

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

PART ONE

Ruling ourselves

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When you were saved, you joined a war already in progress. It is not a war with a front you visit and then leave. The battles can happen anywhere, anytime. You do not even have to be awake. Because it is that kind of war, the church needs basic training — and we forget, so we return to it.

Spiritual warfare, in this teaching, does not begin with shouting at the air. It begins with ruling yourself: your emotions, your words, your thoughts. The aim is not more information. The aim is a people who keep themselves, so the wicked one does not fasten to them.

Three Things We Know

John closes his letter by nailing down three things. This is the frame for the whole series.

> *"We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him."*
>
> **— 1 John 5:18**

> *"We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one."*
>
> **— 1 John 5:19**

> *"And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ."*
>
> **— 1 John 5:20**

"Touch" in verse 18 can mean fasten — grab hold. The wicked one needs something to fasten to. What he needs is a handle. The children of God keep themselves so that they do not have handles. That keeping is not something God magically does instead of us. It is our responsibility. It is your responsibility to make sure there is nothing on you he can grab.

Handles, and Who We Blame

Human nature likes to blame God. Proverbs 19:3: the foolishness of a man twists his way, and his heart frets against the Lord. Why was the way twisted? Because he was foolish. Who did he blame? The Lord. That is the pattern. We do foolish things. We acquire handles. The devil fastens to them and begins to work our life, and we say, "God, why are You doing this to me? Why won't You take this away?" If we do not understand how the war works, we will blame God for what we opened, or for what devils did. It is their job. It is what

they do. It is going to happen.

Agreement Is Access

> *"Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?"*
>
> **— Amos 3:3**

If you read the Word and agree with it, God calls that faith, and you walk together. If you believe a lie and agree with that, a devil says, "I will agree with that," and he walks with you. Agreement is access. That is where handles come from. They are aggressively pursuing your agreement. It is their job until the end.

How Handles Are Given

Lies believed. "You will never amount to anything." "You are the dumb one." "Why can't you be more like your brother?" You begin to believe that instead of what God has said about you. A devil comes and says, "I will walk with you on that, and I will reinforce it for the rest of your life." You can spend years failing with help.

Offense. It is not merely, "I am offended and I will get over it someday." The whole time you stay offended, there is a handle, and something is walking with you, trying to enlarge it.

Unforgiveness — the mother of all handles. Matthew 18 ends with the unforgiving servant delivered to the tormentors. The next sentence applies it: so will your Father in heaven do to each of you if you do not forgive from the heart. That is a polite way of saying there will be a large handle, and God is not going to violate His own principles to stop what you have left open. It is not first that God is cruel. We open the door. Forgive anyone anything — not because you are so loving, but because you refuse that handle. You do not want to be given over to a tormenting spirit because you would not forgive.

Compromise. Thoughts and actions. The common things. The action itself can create a handle. They do not only agree; they reinforce. They draw you further down the path. Sin is progressive. You start with a little, then a little more, and you are doing what you never thought you would do. The moment the handle was there, something said, "This is not a great handle yet. Let us strengthen it."

Devils do not play fair. You may have a handle because of the house you grew up in. There have been cases of bondage tied to what was happening with parents before a child could choose. That is not fair. They are never required to be fair. They take advantage of anything. It is still your responsibility to remove

the handle. God does not say, “That was unfair,” and take it back for you. You still have to learn to rule over it.

A Common Pairing: Rejection, Then Rebellion

One of the most common bondages in deliverance ministry is a spirit of rejection. No one gets through life unrejected. What matters is how the rejection is handled. The spirit of rejection says, “That was unfair. There is something wrong with you. This is the third time.” It grabs the handle and reinforces it.

Immediately on its heels a spirit of rebellion offers a solution: “You will never be rejected again. We will take control. We will not do what anyone says. We will reject them first, and I will protect you.” Many who walk in rebellion are not first rebels. They were wounded. The second spirit sold itself as protection. Whose responsibility is it to get free? Still theirs. No one gets through without having to deal with handles.

Two Sources of Influence

There are, ultimately, two beings seeking to influence the earth: God, who pursues us with goodness, and the devil, who is a liar. We are of God. The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one. That is not a simple map of “good people and evil people.” There are kind, gifted, lovable people who do not know Jesus. They still have handles. They are still caught in lies. Love them. Do not take their sway into your inner man. Many have been shipwrecked right there — genuinely loving someone, unwilling to offend them, unguarded against the influence coming through them, and ending with a compromised faith. We do not battle people. We are commanded to love them. Love them awake.

The War Is for the Rule of You

> *“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.”*
>
> **— Galatians 5:16–17**

Everyone knows that verse from the inside. You said what you did not want to say. You felt what you did not want to feel. That is because there is a war.

The Old Testament had the law and did not have the Spirit of God living in them. How did they do? Poorly. Acts 15 will not put on the Gentiles the yoke Israel could not carry. The law was given to show the need of grace. We still fall

into the old pattern: if I am a good boy, if I do not fulfill the flesh, God will give me more of His Spirit. That is not what Galatians 5 says. It does not say performance unlocks the Spirit. It says you have no hope of being a good boy without the Spirit. You have been given the Spirit so that you can resist the flesh. It is more about pursuing Him than about merely resisting yourself.

Outward obedience that leaves rage intact is only half a win. You bit your tongue, said something nice, and walked away feeling you had won — and the rage is still on the throne inside. What if the inner weather changed, so that the temptation to vent was not even sitting there? That is the war we were given the Spirit to fight.

> *"Sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."*
>
> **— Genesis 4:7**

> *"Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts."*
>
> **— Romans 6:11–12**

Sin wants rule. You must not let it reign. The power is the Spirit's. The responsibility is yours. You have to rule you. That person can be rebellious, selfish, lazy. Sometimes you are tired of making him do what God wants. It is still the assignment. It is impossible without the Holy Spirit. It is a daily battle. It does get easier in the places you keep winning.

Ephesians 6:12 is not an invitation to relocate the fight to the sky. The principalities are in heavenly places. Their influence is sought *in us*. You do not come to the prayer meeting, shout at devils, go home, and call yourself safe. The battle is internal.

Repent, Break Agreement, Take Authority

If we sin, we repent, God forgives, we are right with Him. Devils are not polite about that. They do not say, "He repented; my work here is done." They try to get you to do it again. Repentance is not mere regret. The word is a turning — 180 degrees, back toward God, to do it His way. In this war, repentance alone is not the whole response.

First, repent, because you want to be right with God. From that place, break agreement. Remove the handle. Name the action or the lie: "That agreement is gone. That thing cannot walk with me." Then take authority: "You have to leave me in the name of Jesus. I am not walking with you. Go."

"Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you."

— Luke 10:19

If you do not want anything to harm you, you have to take authority. "God, please take this away" may be a request He answers by handing you the work. He has given you authority. You will blow it. When you blow it, you deal with it. You break agreement. You take authority. You say no, and you keep saying no. They are like two-year-olds. They try the same thing again. You keep disciplining them. The more you do it, the stronger you get in the Spirit.

A woman called a pastor at 12:30 in the morning: "There is a devil in my house. Come cast it out." He told her to tell it to go in the name of Jesus. She asked if that would work. He said, "If it doesn't, I don't have anything else." She did it. It worked. Devils do not leave because a pastor walked in. They leave because Jesus is there. A pastor does not have a different authority from a believer. These signs follow those who believe. They shall cast out demons.

Two Errors

The first is to fear the demonic or ignore it. "If I do not bother them, they will not bother me." That is not true. They will bother you subtly. They will pretend it is not them. They will tell you the thoughts are just you. They are real. They are terrified of Jesus. You have Jesus in you. You do not have to be afraid of them.

The second is to treat authority as a quick fix. Mass deliverance meetings have their place. Sometimes it is that simple. Most of the time it is not. People arrive wanting a devil named and expelled and become offended when someone asks how it got there. If you cast it out and never close the handle, it returns. Casting out what you still agree with is a revolving door. Sometimes you need an interview with your own history before you need a meeting. Sometimes you have to press in: "Lord, what am I missing?" and He shows you a lie you did not know you believed.

The Greatest Weapon Is Truth in Him

Satan is the father of lies. Those who work for him are liars. We do this war with truth. You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth."

— John 17:17

Sanctify means set apart for the Lord's purpose. What sets the church apart is not volume or technique. It is the truth that is in Christ, taken in. The sword of the Spirit is the Word.

> *"Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom."*
>
> **— Psalm 51:6**

It is not enough to have the Word and right doctrine. The Word has to get in you. It has to win the battle for control of the inner man. In conflict we want God to explain the other person. He often says, "Let us talk about your heart." We protest: "You misunderstood — he is being a jerk." He insists on the plank before the speck. The heart is deceitful. We do not see ourselves clearly. He will not let us process the conflict until the inner man has been dealt with.

2 Thessalonians 2 speaks of people deceived because they would not receive a love of the truth. How much do you love the truth? Enough to let Him tell you what is in you that you do not see? You will not survive that searching unless you already know you are loved at the cross — that it is His cross, not your recent obedience, that gives you the right to stand there while He searches you.

We cannot reliably rule our outward actions while the inner man remains unruled. We rule the inner man through the application of His Word.

Ruling Our Emotions

Emotions are not the enemy. They are God-given. God has emotions; they do not rule Him. If they did, we would all be in trouble. They make poor guides. Being led by them is not wisdom — especially when there is a higher Word to be led by. They also lie. You thought someone felt a certain way, you answered that feeling, and it was not what they felt.

Years ago Rachel dreamed during a season of renewal. She was in her house. The Lord was over her shoulder. The curling iron was plugged in in the kitchen. The blender was plugged in in the bathroom. He kept saying: some of you have your faith plugged into your feelings and your truth plugged into your experience. Those things are real. They are plugged in in the wrong place. They do not function. You could haul the food to the bathroom and blend it. You could look through the window and curl your hair. It is the little mis-pluggings that keep us from functioning before the Lord, and the little things become large. At the end He said: they have to be plugged into the Word. Faith and truth come from the Word.

What the World Is Catechizing

The world tells children every week: express your feelings; the people around you must validate them. We built social media for that — a machine for expressing the heart and counting the validations. That is not the Bible's counsel. It is a way to produce an emotionally reactive people who can be steered. Emotional manipulation is one of the cheapest ways to put a handle on a person.

> *"A fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart."*
>
> **— Proverbs 18:2**

Have you formed your answer while the other person was still talking? You were not after understanding. You were after expressing your own heart. Scripture calls that folly.

> *"A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds them back."*
>
> **— Proverbs 29:11**

The internet counts as venting. A culture built to help you vent is not a culture built to make you wise.

> *"Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls."*
>
> **— Proverbs 25:28**

A city without walls is not authentic. It is indefensible. Anything can come in and plunder. If you cannot rule your emotions, you are that city. People can work you. Devils know this. In football a receiver will needle the corner until the man is angry, because an angry man takes every fake. The culture has become very good at that. You cannot open mail, television, or a feed without someone trying to enrage you and then collect a check. The other person may have been wrong. The response is still yours.

We already know this with children. You train a child not to rule the supermarket from the candy rack. If a six-year-old throws a tantrum, we say, that is a child. If a grown man throws one because he was refused the same candy, we suspect a maturity problem. Adults simply learn more polite tantrums — or passive-aggressive ones. Gifts can be instant. A ten-year-old can receive a gift the day he is saved. Maturity is fruit. Fruit takes time. Ruling your emotions is in that column.

We can rule our emotions through the application of His Word to the inner man. Not by grit alone. By the Spirit, through the Word.

The Word on a Card

A fifteen-year-old girl in youth had three younger sisters and an anger problem that was starting to scare her. She was given two verses on a 3×5 card — Proverbs 15:1 and Ecclesiastes 7:9 — and one instruction: when you are angry, take them out and say them aloud. That was the whole assignment. Three weeks later her parents came, not her: "What did you tell our daughter? She is like a different person. She has not lost her temper in two weeks." The living Word, applied to what was happening inside her, changed her. She did not become incapable of anger. She learned how to rule it.

The Long Fight

Rachel's fight with anxiety was not two weeks. It had been on and off since her twenties — a handle taken off, another tried on, some of it tied to the body. In 2021 an opportunity opened and the thought arrived: What if I fail? Then the cascade: career ruined, debts I cannot pay. She knew it was dark. She prayed against it. It kept coming, even through a vacation. The circumstance resolved. The anxiety did not. It returned about once a week and stayed a day or a day and a half.

She had known since her twenties to fight with the Word. She finally said, "You hit me; I hit you back." Seven verses. Spoken something like twenty-five hundred times in six weeks, and hundreds more after that. Not all of them were "anxiety verses." Some of them simply turned her face to the Lord. She called it the divine exchange: I will exchange how I feel and what is running in my head for what Your Word says, because it is living and active.

> *"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."*
>
> **— Hebrews 4:12**

There is nothing in the human condition the Word cannot address. We start by asking what we did wrong. Sometimes the battle itself is how He trains us to come to Him. That fight lasted about five months. It is not now her experience. The verses are ready. When something else comes, she knows what to do.

People can reduce anxiety in a therapist's office and still introduce themselves as "I have anxiety." People can leave a substance in a support group and still have an inner man named by the old thing. The Word is after a different result: that is no longer the battle. Get the Word on your lips. Knowing it is not the same as applying it and praying it.

Five months is a long time to fight something unpleasant. She went all in on the Word and she won. Other helps can work for a while. The Word works. Fear

will increase as the age darkens. The church is still able to rule over what is pressed on her. When you begin to fight a neglected issue, it may get louder. That is often a sign you have found it, not a sign you should stop. Keep going until you whoop it.

A Word as You Close

Jesus came to set us free. He has already done what was required to make a free people. What remains is to enforce it — to walk in it — to take the authority He gave. If you have repented and left a handle in place, name it. If you have named it and never told the thing to go, tell it to go. If you need a person to walk with you, ask. The house is full of people who have already been through a fight.

> *Lord, You said it was for freedom that You set us free. Give us the understanding that comes from knowing Him who is true. Show us what we have not seen in the inner man. We repent. We break agreement. We take the authority You gave. Teach us to rule ourselves by Your Word. Sanctify us in the truth. Amen.*

Discussion Questions

1. Where in your story have you twisted your own way and then fretted against the Lord (Proverbs 19:3)?

2. Which handle is live right now — a lie, an offense, unforgiveness, a compromise that has grown, or rejection answered with control?

3. After your last clear failure, did you stop at “I am sorry,” or did you break agreement and take authority?

4. In your last conflict, did you ask God about their heart, or yours, first?

5. Where is your faith plugged — the Word, or how you feel this week? Where is your “truth” plugged — the Word, or your last few experiences?

6. What verse will you put on a card and speak when the inner weather turns? Are you willing to do that longer than a weekend if it gets louder?

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SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Part One

Walk in the Spirit,
and you shall not fulfill
the lust of the flesh.

GALATIANS 5:16

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