

How to fight

Spiritual Warfare in many ways is contradictory to our everyday understanding of warfare, in which we fight our fellow human beings. The first lesson we learn is that it is not against mortals that we are fighting, but against the source of evil itself, also known as the devil or Satan, and against his army of evil spirits. For this reason, the weapons we use in the spiritual battle are very different from physical weapons, though there are many parallels between them. However, before we take up our arms there are two preparations we need to make: training and putting on our armour.

Training

1. Repentance

A soldier needs to be trained in the ways of war before he/she goes out into the field, and part of this training involves discipline. The first step in training to be a spiritual warrior is to repent of any sins that might be weighing on our conscience: this way the enemy will not have any power over us, we will have the agility to fight effectively without any unnecessary luggage and we will be slim enough to wear our armour, particularly the breastplate, which I will come onto later.

2. Fasting and abstinence

As part of this first step, it may be necessary for us to change our lifestyle in some way to avoid anything which may cause us to sin again. Some kind of self-discipline may be required to keep us from sinning again. For example, fasting may be a good way to discipline our bodies not to over-indulge in food. Fasting is also a good discipline in itself even if we don't have a problem with being greedy, because it provides a general means of keeping the needs of the body subservient to the needs of the spirit: we are spiritual warriors after all. Fasting is a type of abstinence, which means going without something. Other abstinences are also of equal benefit, such as going without television for a day.

3. Almsgiving

There is a needy world out there and it is so important to show charity to other people in many ways. Almsgiving involves giving money, food and goods to those in more need than ourselves. In our battle we are fighting for the sake of every other person in the human race, so just as warriors bring back some of the spoils of war to those at home, so must we give to others to reflect the fact that the fight is For King and Country. In the spiritual battle, our King is Jesus Christ and our country is the rest of humanity, for whom we fight.

4. Sharpening the sword

We shall see later that the sword used by the spiritual warrior is the Word of God. It is important for all Christians to read and get to know the bible, which contains the Old Testament Scriptures, handed down to us from the Jews and Israelites, and the New Testament, which contains the early documents of the Christian church. Read and ponder over the New Testament and the Psalms, learn about it and the rest of the Old Testament through bible study meetings, books, courses or whatever means are available to you. The reason for this is obvious: when the time comes your sword will be that much more effective. You will be able to quote from scripture to the enemy as a means of fighting against him.

One thing which is worth noting at this stage is that warriors often train with each other in friendly fights, but never try to wound each other. It is important to challenge each other in what you learn about the bible so that your knowledge and the challengee's knowledge are more finely honed, but do not go out to fight against other Christians: the battle is not against them, but is still and always will be against the devil.

5. Putting on the armour

In Ephesians 6v10-20, St. Paul encourages us to put on the full armour of God so that we can resist the devil's tactics. Often it can be possible to feel that we are constantly being attacked by the devil, and in times like this it is important to understand such an attack for what it is, but to also remember that the Lord is stronger than the devil, so that we have nothing to fear. By acknowledging our weakness and allowing the Lord to take over the fight, victory is assured.

The Belt of Truth

Just as a belt holds our trousers up and thus enables us to run, so the truth is what sets us free. You can't run with your trousers slipping down. In earlier times when men wore tunics, a man could tuck his tunic into his belt so that he could run. If I give up any kind of lying and no deceitful words come from my lips, then I will be living in the truth, which will be liberating for me. In addition if I truly believe that the words of scripture are the truth, then I can put my faith in them, and use these words in my fight against temptation. In particular, if I acknowledge the truth in the words that Jesus Christ's death cleanses me of all sin then I will be able to believe that I have been truly made righteous.; ie. the belt holds my breastplate in place.

The Breastplate of Righteousness

By wearing the breastplate of righteousness I am acknowledging that any sins I might have committed are completely wiped out by the blood of the lamb who was sacrificed, Jesus Christ, so that I am now innocent, not guilty. The devil is also known as Satan, which means accuser, but once I have repented of my sins and accepted Jesus' blood to free me from them, I can boldly stand and declare myself not guilty before God, in which case Satan has no case against me.

The shoes of eagerness to spread the gospel of peace

Jesus sent out his disciples to the world to preach the gospel (eg. Mark 16v15), and he continues to do this today with the disciples of the church. Living a life which is focussed on proclaiming the gospel of peace, makes us less vulnerable to attacks by the enemy. This I believe is due to God's protection over us as we constantly obey his commands. In Luke 6v47-48, Jesus explains that the person who goes about doing his will, will stand firm, unshaken by any evil.

The helmet of salvation

Jesus is the only sure hope for salvation. This is an assurance which guarantees peace of mind and avoids any need for other influences to distract our minds from him. We are safe in the knowledge that when he returns he will take us to live and reign with him in his Kingdom of justice and peace. This helmet of salvation is a great cause of joy for us because we know that there is nothing in this world or in death to be afraid of at all.

The shield of faith

Faith is the opposite of fear, so whatever arrows the enemy may shoot at us, because we've put our faith in the one who has the power to overcome all evil, those arrows will never reach us. Faith is thus like a shield, a sure defence against any kind of wickedness or snare.

The sword of the Spirit

The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God; through the power of the Spirit the Word of God created the world and the same Word became flesh. By living our lives in the Spirit rather than responding to the desires of our flesh, we are clothed in the power from on high. Because the Spirit is the principal author of scripture (The Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 304), it is also important that we study the Word of God. Through the scriptures, Jesus was able to fight back against Satan in the desert (Matthew 4v4,7,10) and in the same way we can refer to the scriptures in our battles with temptation. The more we know the scriptures by studying and meditating on the bible, the easier it will be for us to know right from wrong. There are many battles going on in this war and one of them includes the battle for our own souls which culminates in personal fights with temptation which each and every one of us faces from day to day.

Prayer fighting

True prayer exists when we allow the Spirit of God to pray through us to the Father and this can be manifest in all styles of prayer, whether it be official set prayers, heart to heart chats with God, contemplative prayer, charismatic prayer or whatever. The highest form of prayer is praise and so it is in particular that in praising God that the gap between God and Man is made smaller, we see the power of God at work and see the works of his Kingdom. It is often during times of praise that we see sick people being miraculously healed and that people have visions or words of prophecy. If a prayer group met together and did nothing but praise God for 90 minutes, who knows what signs and wonders would be worked! In Joshua 6v1-21 Jericho is captured purely through the power of prayer. In verse 20 we read that "they raised a mighty war cry and the wall collapsed then and there" without the need for any physical force.

Spiritual warfare is really all about praying, praying for God's Kingdom to come on earth, a Kingdom of justice and peace where Jesus rules in the hearts of all people. God, due to his fatherly nature, desires us to ask him for our needs and the needs of the world. I believe that wars have been stopped or avoided through the power of prayer, ordinary people throughout the world praying to God. To intercede means to stand or kneel before God in prayer and pray for him to act in a particular situation or for a particular person. We are standing in the gap between that situation or person, and God and praying on their behalf. In this way we are behaving like Jesus does now, because he is constantly interceding before God his father for the needs of the world. With him all the holy saints who have gone to heaven before us are also interceding before God. It is true to believe that Jesus and his saints can pray for us in whatever needs we have. We can also ask people alive to intercede for us; ie. to stand before God on our behalf for our needs.

Every prayer is effective, no matter how brief or how long. There are many great spiritual warriors who spend many hours of each day praying before God for the needs of the world, and there are others who make short prayers, such as "Lord, have mercy!", "Praise to you, Jesus!" or "Thankyou." Even when prayer feels 'dry' it is still effective, and it also shows our faith is strong when we continue to pray through times of dryness. Sometimes, especially in communal prayer, we feel or even see in visions, the results of our prayer. Some people see angels moving into situations to act for God, some go through an experience akin to giving birth. The time of prayer feels like labour pains but when the prayer is answered the satisfaction is like that of seeing a new life appear.

Prayer is the most important thing anyone can do, and is the best use anyone can make of their time. So keep up the fight and keep on praying. There are lots of others both in heaven and on earth praying and interceding with you!

To be continued

Using the Word

The Truth