

FIGHT SPIRITUAL FORCES VERSUS TRUST IN GOD'S POWER

Man's Way Versus God's Way (Part 6)

In this series of feature articles, we have been contrasting man's way and God's way of dealing with the problems of life. So far, we have considered:

| <u>Contrast</u> | <u>Man Says</u> | <u>God Says</u> |
|------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Article #1 | Follow the "Latest Research" | Follow the Scriptures. |
| Article #2 | Save self | Die to self |
| Article #3 | Live by feelings | Live a disciplined life |
| Article #4 | You are a victim | You are responsible |
| Article #5 | Overcome past | Focus on the present |

In this article, we address Contrast #6: Many say that you must combat evil spiritual forces. God says that you are in a spiritual battle, but he commands you simply to stand firm against evil forces in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Can believers be victimized by evil spiritual forces?

In Article #4, "Victim Mentality Versus Personal Responsibility," we stated that among Christians, one of the more popular ways of excusing sinful behavior is to blame outside sources (such as "generational" sins, curses, or demons). When someone asks for prayer because he says he has the "demon of worry," he is implying that he is not totally responsible for worrying, thus shifting the blame. The implication is that he is a victim because he is controlled by the demon.

Satan has been defeated.

It is important to know that Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil (*1 John 3:8*). Just before He breathed His last breath on the cross, He proclaimed "It is finished (accomplished)." He finished the work He came to do, which includes destroying the works of the devil. Satan has already been judged (*John 16:11*) and he has been rendered powerless by Jesus' death (*Hebrews 2:14*).

Believers can rely on the power of the Holy Spirit.

We see in *1 John 4:2-4* that believers can overcome every spirit because they have the Holy Spirit who is greater than any evil force. "... *neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, [emphasis added] shall be able to separate us from the love of God ... (Romans 8:38-39)*." Satan is a created being. While he opposes God, he is not an opposite, co-equal of God.

Then, why do believers so easily attribute the cause of their problems to supernatural forces?

The erroneous opinion that believers can be victims of supernatural forces is accepted by many for several reasons. First, it is a common thread of secular psychological theories that any person with serious problems is a victim. Some outside source has made him like he

is and he cannot help how he is behaving. Second, it provides an excuse for continuing sinful behavior. Some believers continue in sin rather than face, deal with, and endure their problems God's way. Third, it can be something of an excuse for exhibiting bizarre behavior in order to gain attention and manipulate others.

Even believers can be easily influenced by popular "divine healers" who focus on supernatural experiences and rituals. In order to provide evidence of their claims, these "healers" may even attempt to justify their procedures by quoting certain Scripture passages. For example, a common technique is to introduce the topic of spiritual warfare by reading *Ephesians 6:12*, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." Then, they explain how to conduct spiritual warfare using special procedures or rituals that ignore the next verse, *Ephesians 6:13*. *Ephesians 6:10-18* is a summary of all that was written in the previous chapters of Ephesians. Spiritual warfare is to be conducted by taking up the full armor of God and standing firm in the Lord's power.

In summary, some find it easier to place the blame elsewhere and, thus, avoid the responsibility of living a disciplined life.

Satan's schemes

Satan blinds the minds of unbelievers (*II Corinthians 4:4*), but he can only attempt to deceive believers (*Revelation 12:9*). He roars like a lion seeking someone to devour (*I Peter 5:8*), but his power is greatly limited. Satan is a cunning deceiver. He can only hope to scare his prey. He can tempt, but he doesn't have the capability to overpower a believer and make him sin (*I Corinthians 10:13; I John 4:4*).

Any diversion is a delight to Satan. He achieves his purpose when believers unwittingly fight against him, because the believers are spending their energy fighting Satan rather than what they should be doing – focusing on pleasing the Lord. When the Apostle Paul was buffeted by a "messenger of Satan," he did not attempt to do battle with Satan. He didn't even acknowledge Satan. Instead, Paul's response to Satan's attack was to appeal directly to God (*II Corinthians 12:7*). We must do the same.

How should we then live?

God requires us to be faithful stewards (*I Corinthians 4:1-2*). In *Ephesians 6:10-14*, God tells us three times that spiritual warfare is waged by standing firm. Then, He tells us how to prepare ourselves for battle and how to engage in warfare. We are to put on the full armor of God (*Ephesians 6:14-17*) which equips us to live godly lives and stand firm. We don't need to worry about Satan's attacks. God says that if we submit to Him and resist the devil, he will flee from us (*James 4:7*) and we will be strengthened and established (*I Peter 5:8-10*).

In a subtle way, focusing attention on Satan lessens trust in the power of God, and people end up living in fear of Satan. Rather, our attention as believers should be on the empowering, enabling, and leading of the Holy Spirit, with our eyes fixed on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith (*Galatians 5:16; Hebrews 12:1-2*).