



Shield of Victory

Any Christian who plays his or her part in the mission and ministry of the church is liable at times to come under attack from the devil. Those in the front line of Christian ministry should expect to face spiritual attack at periods in their ministry. Yet the vast majority of Christians, and possibly also many Christian leaders, are inadequately trained in defending themselves against such attack.

Our first difficulty in handling spiritual attack is distinguishing it. Spiritual attack can be confused with both the consequences of disobedience to God's rules for holy living or with a difficult period in our lives as a result of our interaction with the rest of (fallen) humanity. Some people can be accused of seeing a demon under every bush, whilst others have never been willing to admit to the possibility of the devil attacking them, if they are even prepared to admit to the reality of his existence.

Yet Satan does exist, and he wants to thwart the plans of the Kingdom. He is not pleased to have his territory threatened, or to see leaders with vision for growing God's kingdom. When God's people start getting serious about being obedient to Him, then Satan is provoked. Although Christ has won the final victory over Satan on the cross, we are in a period of "mopping up" where skirmishes around the edge will continue until the battle is completed when Jesus Christ comes again.

In particular, leaders are likely to come under spiritual oppression and attack. Some have argued that once we have accepted Jesus Christ as our saviour then we are immune from attack. However, if we were immune from attack, then we would not need passages such as Paul's teaching on the armour of Christ.

Recognising Attacks

Satan's attacks are sneaky. That's his hallmark. His trait is to capitalise on human weakness by planting doubts, fear and anxiety in the hearts of Christians. He is the deceiver. His ultimate aim is to convince Christians that the security of their faith in Christ is a lie. Attacks seem to come in a number of different ways :

- anxiety - Satan plays on our fears, bringing back into our minds things that are from the past, and belong in the past.
- on church life. Division, disunity and personal attacks on church members.
- on relationships. Satan loves division between Christians. We should remember that people are never the enemy, although the attack may often come through people. That is part of the devil's game. Ultimately temptation can lead Christians into improper relationships.
- through illness, especially those which are easy to pass off - back pains, headaches, tiredness. This is not to say that all back pain, headaches and tiredness are spiritual attack - we need to discern carefully what is what!
- Satan often uses the darkness - nightmares, insomnia, and other night related concerns.

Four Defences

Before moving onto four defences that God has given us, first note an important fact. Our defences must be in place all the time. An army who waits until they are under attack to take up a defensive position is likely to have insufficient time to fully take up their positions. The advantage of surprise attack has been proved many times throughout military history. It is so for spiritual attack, and our defences need to be in place at all times.

History has also shown on many occasions that a small defensive force can withstand attack from much larger number if it has strong defences. Consider Nehemiah, who positioned half of his men as guards whilst the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt, ready and prepared to ward off such attack. So strong were their defences that the enemy did not attack. (Neh 4:16ff). The means of defence that God has provided us with are more than enough.

1. Knowing that we are IN CHRIST.

Our first defence is knowing that as Christians, we are fully covered by the protection offered by our Lord. Here are some scriptures which tell us where we stand as Christians : Psalm 91, Psalm 18:2, 1 John 4:4, Col 3:1-3. Read them now.

The amazing thing about coming to faith is that God places us by his sovereign power in Jesus. Lance Lambert writes "That is your position if you are a child of God. Your position in the sight of God is in Christ. He is not a child of God who is not in Christ. For to be a Christian is to be in Christ, and Christ to be in you." (Understanding Spiritual Protection, L. Lambert p9)

It is not enough to read it, it is not even enough to believe it when we read it. We must believe it fully with our lives, that we can enter into confidence that we are in Christ. Satan's strategy is to con us into believing that this is not true, to allow us to become uncovered.

Yet at times we allow ourselves to become uncovered. Sin can remove us from God's protection, especially deliberate and repetitive sin. The first step is to know that we have moved out from under that protection, through doubt and disbelief, through sin or through a lack of trust in God. From there, it is a simple, although not easy, step to confessing our weakness, doubt and sin and allowing God's mercy and grace to cover us again.

2. The armour of God

Ephesians 6 (11-18) is a classic passage on the armour that God provides. Note that Paul says "put on" the armour. For many years I knew that God's armour existed, but I did not know how to put it on. I've had to learn how, for example, to buckle on the belt of truth, or what it means to use the shield of faith.

Sometimes we can leave part of the armour off. Soldiers in partial armour may find it easier to move, but are leaving themselves partially uncovered, and are an easy target for enemy archers. We need to learn to "put on" the whole armour, we need to learn to use the shield of faith, bringing it between ourselves and the "fiery darts" of the devil and we need to learn to use the sword of the spirit.

This is true both for individual Christians and for the church. Reading this passage in the context of the whole letter to the Ephesians, we see it as a vital component of Paul's teaching on living out the gospel as a community of faith. He addresses the corporate church, rather than singular Christian scouts on a mission of spiritual warfare against demons. Lone soldiers make easy targets.

3. Praise and worship

Psalms 149 describes the praise of God as a double edged sword (v6). Singing God's praise was a powerful weapon for Jehoshaphat (Chronicles 20:21,22) Just as praise helped Jehoshaphat defeat the armies of Edom, Moab and Ammon, so praise is important in our resistance to the attacks of Satan. Praise creates an environment which the devil cannot tolerate. He cannot tolerate it for three reasons :

- ♦ Praise proclaims the name of the Lord Jesus,
- ♦ Praise is the result of the Holy Spirit working in us. (Hebrews 13:15)
- ♦ God inhabits our praise (Psalm 22:3)

Do not underestimate the power of praise to help us in difficult situations. In Acts 16 we read of Paul and Silas locked in prison. Instead of being downcast at their suffering and misfortune, they praised and worshipped God. Their praise unlocked the power of God, and secured their release. (Acts 16:25,26) Playing praise and worship tapes or CDs when we feel under attack creates an atmosphere of praise around us. This not only adds to our defences, but also can help the Spirit minister to us in times of need.

4. The Body of Christ

Praise God that He seldom places us in situations where we are ministering in total isolation from other Christians. We should praise Him too that he creates us with sufficient weaknesses to need each other. I have yet to meet the completely equipped Christian who is able to minister effectively as a one person church! God's plan for the church is that we need each other. (Romans 12:4-8, 1 Cor. 12)

Part of the devil's attack is to use our inadequacy against us so that we feel embarrassed or anxious about asking for help. Yet it is precisely when we are struggling that we most need to turn to others. One of the motivations for writing this booklet is an experience from the week leading up to planting a new church when I felt totally isolated from God and from others. A two day sudden depression came over me. Whilst I realised that it could well be spiritual attack, I felt unprepared, and quickly felt isolated from God and from friends. It was like being trapped in the open air, miles from help. Turning to friends who could pray for me, and with me, helped me to restore my place with God.

In Understanding Spiritual Warfare, Tom Marshall highlights the importance of Christians having relationships they can depend on - "People living in fellowship and covenant with you are those that you should be able to ring up at any time of the day or night and ask them to pray with or for you" This is important for all Christians. It's vital for leaders!

ACTION POINTER :Spend some time reviewing your defences. .Take each one in turn, and reflect on it. How well are you equipped to use it?