

SPIRITUAL WARFARE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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INTRODUCTION:

Spiritual warfare is in the news. Prayer walks, spiritual mapping, forty-day fasts, binding the spiritual hierarchies over our cities, and many other exciting activities are being undertaken in the hope of hastening the return of our Lord. Traditional exercises in spiritual warfare, such as intercession, have moved from the cloistered circle of a few dedicated and called practitioners into the popular life of the Church. Some of the things being done in the name of spiritual warfare are causing controversy, especially among missiologists and churches deeply involved in missions.

In the midst of all of this activity (and controversy), it is our responsibility to ask, "What is the biblical pattern for overcoming the forces of darkness that control nations, cities, ethnic groups, institutions, and how do we identify and defeat Satan on a personal level?" This paper will examine the nature of the conflict, and the scriptural model for overcoming Satan and his minions. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations will be from the New American Standard Version – we will alter the reading in some verses, in order to comply with a more literal translation of the Greek and Hebrew.

As we begin our study, it is important that we not forget the truth expressed in Deuteronomy 29:29

The secret things belong to Jehovah our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.

There are many things in the spiritual realm that God has not revealed to us. Many strange, and in some cases, dangerous, teachings have been born out of the desire to explain that which God has not revealed to us. It is important for us to learn to be content with that which has been revealed and not be driven by a perverted curiosity to enter into the realm of the unknown.

He has revealed to us what we need to know in order to obey Him, please Him, and to fulfill His reason for calling us to be His people. That being true, in the following pages we will restrict ourselves to that which Scripture clearly teaches and models, and we will seek to avoid speculation.

SECTION ONE: **FORCES THAT INFLUENCE THE BEHAVIOR** **AND DESTINY OF THE NATIONS**

PART ONE: TWO KINGDOMS, TWO HEIRARCHIES

One of the most informative glimpses into the realm of angelic hierarchies is the episode recorded in Daniel 10. This account leads us to conclude that both God and Satan have *archangels*.

The event recorded in Daniel 10 took place when Daniel was almost 90 years of age; he had lived in Babylon for seventy-two years. As a result of the divine revelations that had been given to him, Daniel had gained a position of influence in the various monarchies that had ruled Babylon, including that of Cyrus, the recent conqueror of Babylon.

As a result of Cyrus' victory, Babylon had become a part of the Persian Empire. Shortly after conquering Babylon, Cyrus ordered the Hebrew captives to return to their homeland and to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Because of his position, and possibly because of his age, Daniel was not free to leave his post and join the pilgrims who were returning to Palestine. Neither had he received a divine injunction to do so.

As he watched the last Jerusalem-bound caravan leave the western gate of the city, Daniel experienced anxiety about the fate of his people. Reports describing problems experienced by the Jews began to filter back to Babylon. The Samaritans living in and around Jerusalem resented the Jewish settlers. After about two years, a delegation of Samaritans arrived at Cyrus' court, bring accusations against the Jews. They were determined to undermine the efforts to rebuild Jerusalem. Daniel began to mourn for his people.

God had given Daniel several visions concerning the future (beginning in Daniel 8). After each vision, even after some enlightenment from angelic interpreters (Daniel 8:16-27; 9:20-10:1), Daniel experienced anxiety about what was going to happen to his people. On the occasion before us, Daniel entered into a three-week selective fast, eating only common food, and praying for understanding. All of Daniel 10 should be read to understand this episode.¹ The words of the heavenly messenger, recorded in verses 12-13 & 20, are of special significance to our study:

Then he said to me, "Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. "But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia. ...Then he said, "Do you understand why I came to you? But I shall now return to fight against the prince of Persia; so I am going forth, and behold, the prince of Greece is about to come.

A key player in this drama is Michael, an angel whose name means, *who is as God*.² It should be noted that Michael is described in Daniel 12:1 as the angel-prince who stands guard over the people of Israel:

Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued (Note that in Daniel 10:21 Michael also is described as, your prince).

¹ Note that the theophany of Daniel 10:4-6 corresponds to the theophany of Ezekiel 1:26ff and elsewhere in Ezekiel. This theophany preceded the angelic messenger sent to enlighten Daniel.

² A strong case could be made that Michael is the *angel of Jehovah* who is a key player in many episodes of the Old Testament.

In the vision of Daniel 10 (v13) Michael is described as *one of the chief princes*. This agrees with the New Testament terminology in Jude 9 where Michael is described as an *archangel* (ἀρχάγγελος):

But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "Jehovah rebuke you."

The term, *archangel*, means *primary angel*, or *first-rank angel* or, *ruling angel*. The term is formed from two Greek terms:

- *arche* (ἀρχή), meaning, *first*, or, when applied to human hierarchies, *ruler*;
- *angelos*, (ἄγγελος), meaning, *messenger*³ (the Greek term used in Scripture for the heavenly messengers that God dispatches to earth).

The term, *archangel*, corresponds to the *archai* (ἀρχαί), the *rulers* of Ephesians 6:12, which describes the highest rank in Satan's hierarchy (see the following comments on Ephesians 6:12).

Revelation 12:7 pictures Michael in his archangel role as leading the angelic army of God against the dragon and his angels:

And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. And the dragon and his angels waged war,

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, that an archangel would put forth a loud shout, as Jesus and his host descend from heaven in the second coming:

For Jehovah Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. (1 Thessalonians 4:16)⁴

Since Daniel 10:13 describes Michael as *one of the chief princes*, we would assume that there are other archangels, although none are named in Scripture.

Another angel, Gabriel, was involved with Daniel. This angel is mentioned four times in Scripture. He was sent to Daniel on two occasions:

³ Etymology is an uncertain means of precisely defining words. Care must be exercised in using this means of determining the definition of a term. In this case, it is justified, since there is no inductive means of defining the term, *archangel*.

⁴ Since the archangel of I Thessalonians 4:16 is called "the" archangel, and since Michael is the only archangel named in Scripture, some exegetes consider Michael to be the archangel mentioned in this passage. However, the evidence is inconclusive since Michael is described in Daniel 10: 13 as, "one" of the chief princes. Michael clearly is a member of the first rank of heavenly beings in God's service. He may be the only one of that rank.

And I heard the voice of a man between the banks of Ulai, and he called out and said, "Gabriel, give this man an understanding of the vision." (Daniel 8:16)

...while I was still speaking in prayer, then the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision previously, came to me in my extreme weariness about the time of the evening offering. (Daniel 9:21)

In Luke 1:19 we learn that Gabriel is the angel who was sent to Zechariah, to tell him that he and his wife would have a son (John the Baptist).

And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God; and I have been sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news.

Six months later, Gabriel was sent to Mary to announce that she will be impregnated by the Holy Spirit and that she would bring forth a son, who is to be named, Jesus.

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming in, he said to her, "Hail, favored one! Jehovah is with you." And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and Jehovah God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end. The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God. And the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:26-28, 30-33, 35-37, 38b)

Thus, we conclude that Gabriel is a special messenger from God, sent to bring important revelation in special circumstances.

Since Gabriel is the messenger sent to Daniel on two earlier occasions, Gabriel probably was the unnamed messenger in Daniel 10.

In this glimpse into the unseen Kingdom of God, there is a clear picture of a hierarchy of angels. Those on the higher levels of this hierarchy have more authority than those on the lower levels.

The Daniel 10 glimpse into the Satanic hierarchy is consistent with Paul's description of this evil empire.

PART TWO: THE SATANIC HIERARCHY

There are many portions of Scripture that give us fleeting glimpses into the hierarchy of Satan's kingdom. Paul's description in Ephesians 6:12 is more than just a glimpse.

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.

This verse describes a four-level hierarchy of evil forces.

- The first level consists of the "rulers." The Greek term, here is, ἀρχαί, (*archai*) meaning literally, *the primaries*. In its usual use, the term refers to those who take orders from no one, but have authority in themselves. These are the spiritual forces that are at the top of the chain of command in Satan's kingdom.
- The second level, Paul calls *authorities*, or *powers*. The word is, ἐξουσίαι, (*egzousiai*). This term means, *authorities*, and describes those to whom the primaries have delegated authority in certain spheres. When one of these *authorities* acts within his assigned sphere, it is as if the *primary* under whom he serves were acting.
- The third level is the *world forces of this darkness*. The Greek terminology, τοὺς κοσμοκράτωρ τοῦ σκότους τούτου (*tous kosmokrator tou skotos toutou*). Literally means, *the world rulers of this darkness*. This terminology would lead us to conclude that these are the spiritual forces behind the evil in nations and cities.
- The fourth level is the πνευματικοί (*pneumatikoi*), *the spirituals*. If we continue the pattern displayed in the first three terms, we would conclude that these are the demonic forces that are the footsoldiers in Satan's army.

The Daniel 10 episode fits into the framework described by Paul. The Satanic representative in the Persian Empire (through Cyrus's victory over Babylon, it now was a part of the Persian Empire) is called, *the Prince of Persia*. He was Satan's commandant who oversaw the demons (δαίμόνιον), who were represented by the idols of Persia (Paul wrote to the Corinthians [I Corinthians 10:20ff] that those who sacrifice to idols sacrifice to demons). He was the *Satanic ruler* or *authority* that influenced the kings of Persia, in an effort to turn them against the Jews.

The Prince of Persia was a powerful angelic majesty (Jude 8) and he probably was a level or two higher in the spiritual hierarchy than the messenger sent to Daniel (as if a Captain in one army's trying to have authority over a General in another army; more will be said on this topic later). Because of this hierarchical difference, the angel sent with a message to Daniel could not get past the Satanic Prince of Persia angel.

Therefore, the archangel Michael (*who is as God*), was sent to unseat the Satanic angelic majesty. He dislodged Satan's Prince of Persia, thus enabling God's messenger to complete his mission to Daniel.

Interestingly, Satan's displaced agent was to be replaced by the angel speaking to Daniel (v 13 "I had been left there with the kings of Persia"). The messenger told Daniel that he was going to return to the ongoing conflict and that his next challenger would be Satan's agent assigned to the Greeks.⁵ Michael, Israel's guardian angel, was the only one who was standing with this angel him in this continuing conflict. Earlier, this messenger had helped Michael in a battle with the evil spiritual forces related to Darius the Mede (10:21-11:1)

However, I will tell you what is inscribed in the writing of truth. Yet there is no one who stands firmly with me against these forces except Michael your prince. And in the first year of Darius the Mede, I arose to be an encouragement and a protection for him.

⁵ The Greeks, led by Phillip of Macedonia, began a conquest of Persia in 336 BC. After Phillip was assassinated, his son, Alexander renewed the conquest in 334 BC, finally completing the conquest in 331 BC, thus making Persia a part of his Greek empire.

PART THREE: THE BAALIM

The ancients understood that there are spiritual dominions over various people and geographical areas. They called these spiritual entities, the *baalim* (בעלים). The term, *baalim* (rendered in most English versions as, *baals*) means, *Lords*. The ancients believed that there was a *baal* over every plot of ground, plus an hierarchy of *baalim* over enlarged sections of real estate. For this reason, each peasant had an idol to which he sacrificed, representing the *baal* over his garden plot. This was one of the problems that Jehovah had with the Israelites when they came into the Promised Land. The Israelites tried to "copper the bet." Not only did they worship Jehovah, but they also offered sacrifices to the *baalim*, just in case Jehovah was not strong enough or not disposed toward the provision of a good crop. Gideon's destruction of his father's *baalim* is a case in point.⁶ Another interesting illustration of this truth is the manner in which the Arameans explained their defeat by Israel:

Now the servants of the king of Aram said to him, "Their gods are gods of the mountains, therefore they were stronger than we; but rather let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they. (I Kings 20:23)

Every glimpse that the Bible gives us into these realms confirms that there are Satanic hierarchies over nations, people, and cities.

PART FOUR: THE FOOTSOLDIERS

On a totally different level than these Satanic super-powers are the foot-soldiers of the Satanic host. As noted earlier, these probably are the demons. During the ministry of Jesus and the life of the early Church, demons were in direct conflict with the messengers of the Gospel. Abundant testimony from around the world makes it clear that demonic activity has not ceased. Jesus has given His Church authority over demons. He first gave this authority to the Twelve and then to the Seventy, when he sent them out on evangelistic missions.

And He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs; and He was giving them authority over the unclean spirits; (Mark 6:7; see also Matt. 10:5ff; Luke 9:1ff)

Now after this Jehovah appointed seventy others, and sent them two and two ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come....And the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." (Luke 10:1, 17)

The traditional concluding verses of Mark's Gospel⁷ contain Jesus' promise that the early church would cast out demons:

And these signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; (Mark 16:17)

After the ascension of Jesus, the preachers that went forth fulfilled this prophecy. For example, in Philippi, Paul encountered a demon possessed maiden:

⁶ Judges 6:25

⁷ The various families of manuscripts have four different endings for the Gospel of Mark. The one cited here is the traditional ending, found in the Textus Receptus and several other sources.

And it happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a certain slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortunetelling. Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation." And she continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out at that very moment. (Acts 16:16-18)

PART FIVE: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIFFERENT LEVELS OF THE HEIRARCHIES

As we have seen, there are hierarchies and levels of authority, both in God's spiritual kingdom and in Satan's spiritual army. There is an absolute quality in these hierarchies. Unless an agent in one kingdom is equal or superior to an agent in the opposing hierarchy, he does not rebuke him, and is seemingly unable to defeat him.

Jude speaks to this issue:

Yet in the same manner these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties. But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "Jehovah rebuke you." But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed. Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. (Jude 8-11)

Note that Jude refers to those in the Church who have *crept in unnoticed*, people who would pervert the Church. The reference to the *rebellion of Korah* indicates that they do not respect spiritual authority (see Numbers 16). One of their characteristics is that they *revile angelic majesties*. The angelic majesties include both the hierarchy of God and the hierarchy of Satan.

Jude points out that even the archangel Michael (the archangel *who is as God*) did not dare pronounce a railing judgment against Satan. Jude describes, in a negative way, the proper behavior toward someone who is higher in the spiritual hierarchy. The archangel Michael's behavior is contrasted with those in the church who *revile angelic majesties*. They revile things that they do not understand.

Peter's Second epistle, presents the same picture of those who *revile angelic majesties*.

...then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties, whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord. But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed...(II Peter 2:9-12)

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM MATERIAL IN SECTION ONE

- Both God and Satan have heavenly hierarchies.
- Satan assigns powerful warlords over certain geographical areas and certain people groups.
- God assigns powerful angels as "guardians" of people groups and individuals.
- Those who are on one level of an hierarchy, do not succeed in opposing an enemy agent who is at a higher level in the hierarchy.
- Out of reverence for spiritual authority, an agent of one kingdom does not rebuke an agent of another kingdom who is on a higher plane of authority.
- The "foot-soldiers" of Satan's kingdom are the demons, who seek to inhabit people and use people.

SECTION TWO: THE BELIEVER'S ROLE IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE

PART ONE: "BE PREPARED"

What is the Christian to do about these forces of evil? What is our role in this battle between the Kingdoms? Obviously, if we are to be warriors in this war, we must be equipped. We must be certain, before entering the fray, that we have on the protective armor described in Ephesians 6.

Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil... Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:10-11, 13-17)

Observe that this armor is not provided for the taking of territory. All seven items in this armor are instruments that enable the believer to hold his ground:

V11 *Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.*

V13 *Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.*

V14a *Stand firm therefore...*

Even the Word of God, the Sword of the Spirit, is presented here as an instrument for holding one's ground, rather than being used for the taking of territory. Jesus provided an example of using Scripture as a defensive weapon against Satan, when He battled Satan at the close of His wilderness experience.⁸ Here is Matthew's account of Jesus' using the Word of God as a weapon to deflect Satan's thrust.

⁸ Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13

- *And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."⁴ But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:3-4)*
- *and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give His angels charge concerning You'; and 'On their hands they will bear You up, Lest You strike Your foot against a stone.'"⁷ Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" (Matthew 4:6-7)⁹*
- *Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory;⁹ and he said to Him, "All these things will I give You, if You fall down and worship me."¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'" (Matthew 4:8-10)*

Much has been made of the word, *rhema* (ῥῆμα) which is the Greek term in the Ephesians 6:17b expression, *word of God* (ῥῆμα θεοῦ - *rhema theou*)

A number of contemporary teachers state that in Ephesians 6:17, *rhema* signifies a special word that God gives to someone for a particular situation, whereas *logos* (λόγος) refers to written Scripture. These teachers would state that Paul is not referring to Scripture, but prophetic revelation in specific situations or a verse or a portion of a verse that God enlivens to an individual in a specific situation.

This view is too simplistic. *Rhema* normally has the idea of *something communicated*. The Greeks used the term to indicate something communicated by any means - something that was spoken, something written, a phrase or passage in literature or a speech, etc.

Logos (λόγος), on the other hand, refers to a *word*, an *idea*, or a *thing*. Sometimes, *logos* and *rhema* are used as synonyms. Here are some examples:

In Luke 18:34 *rhema* clearly refers to a spoken word.

And they understood none of these things, and this saying (rhema) was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said.

In Matthew 4:4, *rhema* refers to something spoken and possibly written.

Matthew 4:4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word (rhema) that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'"

As noted above, *logos* normally is the term used in reference to a *word*, an *idea*, or a *thing*. Thus, we would expect *logos* to be the term used in Luke 1:37, but it is not *logos*, but *rhema* that is used for *thing* in this verse.

For nothing (no thing [rhema]) will be impossible with God.¹⁰

⁹ Note that Satan sought to use the Scriptures in the same manner that the Word of Faith teachers use Scripture – extracting a single verse from Scripture, without taking into account the immediate context or the context of the entire corpus of Scripture.

¹⁰ ὅτι οὐκ ἀδυνατήσκει παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ πᾶν ῥῆμα – literal translation, “since not unable from God all thing.”

Therefore, we must note the context to determine what meaning is communicated by the terms. Since the context of Ephesians 6:10-17 has to do with the individual believer's survival in the midst of Satan's maneuvers, we can look to Jesus' use of the Word in His time of temptation, as a model. The use of *rhema* in this passage brings to mind Psalm 119:11, 105:

Thy word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against Thee... Thy word is a lamp to my feet, And a light to my path.

The use of *rhema* in Ephesians 6:17 would indicate that Scripture must be more than just something written by God. It must be heard, accessed, and followed by the believer; it must be a Living Word.

The armor in this passage refers to the believer's relationship with God. Each one must make certain that there is no place in his life for Satan to gain a foothold. Fasting, prayer, meditation on the Word, an honest examination of one's heart before God, these and other spiritual disciplines are valuable means of insuring that the armor is in place.

PART TWO: TAKING THE BATTLE TO THE ENEMY

It is not until verse 19 that Ephesians 6 mentions offensive activity:

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. (Ephesians 6:18-20)

Verse 18 speaks of praying for other saints (survival), then in verses 19-20 Paul speaks of offensive activity. The primary weapon used against Satan's kingdom is preaching of the Gospel. Paul calls the Ephesians to join him in the battle by praying for bold proclamation of the Gospel.

Note that Paul does not ask them to "bind" spirits over the cities and nations where Paul will preach. They are to pray that God will give Paul the words to say (*pray...that utterance may be given to me in the opening in my mouth*) and that he will be as bold as he should be (*that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak*). If the work is that important, and if the enemy is so strong, surely Paul would have asked them to do what needed to be done to win the battle – pray, not bind the spirits having dominion over territories.

Clearly, proclamation of the Gospel is the means whereby individuals are called out of darkness into light. It is through the deliverance of individuals, that societies are changed:¹¹

¹¹ Dominion Theology (although not always recognized as such) has influenced many in the Charismatic and Pentecostal world. This theology is Post-millennial (i.e., The church will achieve spiritual authority over society, transforming it into a society under the dominion of God - Jesus will return to a world that already knows Him as Lord). By declaring that Jesus is Lord over this city or that city, Dominionists hope to change societal morals, etc. The scriptural method for changing societies (if, indeed, society is to be changed) is through the preaching of the Gospel. Intercessory prayer may remove obstacles to the Gospel, but the Gospel must be preached. There is no biblical warrant for declaring Jesus as Lord over a territory, in order to change society (for that matter, changing a society is not a New Testament focus).

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (Romans 1:16)

This reflects what Jesus urged on His disciples:

And He was saying to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech The Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. (Luke 10:2)

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. (Mark 16:15-16)

Paul gave the same exhortation to the Colossians that he had given to the Ephesians. His part was to preach the Gospel. They could join Paul in this endeavor by praying to God, asking Him to open the way for Paul to Preach.

... praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; (Colossians 4:3)

Once again, the instruction is to pray. Every time any activity other than preaching is urged, it always is prayer to God, not binding some demonic hierarchy or power over any territory.

Even though Daniel's experience was before the glorification of Jesus, there is truth for us in Daniel's record. When Daniel interceded, he was praying to God. There was a demonic power over Babylon. In response to Daniel's prayer, a more powerful angel was sent to dislodge the Satanic prince.

Thus, if Daniel's experience communicates anything to us it is that when we are dealing with a Satanic force in the heavenlies, the biblical model is

- to pray to God, asking Him to send a mighty angel to displace the Satanic angel that is influencing a region,
- and, at the same time, for the Holy Spirit to anoint the message and to open the hearts of the hearers.

There is no example in the Bible of prayer marches in which the hierarchies are addressed and driven out by the authority of the believer. Of course, prayer marches which involve prayer and intercession for various portions of the city and the residents thereof are quite appropriate and effective.

There is nothing wrong with seeking to identify territorial spirits, but such is not the concern of Christians in the New Testament. Although they probably were aware of some sort of territorial spirit, they did not display any need to identify these spirits. They prayed to God, trusted Him, and preached the Gospel.

Demon possession

Encountering a demon-possessed individual is another matter. The believer, in the Name of Jesus, has the authority to cast out the demon. Note that the name, *Jesus*, is not some sort of a "magical name"- i.e., that just the name itself has any power. This is demonstrated in the

episode involving the seven sons of Sceva, who during Paul's second visit to Ephesus sought to exercise power over evil spirits.

But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches."¹⁴ And seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this.¹⁵ And the evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?"¹⁶ And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. (Acts 19:13-16)

Only those who are operating under the authority of Jesus Christ have the authority to cast out demons. Doing something "in the name of Jesus" means that Jesus is doing this through His appointed agent – the agent has authority only because it has been given to him by Christ.

Neither Jesus nor any of His disciples "bound" demons. The passage from which this practice has arisen has been often misunderstood.

But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. "Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. (Matthew 12:28-29; see also Mark 3:24ff)

This statement of Jesus is in response to his enemies' claiming that He cast out demons by the power of Satan. He said that before he could take over people's lives, the demons who possessed them had to be removed. He illustrated this by saying that you had to get a homeowner out of the way before you could plunder his house. How did Jesus get the demon who lived in a person out of the way? Not by "binding" Satan. He cast out the demon. It is a far stretch to take this illustrative statement of Jesus as authority for "binding demonic principalities" over cities, etc. (see Addenda A)

PART THREE: THE MINISTRY OF INTERCESSION

First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, (1 Timothy 2:1)¹²

In this exhortation, Paul uses the four terms commonly employed for prayer:

- Δέσις (*desis*), referring to supplications made in special crisis
- Προσευχή (*proseuche*), referring to prayers, in general
- Ἐντεύξις (*enteuksis*), referring to intercessory prayer
- Εὐχαριστία (*eucharistia*), referring to gratitude and expressions of thanksgiving

It is the third of these terms, ἐντεύξις, that is the object of our discussion. One common use of this term is to describe a meeting between two people, for the purpose of negotiation. It also is the term used for a formal petition made to a king or other ruling official. Thus, it becomes the term for intercessory prayer.¹³

¹² In this verse, Paul begins the subject matter of the letter. This is a resumption of the thought in 1:18a, which he interrupted with the parenthetical thoughts of 1:18b-20. So, this is the beginning of the "command I entrust to you, Timothy."

¹³ This is the noun form of the verb, ἐντυγχάνω. The verb is used five times in the New Testament.

In intercession, we come before God with a petition, a pleading, in behalf of someone else. Although the term, *enteuksis*, is not used in the following passages, the activity described clearly falls within the arena of intercession.

Epaphras, who is one of your number, a slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers (proseuche), that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. (Colossians 4:12)

Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers (proseuche) to God for me, (Romans 15:30)

Both of these passages use terms that convey the idea of striving in an athletic contest, an intense battle, or straining every nerve in some intense activity.

- Colossians – ἀγωνίζομαι (*agonizomai*) – to strive or labor earnestly
- Romans – συναγωνίζομαι (*sunagonizomai*) – to strive together or to earnestly labor together

Intercession is this type of intense prayer. Fasting also may be a part of this striving.

In similar vein, Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

Indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us, you also joining in helping us through your prayers, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed upon us through the prayers (desis) of many. (II Corinthians 1:9-11)

The expression, *helping us through your prayers*, *συνυπουργούντων* (*sunupourgounton*) conveys the idea of working together. Paul is saying, *you are cooperating* (or working with us) *with us through your petitions*.

This is the sense of intercessory prayer. The intercessor enters into the life, even identifies with the life, of the one for whom he is praying, with intensity.

There are some wonderful examples of intercession in Scripture. Two of the greatest intercessors were Moses and Paul. First, note Moses' intercession:

"But now, if Thou wilt, forgive their sin-- and if not, please blot me out from Thy book which Thou hast written!" (Exodus 32:32)

Twice it is used in the sense of approaching someone with a complaint (Acts 25:24; Romans 11:2). The other three times (Romans 8:27, 34; Hebrews 7:25) refers to the intercessory activity of the Holy Spirit and of Jesus, our High Priest. The noun, ἐντεύξις, is used only twice in the New Testament, both times in I Timothy (2:1; 4:4). For an excellent discussion of these terms, see, Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume VIII, pages 242-245.

Paul expresses a similar spirit in his plea for Israel:

I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, (Romans 9:1-3)

This sort of commitment to the one for whom the intercession is taking place is the heart of a true intercessor. Note that Paul uses the *voluntative imperfect tense*, which implies, "if I could, I would." God will not allow the intercessor to do so, but the intercessor's heart is such that if he could, he would remove the burden from the one for whom he is interceding and take it on himself. For example, if interceding for someone who has cancer, the intercessor would be willing to take the cancer on himself, if that would remove it from the one for whom he is praying.

Another example of intercession would be Abraham's intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:22-33) in which Abraham dared to negotiate with God.

Of course, the greatest intercession is that which is being done by the Holy Spirit and Our Lord Jesus Christ, for believers, both individually and corporately.

And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words;²⁷ and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27)

who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. (Romans 8:34)

It is significant that in his intercession for us, our intercessor, Jesus, went beyond, "if I could, I would." He did take on Himself our sinful condition.

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM MATERIAL SECTION TWO

- The believer must be prepared for battle, by making certain that he has put on the full armor provided for him, through the cross of Christ, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, and Holy Scripture.
- Preaching of the Gospel is the chief means of winning the battle against forces of darkness.
- If we encounter a demon, and the Holy Spirit motivates us to do so, we cast out the demon, in the Name of Jesus.
- If we are praying for a situation and there seems to be a heavenly authority (world ruler of the darkness) opposing us, we do not address that entity, but cry out to God to send strong angels to war for us - as was done for Daniel.
- Intercessory prayer, in which one identifies with the one for whom he is interceding, to the degree that there is great intensity and passion, is an effective means of defeating spiritual forces and advancing the Kingdom of God.

SECTION THREE: **COMBAT IN THE TRENCHES**

In addition to these large battlegrounds, there are the everyday battles that must be fought by the individual believer and the church. It is important for us to consider these manifestations of spiritual warfare, especially those that involve such matters as temptation, emotional traps, fractured relationships, and other seemingly routine things that give Satan an opportunity to win daily victories.

No one wants to be tested and tried by Satan, but there is a spiritual battle and we are the warriors. In a war, there really is no battle unless there is the potential for wounding of the combatants on both sides. In spiritual warfare, Christians occupy a dual role.

- Christians are the real estate over which God and Satan battle.
- Christians also are God's warriors who fight Satan in the battle.

Thus, when Our Lord allows us to experience trials, tests, and burdens, we are given the opportunity to give Our Lord a victory over the enemy. Satan also has the opportunity to achieve a victory and does so when we fail to live by faith and in obedience to Our Lord.

PART ONE: THE COMMANDER CHOOSES THE BATTLES

Bill Gothard is quoted as having said, "Whether a problem comes from God or Satan, we deal, ultimately, with a Sovereign God."

Our Lord hinted at this truth, when, in the model prayer, He taught us to pray,

Our Father who art in heaven..... 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (Matthew 6:9. 13)

This point is illustrated in Job, which describes Satan as asking permission from God to test Job.

Then Satan answered Jehovah, "Does Job fear God for nothing? ¹⁰ "Hast Thou not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. ¹¹ "But put forth Thy hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse Thee to Thy face." ¹² Then Jehovah said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him." So Satan departed from the presence of Jehovah. (Job 1:9-12)

When Job had lost everything but his wife and his health, Satan approached Jehovah a second time, seeking to test Job further, and the authority of Jehovah in this situation is shown to be the same as when the first request was given. No test could be launched against Job without Jehovah's permission.

And Satan answered Jehovah and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. ⁵ "However, put forth Thy hand, now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse Thee to Thy face." ⁶ So Jehovah said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life." (Job 2:4-6)

This brings to mind the statement made to Peter on the night that Jesus was betrayed,

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; (Luke 22:31)

This also is in keeping with what Paul wrote to the Ephesians,

He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet. (Ephesians 1:20-22)

I Corinthians 10:13 is a key verse in considering the battle, and God's limiting what can be foisted upon us.

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)¹⁴

I Corinthians 10:13 has been an important verse to me. There have been times in my life when one problem after another came upon me. More than once, when the burdens were very heavy, I have said, "I can't take one more thing," and then one more thing came upon me. In those times, I remembered this verse and said to myself, "God has a reason for this situation and He knows what I can bear and if He did not know that I could bear it, He would not let this be happening to me."

It has been very encouraging and strengthening to know that my Commander chooses the battles and the ones I must fight are the ones that He has chosen for me.

PART TWO: MARTYRDOM

One of Satan's consistent activities is to do all that he can to remove from this world anyone who carries the light Christ into the world of darkness. Thus, he seeks to kill all who are true followers of Jesus. Our Lord predicted that it would be so. When He gave the parable of the sheepfold, He stated,

"The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly. (John 10:10)

Here are some more of Jesus' statements warning His followers that hatred and martyrdom would be their experience through the centuries.

"Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name. (Matthew 24:9)

"But beware of men; for they will deliver you up to the courts, and scourge you in their synagogues; (Matthew 10:17)

¹⁴ Two questions concerning this verse present themselves (1) is the temptation referenced in this verse an enticement to sin, or it a trial that that is the result of some life circumstance; (2) what is the meaning of *provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it?* Even though these questions intrigue us, if we pursued the answer to these questions at this point in our study, it would be a distraction from the point being made in this paper, which is: God chooses our battles.

"And you will be hated by all on account of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. (Matthew 10:22)

"They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. (John 16:2)

Paul reminded Timothy of this truth.

And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (2 Timothy 3:12)

Throughout the history of the Church, Satan has been successful in removing Christian witnesses from society by killing them. More Christians died for their faith in the final decades of the last century than were killed in all of the preceding years of the Church. In nation after nation, Satan continues to slaughter Jesus' disciples, seeking to destroy all who bring salvation and the lordship of Christ into their respective societies.

When faced with such violence and hatred, the follower of Christ must stand strong and accept discrimination, torture, and martyrdom rather than forsake Our Lord. As quoted above, *it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.*

PART THREE: SATAN'S SCHEMES

Paul's statement to the Corinthians is so important for God's warriors to remember.

in order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes. (2 Corinthians 2:11)

Concerning the schemes of the devil, and the importance of being prepared to stand against them, as noted earlier, Paul wrote to the Ephesians,

Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. (Ephesians 6:10)

In a similar vein, Peter wrote,

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

Our adversary is relentless, clever, and will stoop to anything to achieve his goal, which ultimately is to dethrone God – a goal that he cannot achieve - but for the present he is attempting to rob God of that which rightfully belongs only to Him.

In the following pages, we call attention to some of Satan's most effective and consistent schemes.

Spiritual Ova – the source of personal sin

James presents an interesting picture of how sin is born.

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.¹⁵ Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. (James 1:13-15)

From this vivid image, we glean an understanding of how Satan works to cause us to sin. Each one of us has within us certain ova, which James describes as “lust.” Not all have the same collection of ova. For example, picture a man in a checkout line at a store. The cashier begins the transaction and just as the cash register drawer is opened, the cashier’s supervisor calls the cashier away from the register – just for a few moments. The customer sees the cash in front of him, totally unattended, and he cannot resist the urge to take some of the unattended cash. He steals a few dollars, but not enough for the cashier to notice. He leaves the store, starts up the sidewalk and passes a movie theater, showing erotic films. In front of the theater is a scantily clad woman, who invites him to buy a ticket and enter the theater. He passes her by, without the slightest inclination to enter the theater.

This man, had an ovum of lust for money, but not an ovum of lust for eroticism.

Picture another man in the same scenario. The second man has no impulse to reach into the cash drawer and take any money, but when he leaves the store and passes the X-rated movie theater, he cannot resist the enticement and so he buys a ticket and enters the darkened auditorium. This man did not have an ovum of lust for money, but he had an ovum of lust for eroticism.

Satan is not omniscient; only God is omniscient. Even so, Satan’s minions study us well and by observation they learn which ova dwells in each person. They then seek to create situations that will fertilize one of the ova in an individual, and when they succeed, he/she gives birth to sin.

It is important for each of us to be honest about the particular ovum and collection of ova that dwells in us.

- It is important for us to read the Scriptures in fellowship with the Holy Spirit, so that we might become aware of some of the unrecognized ova that dwell within us.
- Because our hearts are deceitful, it also is important for us to sit before God and ask Him to reveal to us any ova that are hidden or those to which we are blind, or those of which we are in denial.
- It also is helpful to have trusted friends who will be honest with us, and help us to know ourselves and our tendencies.

The Sin of Division

One frequent result of Satan’s fertilizing particular ova in individuals is division. The ovum may be a wounded spirit, an ambitious or jealous spirit, or any other number of ova that cause actions and attitudes that cause division. When such division happens, Satan rejoices.

For twenty-one years, I spent several weeks each summer as a part of the staff of Sunset Bible Camp. Sunset Bible Camp was for boys and girls, from elementary school through high school. The camp curriculum was “graded,” i.e. each week the campers consisted of a particular age group (first week, those 8 & 9 years old, second week, those in the 6th grade, etc.).

For most of those years, I was on the faculty, but for a couple of years I was the camp manager. Each weekly session began at 2 PM on Sunday afternoon and ended at noon on Saturday. The camp was held at Greenleaf State Park, about a ninety-minute drive from Tulsa.

The weeks that Sunset Bible Camp were in session were quite busy for me. On Sunday morning, I taught a Sunday school class, preached a sermon at the Sunday morning service, then loaded up a group of boys and girls in a van, or a bus, or in a caravan of automobiles, and drove to Greenleaf State Park. After getting the campers enrolled for the week, and everyone settled in their dorm, I would drive back to Tulsa, preach at an evening service, then drive back to Greenleaf State Park to serve in camp through the rest of the week (occasionally, someone else would fill the pulpit for the evening service).

One week in the late 1970's, I had been so busy that I had not found time to prepare a sermon for the Sunday night service. As I was driving back to Tulsa, I began praying for God to give me a word for the evening, but nothing seemed to be happening. Then, as I was passing near Coweta, Oklahoma, about one hour before I was scheduled to preach, the odor of a skunk filled the automobile. While I was driving as fast as the law allowed, with the windows open, seeking to get away from the smell, the Lord spoke to me, "That is your sermon tonight. You cannot mistake the odor of a skunk. When you smell that odor, you know that a skunk is in the vicinity. The same is true of Satan. Satan has an odor and his odor is division. Anytime, you see division, that means that in some way, Satan has been, or is, present. That is your sermon tonight."

An hour later, as the Holy Spirit enlarged on that theme, the congregation of Bellaire Christian Church heard the sermon concerning Satan's odor – the odor of division.

I never have forgotten that event. It has come back to me time and again, as I have had to deal with division –in a divided marriage, conflict between parent and child, division in a congregation, division between churches, division in a community, etc., etc. etc.. Division is the result of many things: human emotions, false doctrine, greed for power or money; the list could go on and on, but every time division has invaded a relationship, Satan's odor is present.

It has been true since the fall of humanity. Originally, there was peace, harmony, and true oneness in the Garden of Eden. Humans were in beautiful and perfect harmony with God. They were in beautiful harmony with one another – then came Satan with his enticing sin and leaving behind his unmistakable odor.

Prior to their sin, recorded in Genesis 3, man and woman were naked; they were not "self"-conscious. Interestingly, the very first evidence of their sin was their realization that they were naked – they became conscious of "self" and made primitive covering for themselves – no longer naked before one another but separate in their self-perception – division.

Separation from God soon became evident and then separation from the Garden. Thus, even though Eve's Satan-inspired doubt produced the first sin, the first manifestation of the fall of mankind was separation – division.

From that time onward, beginning with Cain and Abel, the biblical account contains one story after another that manifests Satan's odor – division.

Scripture has much to say, concerning division in the Church, both local and trans-local. Here are some pertinent passages:

There are six things which Jehovah hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him:

Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers. (Proverbs 6:16-19)

Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. (Romans 16:17)

that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. (1 Corinthians 12:25)

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,²¹ envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21)

All who belong to Jesus Christ must be touched by His High Priestly prayer, which he uttered as the conclusion to his farewell discourse in the upper room, prior to going to Gethsemane. In the very heart of His prayer is a plea for the unity of His disciples, both those who were with Him at that time, and for those who would be His disciples throughout the coming ages.

"I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine; (John 17:9)

"And I am no more in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, the name which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, even as We are. (John 17:11)

"I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;²¹ that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me.²² "And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one;²³ I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me. (John 17:20-23)

Satan is dedicated to opposing the fulfillment of that prayer and sadly, he has been successful in every generation and in every place.

When we see division, we must ask, "Where is Satan in this scenario; what emotion, need, or deception is he using to cause this division; what ovum has he fertilized?" Usually, his divisive tool is obvious, but there are times when revelation from the Spirit is needed to discern the hidden instrument that Satan has used to produce his odor.

What can be done to remove Satan's odor, in a given situation, and if it cannot be removed, what is to be our response?

Our desire should be to remove the odor and when the division is between two believers, Jesus'

gave clear instructions concerning how we are to seek to remove the odor.

"If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,²⁴ leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering." (Matthew 5:23-24)

In this scenario, if a believer becomes aware of another believer's harboring some sort of resentment against him, he is obligated to seek out the offended person and seek reconciliation.

The second scenario we consider describes a believer who has been offended by another believer. When this happens it is important for the one who has been offended to go to the offending believer and seek reconciliation.

"And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.¹⁶ "But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.¹⁷ "And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer.¹⁸ "Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.¹⁹ "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven.²⁰ "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst." (Matthew 18:15-20)

In response to this command, Peter asked,

Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" (Matthew 18:21)

Jesus then, in hyperbolic language, replied,

"I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. (Matthew 18:22)

Jesus then recited a parable, in which a slave owed his master ten thousand talents (more than ten million dollars in the worth of silver, but much more in buying power). The slave was brought before the master and since he had no means of paying back the debt, the master instructed his other slaves to sell the offending slave, along with his wife and children, and everything that the slave's family owned. The slave fell on his knees before his master and pled for mercy. Amazingly, the master, in an act of huge compassion, forgave the slave.

Later this slave found another slave that owed him a denarii (equivalent to one day's pay) and he demanded payment. Because the debtor slave could not repay the debt, the first slave had him thrown into prison. When word reached the master of this event, he called before him the slave whom he had forgiven and castigated him for not showing the same mercy that he had been shown. The master then had the unforgiving slave turned over to the torturers.

Jesus concluded this parable with this stark and uncompromising statement,

"So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart." (Matthew 18:35)

This reply echoes what Our Lord spoke when He gave the model prayer during the Sermon on the Mount,

"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors... For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions. (Matthew 6:12, 14-15)

We must interpret the instructions in Matthew 18:15-20 in the light of the other commands of Christ. When we do this, it becomes evident that where offenses and division are present, all of us are obligated to seek reconciliation – thus removing Satan's odor.

However, if a member of the church refuses every effort to achieve reconciliation in the manner that Our Lord prescribed in Matthew 18:15-20, then he/she is to be regarded as a stranger, one outside of the Family of God. He/she has become an agent of division, spreading the odor of Satan. He/she is in the category of one who needs to be evangelized as is true of anyone not in the Family of God.

Even so, in response to the clear and full teaching of Our Lord, it is clear that even though the offending brother who refuses reconciliation must be shunned, the one who was sinned against, must forgive the offender and it must be done from the heart.

This is an important truth and can be illustrated by this analogy: Should someone defraud me, causing me to lose money, I must not harbor unforgiveness in my heart toward that person, but I would be a fool to do business with him again, unless he acknowledges his sin and truly repents.

Whatever means Satan uses, he has been very effective in bringing division into the Body of Christ. His odor has been constant, even from the beginning. Sadly, one of Satan's most effective instruments of division has been his continuing ownership of certain members of the Church, who though they appear to be true slaves of Jesus Christ, are false in their identity. No doubt it was with sadness that Paul wrote to the schismatic Corinthian Church,

For there must also be factions among you, in order that those who are approved may have become evident among you. (1 Corinthians 11:19)

False Doctrines

Paul's exhortation to the Ephesian elders has proven to be a worthy exhortation in every age of the Church.

"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. (Acts 20:28-31)

Paul wrote to the Romans,

Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. (Romans 16:17)

This is a situation in which Satan's odor is the result of someone's teaching false doctrine, and church leadership's having to confront and, in some cases shun, the purveyor of doctrines that are false. This especially is sad when those who are "speaking perverse things," draw away disciples after them.

When such teachers are perverting the truth, elders and other leaders must confront them.

And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged,²⁵ with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth,²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. (2 Timothy 2:24-26)

When a teacher of false doctrine does not repent, but persists in propagating his doctrine, then he must be shunned – even excommunicated. In such a situation, Satan's odor has become doubly strong, because the division first was caused by his deception, then division is the result of the action by the shepherds of the flock who must shun the divisive teacher. Sadly, when this happens, usually some of the flock will leave the church because the leadership has come against a doctrine that the deluded sheep have come to hold dear. So, once again, Satan's odor has become quite strong and odious.

Yet, if the leadership had not acted, they would be accountable to God for allowing a wolf to ravish the sheep.

Of equal and perhaps more serious concern is the eternal consequences of false doctrine – not only can it be divisive, but it also can be damning. The central theme of Paul's Second Letter to Timothy is the importance of sound doctrine. In the first chapter Paul exhorts Timothy,

Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.¹⁴ Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you. (2 Timothy 1:13-14)

Then, throughout the rest of the epistle, he mentions examples of false doctrine, and quarrelsome doctrines that various one's have introduced, which result in spiritual tragedy.

This also is true of Paul's other polemical writings, such as Galatians, in which he exposes the danger of Judaizing teachers.

The propositional theme of Jude is a warning against those who seek to pervert the *faith once delivered to the saints* (Jude 3-4).

I John is a polemic against Gnosticism, which denied the incarnation (I John 1:1; 4:2-3; etc.)

Satan is behind all false doctrine, because through false doctrine he can bring division and, as noted above in II Timothy 2:26, even lay destructive claim to many who otherwise would be safe in God's Kingdom.

The visions given to Daniel, recorded in Daniel Chapter 7, present a panorama of the rise and fall of various kingdoms. After ten kingdoms have arisen and dominated the world, another king will arise, who is different from the others. This particular king will display a foolishly blasphemous spirit, even speaking out against God Himself. As an expression of his haughty spirit, he will seek to change the reality concerning the times, and to alter the laws that govern mankind.

And he will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. (Daniel 7:25)

God will allow this blasphemous ruler to have a bit of time to ply his evil, but only for a season.

'But the court will sit for judgment, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever. (Daniel 7:26)

One of this evil being's ploys is to exhaust the *saints of the Highest One*. This is consistent with Satan's ongoing design in every age –attempting to weary God's people to the point that they will just give up and quit.

Thus, Paul urged the Galatians and the Thessalonians,

And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary. (Galatians 6:9)

But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good. (2 Thessalonians 3:13)

The Epistle to the Hebrews cites Jesus as an example of not allowing weariness to deter Him from the course that was set before Him.

For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart. (Hebrews 12:3)

In The Apocalypse, the Ephesian Church is commended for not allowing weariness to cause them to quit.

and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. (Revelation 2:3)

In our present age, the description of the ruler who seeks to change seasons and laws (i.e., those established matters that always have been considered to be basic and true) is an apt description of Twenty-first Century western culture. In the Declaration of Independence, America's founders appealed to the "laws of nature and nature's God." Today, with the courts' redefinition of marriage, increasing restrictions of religious freedom, legalizing abortion, etc., saints of the Most High are facing a world such as has never been seen before – a world that does not recognize the laws of nature and nature's God.

Another manner in which the present age is different from previous ages is that in previous ages there were moral standards and institutions that were assumed and enforced by society, i.e. "the laws of nature." Today, everything is up for grabs and absolutes increasingly are discounted. The post-modernist motto, "My truth is my truth and your truth is your truth," increasingly is society's assumption.

In this topsy-turvy world, the Saints of the Most High are forced to live in a culture that is hostile to the things of God. Reacting to this situation, many grow so weary that they just give up. When this happens, the god of this world, Satan, has won another victory.

Considering our age, we are reminded of what Paul wrote describing the age in which he lived,

in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:4)

NOTE: the Greek term rendered, *world*, in this verse is αἰών (*aion*), which more accurately is rendered as *age*, i.e., *the god of this age*.

What are we to do about the situation? How can we open the eyes of those whom the god of this age has blinded?

The answer is found in Paul's ministry in Corinth. As a result of Paul's preaching and teaching in Corinth, there was born one of the largest and most vibrant (but also aberrant) churches of the First Century. How did this happen? He gives the answer in I Corinthians 2:1-5.

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.² For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.³ And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.⁴ And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,⁵ that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)

In the Acts 18:1-18 record of Paul's ministry in Corinth (of which I Corinthians 2:1-5 is a commentary), we see Paul relentlessly proclaiming Christ, first in the synagogue and then in the home of Justus, whose house was next door to the synagogue. Many believed Paul's message and were being immersed into Christ.

Even though Paul was being diligent in his proclamation, the Lord spoke to him in a dream, instructing him to continue, in spite of any opposition that might come against him.

And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent;¹⁰ for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city." (Acts 18:9-10)

Acts 18 then describes the growing opposition to Paul, but in obedience to the exhortation from the Lord, Paul relentlessly proclaimed Christ, resulting in the birth of the thriving Church at Corinth.

A second important thing to note is that there were no miracles performed as confirmation of Paul's proclamation. All that Paul did was to proclaim Christ.

When we join the record in Acts with Paul's comments in I Corinthians, it becomes clear that Paul's success was the result of obedience and the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

This points us back to prayer. In our age, in which the god of this age is blinding the eyes of the unbelieving, it behooves us to enter into impassioned prayer for Our Lord to anoint our preaching and witnessing, and to open the eyes and hearts of those in this spiritually blinded culture. This truly is a spiritual battle, not a political battle, not a philosophical battle, but a spiritual battle for the souls of those blinded by our enemy.

In an age such as ours, a common tendency is to retire from the battle and focus on ourselves. Creating congregations that are well-oiled machines becomes our single focus – this is a place of safety. For that matter, this is exactly what many in our contemporary culture want Christians to do. The term, “freedom to worship,” means that as Christians we should meet together in our church buildings, but not express our faith outside of that circle.

We must not grow weary, in spite of all that the god of this age does to wear us out and cause us to just, give up. Prayerfully guided and spiritually empowered, we must continue to take the battle to the enemy – preaching the Gospel to the lost even as we shepherd the Flock of God.

We must move forward in hope. As noted in the verses of Daniel with which we began this section, concerning the blasphemous ruler, *dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever.*

Even as Paul exhorted the Galatians, *in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary.*

In a concluding note, Revelation 12:10-11 records John’s vision,

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night. ¹¹ "And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even to death. (Revelation 12:10-11)

The ultimate victory does not belong to the accuser of the brethren, the one who would wear out the saints, but the ultimate victory belongs to Christ and sharing that victory with Him will be those who overcame the accuser *because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even to death.*

Let us not grow weary in well-doing.

The catalogue of Satan’s schemes is so vast and the items so numerous. That it is almost impossible to produce an exhaustive list. We have noted four of the most common.

PART FOUR: AN IMPORTANT EXHORTATION

One of the most important verses relating to the personal battle in the trenches is Ephesians 4:27.

and do not give the devil an opportunity.

The Greek term rendered, *opportunity* (NAS), *place* (KJV), *foothold* (NIV), is τόπος, which literally means, *place*.

A literal translation of this verse is, *neither give the devil a place.*

The exhortation is to not give Satan any piece of real estate in your personal life that he can claim as his and use to attack you – even defeat you.

This exhortation calls to mind Jesus words spoken during His sermon on the mount,

"And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. "And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it

from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell. (Matthew 5:29-30)

This somewhat startling statement is preceded by Jesus' declaration that to lust after a woman is to commit adultery in the heart, and Jesus' pronouncement against the sin of divorce immediately follows these two verses.

It is as if Our Lord blurted out, in an impassioned way, the premise that anything which causes us to sin, or tends to cause us to sin, should be eliminated because nothing is of such value that it exceeds the joy of heaven or is more important than the avoidance of hell.

Thus, regardless of the context in which this declaration is given, it is true, in any situation.

Each of God's warriors must honestly ask himself/herself, "Is there anything in my life that Satan can use to cause me to sin; is anything more important to me than my relationship with my Lord?"

This is not an easy thing to do, because we are so self-deceived – yet it must be done or else we are at risk of spiritual failure.

Such things can take a variety of forms. I know of one man who was an excellent musician, having his own rock band and was experiencing growing reputation. Yet drugs were a part of that scene and they controlled his life. Because of drugs his marriage failed, and he was not the father to his children that he could have been. Today, that man has nothing to do with music, because it was the environment in which drugs ruled him. He realizes that to return to music would be opening his life to the temptation to reenter the drug world – he knows himself well enough to know that to return to his life as a musician would be giving the devil a place in his life. The decision to leave music behind was like cutting off his right hand, but he did it, and now lives a very productive and fulfilling life in another profession.

In our digital age, there are so many places that the devil can claim as his "place." Some hard to make decisions might be required of us to rob him of that place. Are there devices that we need to get rid of, or find ways to control?

Are there relationships that the devil uses to pull us away from God – relationships to which we must put an end.

Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals." (1 Corinthians 15:33)

Even one's "ministry" can become the devil's place. When a person finds his worth and identity in a title or a role, rather than as a slave of Jesus Christ, he/she is in danger. Tragically, in recent years we have seen several men and women of God fall into Satan's trap because their sense of worth was tied to a role or a title. That position became the devil's place and through that place he brought down to disgrace the man or woman of God.

Once again, the abundance of illustrations of a truth could be an inexhaustible list, but the important truth is to pray to Our Lord, asking Him to sensitize us to anything in our lives that the devil can claim as his "place."

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM MATERIAL SECTION THREE

- God, the Commander, chooses the believer's battles
- From Satan's perspective, there is no restriction on what he would do to destroy Christians – there are “no holds barred.”
- Even so, Satan cannot do anything to a Christian that God, for reasons known only to Him, will allow.
- Satan seeks to kill every Christian in order to remove God's witness to a fallen world.
- Satan studies each Christian and knows what “ova” exists in each person. He then seeks to create situations in which that ova is fertilized and gives birth to sin.
- One of Satan's most effective and persistent schemes is to bring about division.
- Satan consistently seeks to foment false and divisive doctrines
- Through constant attack on the individual Christian and through the manipulation of a society, Satan seeks to exhaust Christians so that they will just, “give up.”
- Holy Spirit anointed proclamation of the truths of the Gospel are God's means of delivering people and cultures from the ploys of Satan

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

As Christians, citizens of God's Kingdom, our focus must not be on Satan, but on Our Lord. Hebrews 12:1-2 is an important description of how we are to conduct our journey through life.

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Yet, even as we keep our eyes on Jesus, we also must be aware of that being who is God's enemy and our enemy. We must not be ignorant of who he is, his hierarchy of evil beings, and the various schemes and maneuvers that he employs in his efforts to defeat God and to destroy those who belong to God.

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

We must be aware of those areas of our lives that are not fully sanctified and be wary that Satan does not snare us through our weaknesses and lusts.

It is important that each day we make certain that we are wearing the full armor of God.

We must know the weapons and maneuvers that Our Lord has given us to use in defeating Satan's dark forces – in our private lives and in the world at large.

We must remember that come what may, the ultimate victory belongs to Our God and to His People.

ADDENDUM

Binding and Loosing

I. GENERAL COMMENTS

The terms, *binding* and *loosing*, are used to refer to two different specific actions in the New Testament. Most often, when these two terms are used together, they refer to some aspect of a person's relationship to the Kingdom of God. The modern practice of *binding Satan* (by reciting a formula such as, *Satan, I bind you in the Name of Jesus*), as is done by many in Charismatic circles, finds no warrant in the New Testament. *Loosing*, however, when used in the sense of loosing someone from a Satan-imposed bondage is a New Testament concept. One example of such terminology is in Luke 13:10-16:

*And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. 11 And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. 12 And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art **loosed** from thine infirmity. 13 And he laid his ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day. 15 The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? 16 And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom **Satan hath bound**, lo, these eighteen years, be **loosed** from this bond on the Sabbath day? (KJV)¹⁵*

The practice of *binding and loosing* Satan comes from Jesus' comments in defense of his action in casting out a demon (or demons) from a man who was blind and dumb. Here is the record:

Then there was brought to Him a demon-possessed man who was blind and dumb, and He healed him, so that the dumb man spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed, and began to say, 'This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?' But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, 'This man casts out demons only by Bezebul the ruler of the demons.'

And knowing their thoughts He said to them, 'Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself shall not stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then shall his kingdom stand? And if I by Bezebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? Consequently they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.' (Matthew 12:22-29 NAS)

Because Jesus used the figure of binding a man to explain why it was necessary to cast out demons, a frequently heard expression in deliverance ministry is, *Satan, I bind you!* The concept conveyed by those who use this expression in spiritual warfare is, *Satan, I tie you up so you cannot do anything here.* Such an act is unknown in the New Testament. Demons were *cast out*, they were not *bound*.

¹⁵ We have cited the KJV in this section because it uses the term, *loosed*. The Greek term is ἀπολύω, which means to *release*, or *loose*, or some such synonym.

In the statements before us (Matthew 12:22-29), Our Lord defended His casting out of demons by the power of God. He declared that in order for God to take over the life of a person, any demons in that person's life must be removed. Jesus illustrated this by referring to robbers who entered a house to plunder it. Robbers cannot plunder the house until the home-owner is taken out of the way. This usually was accomplished by tying up the home-owner, then robbing the house. The point is not that the home-owner was bound, but that he was removed from interfering with the robbery. This is what Jesus did every time He cast out a demon (or demons). He removed the demons so that He could take possession of the soul that had been freed from demonic ownership. Our Lord never *bound* a demon. He drove them out of their former habitation.

The modern practice of binding and loosing Satan is the result of building doctrine on an illustration. Illustration cannot be the source of sound doctrine. Instead, doctrine should be built on precepts and consistent examples. Illustrations only make doctrine clear to us. As stated above Jesus and the Apostles never bound Satan or a demon. They cast them out. Following their example, we must have the faith and courage to do the same. Of course, it is a lot easier to say, *Satan, I bind you*, than it is to say, *In the Name of Jesus, I command you to leave!* If a demon is commanded to leave, the evidence of his departure usually is clear. If Our Master tells us to cast out a demon, we have the authority to do that. No demon can stand against that authority. We need to drop the cowardly language of binding and become bold in casting out.

II. BINDING AND LOOSING WITH REFERENCE TO THE KINGDOM OF GOD

As stated above, the terminology, *binding and loosing*, is used most often in the context of our relationship with the Kingdom of God. Sometimes, the binding and loosing is achieved by bringing the word that delivers from sin. The terminology also refers it to church discipline.

A. Peter's Role in Binding and Loosing

Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.
(Matthew 16:17-19)

The subject of this passage is the Church and Peter's role in the founding of it. To him were given the keys of the kingdom of heaven.¹⁶ He was going to be the one to open the gates of heaven to men. This was done, first, on the Day of Pentecost, as he opened heaven to the Jews (Acts 2). It was done a second time in Samaria, as he opened the gates of heaven to the half-breed Jews (Acts 8). It was done a third time as he opened the gates of heaven to Gentiles (Acts 10).

¹⁶ The Greek terminology in this statement is very clear – the promise that keys to the kingdom of heaven would be given, clearly was to Peter and to Peter alone. The Greek is δώσω σοι (*doso soi*). *Soi* is the second person singular pronoun, meaning, “you;” Thus, Jesus said, “I give to you, Peter, the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” Had the promise been to other disciples or to the Church at large, the pronoun would have been, ὑμῖν (*humin*), the second person plural pronoun.

To Peter was given the privilege and responsibility of bringing all races into a binding relationship with the Kingdom. This was done through the preaching of the Gospel and the sovereign bestowal of the Holy Spirit. Each time the Gospel is preached, there usually are two responses. Some accept the word and are bound in a Kingdom relationship; some reject and are not bound into that relationship.

There is no mention of binding and loosing demons in this passage.

B. Binding and Loosing with Respect to a Recalcitrant Sinner

An understanding of loosing is clearer in the second instance of the use of these terms. The subject is reconciliation between dissenting brothers.

And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer. Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 18:15-18)

Here the gathered church functions as a court, judging between two brothers who are at odds with one another. When the church pronounces judgment, its decision is binding (This assumes that the pronouncement is in harmony with God's revelation. There are times when carnal church authorities have made pronouncements which have not reflected the heart of God. In these instances, the leaders fit the description of the pharisaical hypocrites of Matthew 23). This reflects the rabbinical practice of binding certain matters upon synagogues. In the rabbinical literature, one finds expressions such as, *Rabbi X binds.....* and *Rabbi C looses.....* So, when the disputing brothers come before the church, the church should hear them out and pronounce a decision. This decision is binding upon the brothers. If a brother does not heed the judgment, he is to be excommunicated.

C. The Apostles' Role in Retaining and Remitting

A third instance in which similar, if not identical, terminology is used occurred on the night the resurrected Lord appeared to the eleven apostles. Here is the record:

Jesus therefore said to them again, 'Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.' And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.' (John 20:21-23)

Our Lord here referred to the general ministry of the apostles. Certainly their ministry of preaching the Gospel is covered by this statement, because it is in response to our rejection of the Gospel that sins are removed or retained. Jesus' words also reflect the statement recorded in Matthew 18.

Roman Catholicism has taken these three passages (Matthew 16; Matthew 18; John 20) to mean that the Church (which they identify as the Roman Catholic Church) has the power to forgive sin or to retain sin. The system of confession, penance, the Mass, etc. is erected upon this foundation. The consistent witness of Scripture, however, is that such forgiveness or condemnation is dependent on how one responds to the Gospel.

III. WHAT ABOUT THE "AUTHORITY OF THE BELIEVER"?

In recent years, some Christians have taken these verses to mean that they can go about binding and loosing things and that heaven has to honor their action. Often, such teachers speak of this as the *authority of the believer*. Thus, heaven becomes the servant of the believer.

This view misses the sense of the Greek terms employed. In every one of these passages the Greek is in the periphrastic future perfect tense, passive voice. A near literal translation of each of these passages would contain the thought, *already has been* (Note- most interlinear Bibles bring out this sense of the Greek in their literal translations).

.....shall already have been bound.....shall already have been loosed.
.....shall already have been forgiven.....shall already have been retained.

- A believer can only bind what God already has decreed as bound.
- He can loose only what heaven already has decreed as loosed.¹⁷

For example, if I preach the Gospel and someone accepts it, God already has declared such to be freed from sin. If they reject, God already has declared such to be still in their sin.

If disputing brothers come before the church for arbitration, and one of the brothers refuses to abide by the decision, then heaven already has declared such a one excommunicated. The church is only enforcing what God has already declared.

How a tenant is evicted from a house illustrates the meaning of these Scriptures. A judge issues an eviction notice. The sheriff goes to the house and physically removes the tenant. The sheriff has no authority to remove the tenant unless the judge has issued an eviction notice.

As the slave of Christ, I cannot bind anything or loose anything that My Master has not decreed already bound or loosed. I only have authority in the situation if The Lord has made legal pronouncement upon it. Such pronouncements usually are contained in Scripture. Sometimes, of course, God gives special revelation for specific situations.

¹⁷ Some would argue that the two verses that follow Matthew 18:15-18 (verses 19-20) refer to the authority that believers have to speak forth things that heaven has to honor. It should be noted that there is not a sense of bold declaration in these verses. Instead, there is a sense of humbly "asking".