excellent military commander or athletic coach, Satan has a strategy – a game plan – for accomplishing his agenda. His strategy has many parts, and before we dig deeper into what we need to do to suit up for battle, I want to look at Satan's strategic approach.

One of the devil's main tricks is to cause you to miss the goodness of God. As he did with Eve in the garden, Satan wants to get you to question the value of all of the trees that God has provided by getting you to focus on the one tree He has said to avoid. Satan wants you to complain about what you don't have so you will lose sight of what God has given you. However, God instructs us how to counteract this scheme in Philippians 4:6-8.

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made know to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.

God tells us to start by praising and thanking Him for all the things He has provided. He wants us to begin by giving thanks for all He has done and by thinking about His goodness – not only in our own lives but also in the world around us.

Satan tries to pull our focus away from the goodness of God because he knows that the only way he can defeat us is through deception. Truth exists within the goodness of God, and wherever the truth of God is present, Satan's ability to deceive is diminished.

Keep in mind as you face Satan's tricks of deception that you cannot fight him on your own, with your own methods, or even with your own thoughts. God's Word – His truth – trumps Satan. *You don't*. Satan has constitutional superiority over every man and woman

because he is a spirit being. He is not bound by the limitations of flesh and blood. Therefore, you cannot compete with him on the level of his deception. He is the master chameleon.

In fact, Satan is such a masterful chameleon that rarely will you find strutting his stuff in a red jumpsuit carrying a pitchfork. That's too obvious. His scheme is to trick you. He doesn't want you to see him for who he truly is. He's not merely hanging out at the First Church of Satan. Rather, he's also concerned with finding a way to infiltrate First Baptist, First Methodist, or First Bible Church of Anytown, USA.

Not long ago, I sat down after a long day to spend some time relaxing in front of the television. A popular old show called *The Outer Limits* was playing on one of the stations. I had seen this show before, but this time something stood out. There was a clear similarity between what was playing on the television and what Satan often does in our own lives.

The Cliff Notes version of this show is that a ship had crashed in an alien environment. One of the human prisoners was taken captive and fiercely interrogated. When he wouldn't give up any information, the aliens tried another approach. They sent a beautiful young woman into the room with him to be incarcerated as a prisoner as well. As the two prisoners talked and as days drifted into weeks, they shared secrets with each other.

Over a period of time, scales began to appear on the woman after she would be taken away for questioning and then returned to the cell. The man was concerned for her and asked her what they were doing to her when they took her. She told him that they were injecting her with something that was turning her into them.

Eventually, she became completely scaled and looked like the alien creatures questioning her every day. It was at this point that they came to take her away for good. But this was only after she had successfully retrieved all of the information that there was to get out of the man. As she was leaving, the man said, “You have completely changed.”

She stopped, turned around to face him, and replied, “No, I have completely changed *back*. I was always this way. I was just made to look like you so I could get your information. Now that I’ve got it, I can go back to being who I really am.”

The devil is no different. He comes to us as an angel of light in forms we rarely recognize because he wants to steal from each of us what God has in store for us. However, once he achieves his goal, we end up seeing him for who he truly is.

Four Stages in the Strategy

Desire

There are four stages in Satan’s strategy of spiritual warfare. This first stage begins with *desire*. A common

term we often associate with desire is the word “lust.” Lust is not necessarily a bad word, nor is desire a negative thing to have. Legitimate desire motivates us in our lives and provides an avenue for obtaining satisfaction and delight. However, when desire or lust manifests itself through illegitimate means, it turns into temptation, giving the potential for sin.

Desire for food is good; gluttony is a sin. Desire for sex is good; immorality is a sin. Desire for sleep is good; laziness is a sin. Satan’s initial strategic point in our lives is to play on a legitimate God-given desire within us and twist it into something illegitimate. He knows the desire cannot be avoided or ignored – God has planted it within us. So Satan tries to warp that desire by influencing how it is directed and used. Essentially, he wants the desire to be the master over you rather than you being the master over your desire.

Deception

The second stage in Satan’s strategy is the use of deception. A great illustration of this is how a fisherman sets out to catch a fish. If a fisherman were to put a hook into the water all by itself, he would be waiting a long time before anything ever took a bite. In fact, it’s doubtful that anything would ever bite his hook. Instead, what the fisherman does is put a worm on the hook to deceive the fish into thinking it’s getting a tasty meal.

Satan doesn't simply throw unbaited hooks out to us either. He doesn't advertise the local tavern by saying, "Come here and get drunk, become addicted to drugs or alcohol, lose your family, lead your kids into alcoholism, and throw away your future." Rather, what Satan does can be called the "foot in the door" technique. This was a common technique for traveling salesmen. They understood that if they could get potential customers to allow them to put their foot inside the door and talk about something unrelated to the sale, they would more than likely also have the sale. To do this, they diverted the potential customer's attention to something else.

Satan tries to get believers to let him into their lives little by little just like that. First, it's just a foot in the door – maybe a movie you shouldn't have watched, a conversation you shouldn't have had, or a relationship that shouldn't have been redefined in such a way. At first, it seemed harmless. But as Satan makes his way in, it becomes easier to graduate to the next level and buy what he is selling.

The primary way Satan does this is by planting an illegitimate or sinful idea in our minds, just as he did with David "Then Satan stood up against Israel and *moved* David to number Israel" (1 Chronicles 21:1). David got the idea that he didn't need God at that point and that he was able to take care of his army himself. As a result, he disobeyed God's instructions, and 70,000 people ended

up losing their lives. Whatever controls our minds controls our actions.

Disobedience

The third stage in Satan's strategy is disobedience. Desire leads to deception, which then leads to disobedience. The first half of James 1:15 tells us, "When lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin." Desire is not sin. Sin is the illegitimate application and placement of desire. For example, when a young child makes a decision, it's often based on feelings and desires. The child feels like playing, watching TV, eating, running, or anything of that sort. The child says, "I want that" or "I don't want that." If the desire is not managed it can end up dominating the child's actions in forms of disobedience. However, as the child matures into adulthood, the process of maturity leads him or her to begin to operate based on the will. He or she may not feel like getting up and going to work, but because it is a responsibility, he or she gets up and goes to work.

Victorious Christian living occurs when the Holy Spirit's presence is free to manage – through our spirit – our feelings, emotions, and desires. That's not to say we need to negate our feelings. We are human beings, and emotions are very real. But the placement of their expression must be brought underneath the Spirit's control, or we run the risk of letting our volatile emotions be used by Satan to lead us straight into sin.

Philippians 2:13 says, “It is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” Victory in spiritual warfare involves intimacy and identification with Jesus Christ to such a degree that His will reveals itself as the dominant force in our own will. That is the difference between victory and defeat. Only when God’s will directs or lives are we then also equipped with the power to do what He wills us to do. God promises to give us this power if and when our will aligns with His. But to do this requires faith that God knows what He is talking about. The opposite of faith is not doubt. The opposite of faith is disobedience.

Death

Satan’s intention in spiritual warfare is to cause us to miss out on the goodness of God, leading us onto a path of destruction. We learned from James 1:15 that lust gives birth to sin. Here’s the second half of that verse: “And when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.” Sin produces death in a variety of ways, all of which diminish our ability to experience God’s promise of the abundant life. This death can show up as the death of a dream, relationship, career, virtue, or any number of other things. Primarily, sin produces a death within the fullness of our spirit as our fellowship is broken with God.

Breaking fellowship with God makes us ineffective as believers who have been designed to experience God and

to glorify Him in all we do. As we saw earlier, Satan's goal is to make us ineffective. He does this through a strategy of taking a legitimate desire and guiding it down a path toward sin. Oftentimes, the death in our relationships, hopes, careers, families, or in other areas will lead to depressing thoughts and discouragement. Depression and discouragement are Satan's aim because he seeks to make our lives void of the abundance Jesus has promised us. As a result, we often question God and His promises. Not only that, but when our lives feel miserable, we are frequently too dejected to give God any glory or to tell others about Him. In fact, many of us even end up blaming God for the misery we're experiencing.

In time, Satan tries to work himself out of a job by training the deceived to become deceivers themselves (see 2 Timothy 3:13). He turns people into "evangelist of deception" who quickly and effectively spread his lies among us.

Because Satan does not have the power of creation, he has to maximize the potential of deception. He has turned deception into an art form. In fact, his skill at deceiving mankind will one day be so powerful that his antichrist will sit in the temple as god, and people will truly believe that he *is* god.

Yielding to Hell

Satan's agenda and his strategy are all-encompassing,

but there's something you and I need to know about both: *They have already been defeated.* In fact, Satan and his minions have already lost their battle. Any advancement they make in your life or on this earth is because they have been given permission to do so. The only power they have is the power that is granted to them. Satan was able to get access to ruling planet Earth only because Adam and Eve gave him permission to do it. Essentially, demons need permission from us to bring hell to us.

If hell is happening in your life, it is because hell has been given permission to do so. Hell was told – either through sin or circumstance – that you were willing to yield. You communicated something like this:

- “Hell, it’s okay for you to rule my mind. It’s okay for you to rule my emotions. It’s okay for you to rule my will or my body.”
- I give you permission to tell me that I’m not really a man even though I was born a male.”
- I give you permission to tell me I’m not really a woman even through I was born a female.
- I give you permission to tell me that I want drugs, I need drugs, and I can’t stop using drugs.
- I give you permission to tell me I need a

drink, can't live without a drink, and can't go to sleep without a drink."

- "I give you permission to tell me that I should wake up depressed, stay depressed, and go to bed depressed.
- I give you permission to tell me that I can't control my anger, my spending, or my desires; that I am not loved or that I will never amount to anything of significance."

The list of things we allow Satan to tell us can go on forever. Some of it may certainly be related to chemicals or biological malfunctions, but much of what we even call "mental illness" today is actually caused by demons who have been given permission to make someone mentally unstable.

After more than 35 years of working with individuals through struggles in their lives as a pastor and counselor, I'm convinced that much of what we label or try to drug away is simply a result of Satan having his way. I'm not saying that the physical components aren't real, but they are often incited and encouraged by demons who have been allowed to roam free.

Satan operates by consent and cooperation. He operates by subtly changing the worldview, beliefs, and thought patterns of the individual, family, church or

society that he's targeting. Once those schemes are adopted, he is given greater permission to make himself at home. Much like roaches that have been allowed to stay in a filthy kitchen, demons that have set up camp are difficult to drive off.

I've often heard it said that some people are just too demon conscious. Maybe you feel that way. Perhaps this is the first book you've picked up on spiritual warfare because you think people sometimes make too big a deal about demons and the spiritual realm. But that's exactly what Satan would like you to believe. As long as he can keep your focus on the physical manifestations instead of the spiritual root, you will forever be fighting the wrong battle. It's hard to win a war when you don't even know where to show up to do battle.

The foundational principle for a life of total victory is this: *We do not wrestle against flesh and blood*. When we think people are our problem, we will continually be addressing people and miss the root of the problem altogether. If one of us were to set our minds on the spiritual world and less on other people, more of us might still be in our right minds. But when people's minds are divided -fighting this person, that challenge, or some other issue – they don't seem to have much of a mind left at all.

The people are real. The problems are real. The health issues are real. The challenges are real. The conflicts are

real. The strongholds are real. They are just not the root of the problem.

The job of Satan and his demons is to keep you and me from experiencing the abundant life God has in store for us, and they do that by distracting us from focusing on the root. Doing that is their full-time occupation. And we are not their first job assignment. They have had plenty of years to study, practice, and perfect what they do.

But God, who is not bound by time or space, has already won the battle. Learning His strategy is our key to overcoming Satan and his demons and living a life of victory.