

The Other Weapon: Praying in the Spirit as Warfare

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Defining Our Warfare

In order to take up the topic of prayer as spiritual warfare from Ephesians 6:10-20, we must begin by considering the context of this primary passage before us. We must be reminded what the Apostle has just concluded discussing in his letter. He is not suddenly starting a new topic. Instead, he is speaking to the church, and their interactions with one another—challenges between husbands and wives, fathers and children, slaves and masters. The context is conflict between one another.¹

So when he introduces spiritual warfare and our conflict *not* being against one another, he is reminding us of what stands behind earthly conflicts and who our real enemy is. Consider, then, the full passage in this context:

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, ¹⁹ and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak (Eph. 6:10-20, ESV).

The Apostle Paul is introducing our warfare; that it is *in* the Spirit and *by* the Spirit's means. Elsewhere, in 2 Corinthians 10:4-7, Paul tells us that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge

¹ David Powlison, *Safe and Sound: Standing Firm in Spiritual Battles* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2019), 20.

of God,” calling us not to “look at things according to the outward appearance” (NKJV). This is because we are dealing with a spiritual battle, waged according to spiritual means.

There is an ongoing, raging battle behind the scenes (cf. verses 11, 12). Recall that scene in 2 Kings 6:17, where Elisha was about to be taken captive by the Syrian army. He is vastly outnumbered, and he prays that the curtains would be pulled back, that his servant might see that those who are for them are greater than those who are against them. The Lord hears, the Lord answers, and Elisha’s servant sees the host of heaven surrounding the Syrian army in much greater multitude. So too in the spiritual realm there is an ever-present and ongoing war, where Satan and his minions are prowling around, seeking whom he may devour and destroy.

Moreover, this spiritual battle has intensified now that Satan has been cast down to earth to afflict all the dwellers of the earth, leading to a great “woe” pronounced upon the earth in Revelation 12:12. William Perkins, father of puritan thought and popularizer of puritan doctrine, comments on what it means that the devil has come “having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time,” as that woe indicates:

because these are the last times [speaking of the present epoch between Christ’s two advents], and Satan sees that he has but a short time to continue, therefore he bestirs himself; his desire is to bring confusions and to make havoc of all. It is a death to him to see God’s kingdom to be advanced, the preaching of His word to have free passage, His name to be glorified in the congregation of His saints, the clouds of ignorance be dispelled, and men that have long sat in darkness and in the shadow of death now to walk in the true light and to warm themselves at the comfortable sunshine of His gospel. He does even as tenants do with their farms. When their leaves draw near an end, then they use to rack all things to the uttermost to make money of everything and to scrape to themselves by hook and by crook whatever they can, that afterward they may have wherewith to maintain themselves. Even so fares it with the devil. This is the last hour. Therefore, now he will play reaks everywhere; he ruffles it apace, as though he were wood. He stirs seditions, conspiracies, tumults, wars; and by all means with violence he labors to overlarge his own kingdom.²

Indeed, it must be remembered that Satan’s time is short, and as a result he desires to produce as much affliction as possible. His aim is to produce suffering for suffering’s sake; to cause the believer to lack joy; to cause great discouragement that the believer might wallow in his suffering; to make them become thankless, angry, bitter, and resentful toward our Sovereign Lord, and to divide man-to-man.

Despite such troubling thoughts, Perkins provides the ultimate comfort to the believer that Satan cannot cause complete and total harm to one who is in Christ. Commenting on the sin which is unto death (1 John 5:21), and whether Satan can draw the child of God away from devotion to the Lord, such that he commits the unpardonable sin, Perkins states: “he which is born of God so preserves himself by grace that he cannot be drawn by Satan to commit the sin that is to death.”³

² William Perkins, *The Works of William Perkins, Volume 6*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Greg A. Salazar (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 470.

³ William Perkins, *The Works of William Perkins, Volume 7*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, Derek Thomas, and Shawn D. Wright (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 419. Anecdotally, the present author has heard of numerous accounts and testimonies of occultists, drug addicts, and others who were deep into darkness, share of sudden thoughts of blaspheming the Holy Spirit, in a last-ditch effort of devils to derail the very near conversion from darkness to light. In one such testimony, a Reformed pastor shares of almost not proceeding with his baptism after such thoughts raced across his mind. He has since come to

What is more, Satan cannot even touch the believer without God's sovereign permission (cf. 1 John 5:18). Such a notion is clearly captured in the words of that great enemy of God's people and wicked sorcerer Balaam, who nevertheless speaks truly when he says in Numbers 23:23: "For there is no enchantment (i.e., sorcery) against Jacob, no divination against Israel; now it shall be said of Jacob and Israel, 'What has God wrought!'" (ESV).

Perkins, of Balaam's exclamation, extrapolates:

[It is] as if he should have said, "I know well that sorcery is powerful in many things and of force to bring much mischief upon men, yet it can take no place against the people of God because He has blessed them, and whom He blesses, them no man can hurt by cursing."⁴

When instructing on this topic in his work, *Cases of Conscience*, Perkins suggests that if the believer is permitted to be afflicted by devils in such a manner, even to the fullest extent, he says:

Howbeit, herein lies the comfort, that though such calamities befall them, yet they shall turn to their good rather than to their hurt. This point well considered, by the way, bewrays the great presumption of some who are not afraid to say their faith is so strong that the devil cannot touch them.⁵

It is only by sovereign permission that such calamities befall the believer. Such is the case of Job, whose godly children perish, whose wealth and property are destroyed, whose body is wracked with disease, and whose closest friends become mouthpieces of the devil as they revile and rebuke an innocent man.

Besides such direct molestation from devils, there are also *indirect* or *mediated* attacks through other means. Peter's tempting of Christ not to go to the cross is such a mediated demonic instigation. Peter had just confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. When Jesus responds that the Son must suffer and die, Peter rebukes Messiah saying, in essence, "you will not be handed over to death—this will never happen to you, Lord!" To which, Jesus rightly responds, knowing Peter was his friend, disciple, and follower, but recognizing the mediated temptation, "Get behind me, Satan" (Mark 8:33).

Another clear example of Satan enticing a believer to do his bidding, and thereby causing great harm to come to God's people as a result, is when the devil incited David to number the troops. While a direct temptation of David, the result thereby incurred severe disaster upon the people of God (2 Sam. 24). In other words, it was a mediated attack.

Job's wife is another example of mediated temptation, in which Satan, after he could not get Job himself to curse the Lord, evokes the lure through his helpmeet instead. She says to her wretched husband, "why don't you just curse God and die?" To which Job rightly recognizes that she is speaking like a foolish woman (Job 2:10), and the inspired text acknowledges that in this right recognition, Job did not sin.

Lastly, although we have already considered Balaam's attempt at a direct attack above, we see a successful mediated attack later. When Balaam instructs Balak to incite Israel to sin with the cult

appreciate that this too was a fiery dart and an effort of the demons whom he once willfully sought to have indwell him when immersed in the occult.

⁴ William Perkins, *The Works of William Perkins Volume 9*, ed. J. Stephen Yuille (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage, 2020), 356.

⁵ William Perkins, *The Works of William Perkins, Volume 8*, ed. J. Stephen Yuille (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020), 195.

prostitutes of Baal of Peor, the resultant wickedness brings upon God's people severe discipline from the Lord himself (Num. 25, cf. Num. 31:16 and Rev. 2:14).

Perkins, commenting on this notion of mediated demonic instigations, speaks of bringing trouble upon oneself and family. For, if one does not live one's life according to the ordinances of God, Perkins suggests that he opens himself and his family up to "plagues and punishments."⁶

Therefore, we have before us the principal combatants of our warfare: demons. And, we have the two principal categories of our warfare: direct demonic instigation and mediated demonic instigation. Mediated attacks are such allurements that come through various *media*, even other people, while direct attacks include immediate temptation as well as what are known in Ephesians 6:16 as fiery darts.

When commenting on these fiery darts, William Perkins indicates how we may distinguish these suggestions of Satan from our own suggestions, imaginations, and thoughts. The four criteria he provides are that they are sudden, contrary to the light of nature, of frightful content, and incongruous with our innate desires.⁷

Regarding their suddenness, such suggestions of devils are described as "darts" in the scriptures and because they come like lightning into someone's mind. Perkins cites finding oneself in an innocent estate, not setting one's mind on anything vile, and immediately having one's heart filled with impure and ungodly thoughts.⁸ If they were of one's own affections, they would arise more leisurely and grow in accord with one's desires and would do so without such vehemence. What is more, they would not come with such ferocious regularity, so as to wear one down.⁹

As for the darts of the devil being contrary to the very light of nature, this presumes that our ordinary thoughts are in accord with God's natural ordering of things. Fiery darts, on the other hand, are most wicked, devilish, vile, monstrous, and alien, so that they are able to be discerned as the suggestions of Satan.¹⁰ The Apostle Paul seems to speak of a similar notion when he says in Ephesians 5:29, "For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it." And while he is making an argument about Christ, the church, and the relation to the household, he is appealing to the light of nature, which we all know by common experience. No one naturally desires to take his own life or engage in self-harm. Such sudden suggestions to plunge a knife into one's own flesh while washing dishes, would be a sure indication these suggestions are arising from the evil one.

Thirdly, these fiery darts cause frightfulness in the recipient. Perkins says that the party thus struck is often overcome by extraordinary fear. He then contrasts this with our own thoughts and suggestions which do not cause us such alarm, since they arise within us, are part of our own

⁶ Perkins, *Volume 9*, 392.

⁷ Perkins, *Volume 8*, 199-200. It must be observed how these four means of discernment directly line up with Thomas Watson's three-fold means of discerning fiery darts, as famously found in his work on *The Lord's Prayer*. See Thomas Watson, *The Lord's Prayer*, Revised edition (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1960), 263-264. Considering Watson was writing a generation after Perkins, it is not hard to determine where Watson would have obtained his list, slightly condensed though it may be.

⁸ Perkins, *Volume 8*, 198. All one would have to do confirm the existence of such intrusive thoughts is to inquire with a pastor if he has ever experienced ghastly violent or sexual thoughts moments before he enters the pulpit. The present author has not yet found a minister of the gospel who has not experienced such horrendous temptations, and at such a moment of not only innocence, but of such a crucial juncture for the advance of the Kingdom of Christ. Another illustration which afflicts even quiet mothers of small children is that of driving one's minivan across a bridge, and suddenly being struck with the suggestion to plunge the car and family over the railing and embankment!

⁹ Perkins, *Volume 8*, 199.

¹⁰ Perkins, *Volume 8*, 200.

desires, and are in accord with our affections.¹¹ All have likely experienced such sudden suggestions that at the thought of them we recoil from them, hating even the suggestion of them. How these would arise naturally within our own desires, even our sinful flesh, is a question which betrays their satanic origin.

Finally, these darts do not naturally arise within the person but are indeed external, alien, and foreign to our own minds.¹² Especially those who are of Christ and not of a wicked mindedness, these suggestions are all the more obviously *from without* and are the work of devils casting them into one's mind.¹³ Metaphysically, how this takes place is beyond the scope of our present consideration, even beyond the scope of man's revealed or discoverable knowledge, but it is safe to say that it is not the result of the devil having full access to one's thoughts and mind. "For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him?" (1 Cor. 2:11).¹⁴

John Bunyan similarly speaks of such fiery darts in Pilgrim's Progress when Christian is walking through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and cannot distinguish his own thoughts and the whispers of devils.¹⁵ Even in his autobiography *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, he speaks of similar devilish suggestions to his mind, thus finding parallel treatment in his writings.¹⁶ Bunyan tells of a dart, a suggestion of the devil, which came suddenly and left him questioning his eternal state and struggling with his assurance for over a year's time.¹⁷

What must the believer do, then, in the face of such opposition, temptation, instigation, and satanic molestation? According to Ephesians 6, we must *stand!* But before we are able to comprehensively understand what it means to stand, we first must ask and answer the question, who is it who stands?

The Army

When approaching the Ephesians 6 passage, we must first recognize the corporate nature of this text. Based on how this passage is often portrayed, we think of it, and even hear it applied, to the individual Christian, and each part of the armor is unpacked as individual pieces. Yet this is not how a native Greek speaker and listener would have heard the Apostle's message. Every single verb or command in this section of Scripture is not to the individual, but they are all in the plural form. Beginning with verse 10, "finally my brethren" as the passage is rightly rendered in the KJV or NKJV, and from there onward, each command is to the brethren, not to the individual. Wars are not fought as individuals—if you think they are, just tell that to Uriah the Hittite! When David and Joab made Uriah, a mighty warrior, go out to the fiercest part of the battle, all alone, the result was certain death (cf. 2 Sam. 11). The Christian soldier needs the full army of the Lord—the corporate body, one another—or how else will we stand against wiles of the army of darkness?

When one of our brothers or sisters is struggling, besieged, tempted, saddled by burdens, we will often hear the church express, "I wish we could do more." To begin to introduce our main theme,

¹¹ Perkins, *Volume 8*, 200.

¹² Perkins, *Volume 8*, 201. Perkins uses the illustration of someone soliciting another to murder or to commit treason.

¹³ Perkins, *Volume 8*, 200.

¹⁴ Perkins, *Volume 8*, 194-195. Speaking of Satan, Perkins says: "The one is his own nature whereby he is a creature and, therefore, finite. Hence it is that he can neither know nor do anything that is beyond the reach or capacity of his nature, or above the power and skill of a creature. For example, he cannot directly and immediately know the deep things of God, unless they are revealed unto him, nor yet the secrets of men's hearts. "None knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of a man which is in him: even so the things of God knoweth none, but the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:11)."

¹⁵ Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, 68.

¹⁶ John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2018), 40.

¹⁷ Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 51, 81.

and the theme we see at the end of this passage, you can pray! But the church will often hear the thought expressed, “but all I can do is pray”, as though apologizing for such limitation. We should say, we *can* pray. We *get* to pray. How do we close the ranks, come around, and care for our comrades in arms? We have been granted the ability to stand with our brothers and sisters in prayer. When we receive *yet another* prayer email, we can feel taxed and burdened. And yet, if the church sees prayer, and especially prayer for the body, as warfare, and not mere inconvenience, how transformed will our efforts to pray be! For if we see prayer as *war*, then prayer is bleeding with our brethren, weeping with our brethren, caring for our wounded, and *standing* with our friends in battle.

But lest we be tempted to believe that such a stance against darkness is a simplistic one, and prayer is paltry, let us recall God’s words in Job 41 about Leviathan, that great Beast of the Sea:¹⁸

Can you put a rope in his nose or pierce his jaw with a hook? Will he make many pleas to you? Will he speak to you soft words? Will he make a covenant with you, to take him for your servant forever? Will you play with him as with a bird, or will you put him on a leash for your girls? Can you fill his skin with harpoons or his head with fishing spears? Lay your hands on him; remember the battle—you will not do it again! Behold, the hope of a man is false; he is laid low even at the sight of him (Job 41:2-9, ESV).

Can anyone, believer or otherwise, stand against Leviathan? Certainly not! As Perkins says on this point:

Again, the Scripture notes him to be a powerful spirit, whose strength far exceeds and surpasses the might of any man or creature that is not of an angelic nature as [he] is. For he is termed “a prince of the air” and “the god of this world.” His power reaches even to the spirits and souls of men, whereby he works in the children of disobedience (Eph. 2:2). His principality is so great that no strength, no defense of man, is able to withstand it, unless man takes unto himself “the whole armor of God” (Eph. 6:11).¹⁹

The Armor

This then leads our discussion to the armor of our Ephesians 6 passage. The whole armor of God precedes Paul’s appeals to use prayer in our spiritual warfare. Therefore, consideration must be given to how prayer fits with this larger picture of the panoply. David Powlison, in his various treatments of the demonic,²⁰ compellingly presents how each piece of armor is in fact the armor worn by Christ as he accomplished salvation for his people. He shows how all pieces²¹ show up in Isaiah’s prophecy as it relates to the suffering servant and God himself accomplishing deliverance

¹⁸ We must see the imagery of the beast of the land (Behemoth) and the best of the sea (Leviathan) as the two great beasts leveraged in the book of Revelation to depict Satan’s manifest power in the world. If this image be granted, then both chaos-animals in the book of Job stand as a representation of an ancient depiction of Job’s battle with evil. Most particularly, we see Job’s contest with Satan and God’s sovereignty over that great devil. For a more complete discussion of these themes, see Eric Ortlund, *Piercing Leviathan: God’s Defeat of Evil in the Book of Job* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021), 133-144.

¹⁹ Perkins, *Volume 8*, 194.

²⁰ David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), David Powlison, *Safe and Sound: Standing Firm in Spiritual Battles* (New Growth Press, 2019), and his sections in James Beilby, *Understanding Spiritual Warfare: Four Views*, New Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012).

²¹ The lone exception is *the shield*, which finds its referent in the Psalms.

for his people. Most notably we find these images in Isaiah 11:4-5, 49:2, 52:7, and 59:17. Thus, the armor is Christ's, and the church is clothed in Christ—it is clear, Paul's image is that of union with Christ.

Coupling this with the fact that every verb in this section of scripture (Ephesians 6:10-20) are corporate commands ("you all put on..."), the armor, therefore, is not the armor of the lone soldier,²² but the armor of the church of Jesus. The Apostle is calling the whole church of Christ to stand in Christ as their defense and protection.

This situates the prayers we have begun talking about in our present treatment in two unique ways. First, prayers for deliverance and protection from the enemy must always be *in Christ*. The believer has no authority in himself to directly interact with or cast out devils.²³ The victory over demons is Christ's, the authority is Christ's, and the sovereign decision to protect or to deliver is Christ's alone. And second, these prayers are not exclusively individualistic as 21st Century American Christians may be tempted to believe that they are. These prayers are, primarily in the Apostle's mind and in this section of Scripture, the corporate prayers of the church, which is *his body* that is clothed in *his armor*, as his people appeal to the rightful Head and Victor, Christ himself.

If it was one of the chief reasons for which Christ came, to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8), and to crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15), then it is no accident then that Paul says elsewhere that God is crushing the head of the serpent under the feet of the church. And this is in the corporate sense of the body (see, for example, Romans 16:20). Individual Christians are not being called upon to directly conflict with individual devils, binding and casting them out in prayer. Instead, the church of Jesus on earth is to engage in the corporate means Christ has established—the reading and preaching of the word, the sacraments, and prayer—and in so doing, watch the powerlessness of the kingdom of darkness to stand against the advance of the kingdom of Christ. Such a corporate understanding places a refreshing emphasis upon a well-trodden and familiar text often wrongly applied in individualistic ways.

The Weapons of Our Warfare

If the armor is Christ's, then the weapons are the Spirit's. The victory belongs to Christ, as the church is clad in him. And the weapons, for the ongoing advance of the kingdom of light, is the work of the Spirit. After all, Christ is waging war from his throne, and he is using the means of his church and his Spirit indwelling his church, to bring about such an advance.²⁴ The two principal weapons we see in this passage, then, are the *word* and *prayer*. We should hear parallels and echoes of those two means spoken of here, because they comprise the chief ministry of the apostles described in Acts 6:4, when the apostles delegated responsibilities to the proto-deacons so that they could commit themselves to the ministry of the word and prayer.

In Ephesians 6, however, it is often thought that there is but one offensive weapon, which is the word of God, the sword of the Spirit. But grammatically, the Apostle Paul offers two, and both are by the Holy Spirit: "and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication." Several elements are worth noting. First, the verb in that sentence, translated, "to take up" applies to all three distinct portions mentioned in that sentence. So we believers (for, again, the verb is plural and corporate, not individual) are to take up the helmet, the sword, and prayer. Therefore, structurally, we cannot lose sight that prayer is the second, almost forgotten, weapon spoken of here by Paul.

²² Battle is always corporate, and spiritual warfare is no different.

²³ See Perkins argument in William Perkins, *The Works of William Perkins, Volume 4*, ed. J. Stephen Yuille (Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), 154-156.

²⁴ See the entire book of Acts to demonstrate this very theme.

Prayer as Inoculative

Second, note that the prayer is not that of sensational and exorcistic prayer, especially in this context.²⁵ Our battle may be against spiritual powers in the dark realms, as verse 12 would have us to know, but the means instructed are not based on a deliverance model. Paul even goes so far as to instruct what type of levelheaded or moderate prayers he has in mind. He says, “all prayers and supplications”, “prayer for all the saints”, and even specifically, prayers for the Apostle Paul himself, that he would be given words, that he would “open his mouth boldly”, and that he would specifically “proclaim the gospel.” Paul instructs the full range of prayers the believer is called to pray elsewhere in the New Testament—not exorcism prayers of “devil be gone”, but the types of prayers we are instructed to pray across the Testaments: precatory prayers,²⁶ deprecatory prayers,²⁷ imprecatory prayers,²⁸ advancement of the kingdom prayers, humility prayers, prayers for stability, strength, perseverance, and the like. The breadth of prayers we see taught and expressed across the Testaments are the prayers the Apostle is here commanding. Clearly, Paul does not have the binding and casting out of devils remotely in his mind, or else now would be the time to instruct such combat. And if not in this present context, where else? No; he has ordinary, inoculative, and corporate prayers of the church in mind.

Prayer as Responsive

To further flesh out the biblical limitations of our prayers, and to see that we are not called upon to directly bind and cast out demons, we must venture out of Ephesians 6 for a brief aside. There is a particular prayer that deals directly with the devil, found in the little book of Jude, verse 9. There, the archangel Michael faces off with his preternatural equal, Satan,²⁹ over the body of Moses.³⁰ The prayer of the archangel Michael, is simply, “The Lord rebuke you”, in which the prince of Angels submits his request to the sovereign will of God.³¹ Here we see an archangel in spiritual combat, and that, with the chief of demons. And despite it being equal to equal, and spiritual being to spiritual being, even Michael does not presuppose to directly confront, “cast out”, or personally rebuke Satan. William Perkins makes much out of the fact that glorious angels, and even the chief angel, do not place themselves in a position that only the Lord sovereignly holds: the power to command devils. And from there he argues that if even angels dare not act in such a way, how can mere men, who have not been granted the right to such office or authority,

²⁵ Powlison, *Safe and Sound*, 36–37, and Beilby, *Understanding Spiritual Warfare*, 78–79.

²⁶ Requests.

²⁷ Asking the Lord to remove sin from us, or to forgive.

²⁸ Appropriate prayers of cursing as found across the testaments. For a brief discussion of these three (precatory, deprecatory, and imprecatory) types of prayers, see Perkins, *Volume 8*, 88.

²⁹ It must be remembered that God and Satan are not spiritual counterparts, as Satan is a created entity, glorious though he may have been, and powerful though he may still be. Instead, there is one archangel mentioned in the scriptures, and Perkins makes the argument that this is not a class of many angels, but a reference to but one, Michael, the prince of the angels (see Perkins, *Volume 4*, 149–150 for the full discussion). Michael, as the prince of angels, and not Christ, is the counterpart to Satan, the prince of demons. It is also in this section that Perkins makes the argument that Michael is *not* to be equated with Jesus, as some mistakenly argue.

³⁰ It is fascinating to follow Perkins’ thought of why the contention of Moses’ body and the need for the Lord to bury his body in a place no one would know or find, and that of instigating false veneration in the OT church. If Satan could use the bones of the great prophet of old, he could sow seeds of false religion in the church underage, much like the veneration of saints in the Eastern and Catholic traditions. Perkins, *Volume 4*, 153.

³¹ While Clinton Arnold allows for ekballistic encounters with demons in some case, he nevertheless makes the very perceptive, though haunting insight from Jude 1:9: “We do not have the right to tell a spirit to leave if it has an invitation [from the Lord] to stay.” Clinton E. Arnold, *3 Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1997), 166.

presuppose a blasphemous declaration?³² Angels dare not transgress the “power, justice, sovereignty, and lordship of God” who is over them, but “must be subject thereunto” and leave all “judgement, restraint, correction, and repayment of the devil” to the Lord alone.³³

Instead of direct confrontation and exorcistic authority, what does the angel do? He prays. Here is the crux of our present consideration and the power of prayer as a supernatural weapon. The prayer was a simple one, leaving matters in the sovereign hands of the Lord, who alone has the right to vengeance and wrath (cf. Deut. 32:35 and Rom. 12:19). Based on Michael’s prayer that the Lord would rebuke Satan, Perkins asks, “What must a man do that is to encounter with the devil, either by temptation, [affliction], possession, or otherwise?”, to which Perkins answers, “He must follow the practice of the archangel, even flee to God by prayer and entreat *Him* to rebuke him” (emphasis added).³⁴ He goes on, “The Lord must be entreated to restrain the malice of the devil, that he may not in himself or [with his] instruments prevail.”³⁵ In the same manner that Jesus speaks of “prayer and fasting” (Matt. 17:21) or in some contexts simply “prayer” (Mark 9:29) as being more enduring than apostolic sign gifts and exorcistic abilities, when he says “this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting”, so here too we see that prayer is the more certain and prescribed means of dealing with devils than any concept of direct encounters.

Another example Perkins cites from scripture to demonstrate that prayer is the more enduring means of engaging with the demonic rather than direct or exorcistic encounters, is that of Paul praying for the removal of the thorn in his flesh (2 Cor. 12:7). While that context does not immediately present itself as demonically induced suffering, the Greek is quite clear that Paul is facing “an angel of Satan” (ἄγγελος Σατανᾶς, in the Greek). While there is a range of potential meanings or translations to such a grammatical construction, the reality that this thorn was sent by Satan is indisputable. It is in such a context that Perkins states:

Paul prayed to be delivered from the angel of Satan that buffeted him; but the Lord answered that it should not so be, because His grace whereby he was enabled to resist his temptation was sufficient. And Paul, finding the fruit of his prayers on this manner, protests hereupon that he will rejoice in his infirmities [2 Cor. 12:9].³⁶

Here again we see the need to wait upon the sovereign decision of the Lord and, when deliverance is not granted, to patiently bear up under the affliction until the time the Lord should grant. In such instances, then, the prayer should be for God’s endurance and that his grace would indeed be found sufficient to sustain (cf. 1 Pet. 5:6-9, noticing the context of the devil).

In, William Perkins’ *A Golden Chain*, under the heading of “Calling Upon God”, Perkins unpacks the various elements of faithful prayers.³⁷ Chiefly, prayers “in Christ” have two parts: petition, and assent. In petition, we ask anything that is according to God’s will, expressing wants and desires for God to supply those wants. And then with regard to assent, the scriptures call us to believe and profess before God that he will in due time grant to us those requests which are made in accordance with his will.³⁸ Though there are many infirmities in the one praying, the efficacy is in God alone who brings these answers to pass, and in receiving answer, the believer is called upon to give thanks to the Lord with joy and gladness for granting the request. In applying these notions to our present topic of spiritual warfare, we see how they dovetail perfectly with the preceding

³² Perkins, *Volume 4*, 154.

³³ Perkins, *Volume 4*, 154-155.

³⁴ Perkins, *Volume 4*, 156.

³⁵ Perkins, *Volume 4*, 156.

³⁶ William Perkins, *The Works of William Perkins, Volume 5*, ed. Ryan Hurd (Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), 148-149.

³⁷ Perkins, *Volume 6*, 206-207.

³⁸ Perkins, *Volume 6*, 207.

portion of our meditation. We must pray that demonic affliction be overturned and ceased, and then wait on the Lord until the due time when the Lord grants the request. In so doing, the righteous person must pray with faith that the Lord will grant that which he is requesting in accordance with the Lord's will.³⁹

Allow an illustration at this point. The Lord has promised to heal the believer of every physical ailment which ails her.⁴⁰ It is an absolute promise, ultimately, but not an absolute promise this side of glory. Therefore, the believer may pray, by faith, that the Lord will indeed heal all that physically ails her, however imperfectly this side of glory, knowing that the promise ultimately is "yea and amen" in Christ. In the same manner, the promise of deliverance from all afflictions (demonically instigated affliction included) is an ultimate one, but not necessarily on this side of glory. Therefore, the believer may pray by faith to be relieved of all demonically instigated assaults, knowing that the promise is ultimately "yea and amen" in Christ. And yet, vestiges of suffering and demonic affliction may remain this side of the consummation. It is into such a context that God's grace is sufficient to sustain, even when his answer to our prayer for deliverance or freedom is "no", for the second half of that answer is always, "my grace is sufficient for you" (2 Cor. 12:9).

It was mentioned in the preceding portion of this present treatment on prayer that prayer and fasting are more durative than apostolic sign gifts and direct confrontation with devils. While we do not have time in our present consideration to visit fasting as a separate study, it must not be lost on us at this point that Christ himself commended prayer *and fasting*. When his disciples could not cast out a demon, the father of the boy went to Jesus. This was a demon who brought affliction into the child's life in a way that mimicked muteness and epileptic seizures and had been with the boy from a very young age, a seemingly lengthy period of time (Mark 9:17-18, 21). Jesus appeals to the man's faith, and then casts out the devil (vs. 23-26). Then, when the disciples are alone with Jesus, they ask, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" to which Jesus replies "This kind can come out only by prayer" (or in some manuscript traditions, "by prayer and fasting", as compared to Matt. 17:21).

The weight of this assertion from Jesus must be appreciated and understood. At issue is an implied question: what are the most powerful means of engaging in spiritual warfare? Even though the disciples had the sign gifts uniquely gifted to them in their office of Apostle, Jesus did not appeal to greater faith or mighty abilities to cast them out. He did not appeal to the disciple who could wield exorcistic rites with greater precision or authority. Instead, he pointed to what was more powerful and more enduring than the gifts afforded to the first century office of Apostle; that of prayer—and fasting! If this is not an endorsement of the power and effectiveness of prayer when dealing with our demonic enemies, then we fail to appreciate the strength of Jesus's teaching.

The Regulative Principle of Warfare

After covering lawful means of word, sacrament, and prayer, in response to the dark spiritual realms,⁴¹ Perkins transitions to the "unlawful and superstitious remedies of the popish church."⁴² His introduction is notable and worth repeating:

The most learned papists of this age do teach and avouch that there is in God's church an ordinary gift and power whereby some men may cast out devils and help annoyances that come by [occultists]. The Protestant is of a contrary judgment and

³⁹ Perkins, *Volume 6*, 207.

⁴⁰ See Psalm 103:3, 147:3, and Rev. 21:4.

⁴¹ These topics correspond to the author's *RPTJ* journal articles in 2021, 2022, and 2023, respectively.

⁴² Perkins, *Volume 9*, 394.

holds according to truth that there is now no such ordinary gift left to the church of God since the days of the apostles.⁴³

He then proceeds to prove this is the case, by articulating a commitment that the apostolic sign gifts have ceased since the times of the apostles.

First, he argues that miraculous gifts (handling serpents without harm, speaking in tongues, curing of diseases, and casting out devils) are all sign gifts given to the primitive church during the time of the Apostles for the attestation that the gospel is true and the work of God.⁴⁴ Since the time of the apostles, all such miraculous gifts have ceased. Of these sign gifts, the Apostle says they are a sign, not to those who believe the gospel, but to them who do not believe (1 Cor. 14:22). Thus, the apostolic age having come to a close; if the miraculous gifts continued, they would call into question the effect and success of the apostolic ministry. Additionally, if the miraculous gifts continued, then God's extraordinary assistance to those ends must continue as well.⁴⁵ And if we expect exorcisms to continue, then we ought to expect ministers to lay their hands on the sick and for them to arise.⁴⁶ Instead, as Perkins concludes, such laying on of hands or anointing of oil would do no good, because the promise and gifting of such has ceased. So too all exorcistic rites.⁴⁷

What is more, how dare we bid a spirit depart, whom the Lord has granted the right to stay? Would Job have "cast out" and bound demons when they were granted permission to afflict? Did he cast away and rebuke when his children were killed and sifted? Did he silence the devil who used his wife as his mouthpiece? Did he seek to exorcise the devils who were afflicting his body with sores? Did he command "get behind me, Satan" when Leviathan was using the speech of Job's three friends? When Eliphaz recounted a demonically induced dream in Job 4, did Job decry the devil or cast him out and away? Instead, do we not see him bear up under demonically induced affliction after affliction? This is the normative teaching of Job's satanical molestation—we must humble ourselves under the mighty hand of the Lord until he lifts up in due time.

Next, Perkins delineates the particular extra-biblical remedies the Roman Church prescribes, such as the use of Christ's name to cast out demons, the use of relics, the sign of the cross in various forms, the hallowing of things such as water, oil, or salt, and finally, exorcisms proper. Space fails us to consider all these aspects, but the first one, of using Christ's name as a means to cast out demons, directly connects to our present consideration of prayer itself. Is a binding "in the name of Jesus" parallel to praying in Jesus' name?

To answer such a provocative question, Perkins says that of course the calling upon the name of Christ in prayer is more than acceptable—so long as the one pleading for deliverance from demonic possession or bewitchment is submitting to the Lord's will regarding timing, means,

⁴³ Perkins, *Volume 9*, 394.

⁴⁴ Perkins, *Volume 9*, 394.

⁴⁵ While Perkins point here is less than clear, the remainder of his argument reveals that he has in mind the special office of apostle, the supernatural endowment of those apostles with miracles of healing, tongues, prophecy, and exorcism, and such an office, calling, and special blessing would continue if the works themselves are to continue.

⁴⁶ The categories of *magisterial* and *ministerial* authority help us here. The apostles were given magisterial authority to unilaterally ordain, heal, cast out demons, prophesy, forgive sins (cf. John 20:23), smite (cf. Acts 5:3–5), among other authoritative acts and declarations. The succeeding generations of the church, after the apostolic authority ceased with the "last" Apostle (cf. 1 Cor. 15:8, as Paul literally says he is), only receives ministerial authority. If the priestly office of engaging in all of these acts authoritatively continues, then all these magisterial abilities would continue. But if ministers do not authoritatively declare a person to be healed or forgiven of their sins (cf. Mark 2:7, "only God can forgive sins"), upon what basis can they authoritatively bind demons and cast them out? These magisterial acts rise or fall together, and ministerial responsibilities carry no authority or ability to carry on these particular deeds.

⁴⁷ Perkins, *Volume 9*, 394.

God's glory, the benefit of the church, and the good of the one afflicted.⁴⁸ But this is not what the practitioner who is willing to go beyond the parameters of scripture has in mind. Such exorcists believe that the very name of Christ is powerful to cast out devils. They believe that the authority of Christ is present at the use of his name, and by that authority, the work of exorcism may be done. Perkins says, "this is a flat untruth and a practice full of danger"⁴⁹ and cites the example of the seven sons of Sceva who engaged in such a practice (Acts 19:13).

His two rationales to further substantiate this claim must be heeded, for he says, "the church of Christ has no warrant in the Word to use this name of Christ for any such purpose. Neither has any ordinary Christian a special calling from God to do so." He concludes, "Therefore, he may not do it."⁵⁰ This is the single clearest articulation of the "regulative principle of spiritual warfare" in all of Perkins' writings. Without the office to exorcise such a sign gift, without the direct warrant from God's word to engage in the practice, and without a special calling from Christ to take up the gift or the office, the believer is forbidden from engaging in such unlawful practices. Now, if Christ, by his power, and in accord with what his name represents (his glory, majesty, power, and authority), by his sovereign will, *chooses* to heal the individual of his demonization, that is altogether good and right. But that is far from casting out devils "in Jesus' name".

If we departed from such a regulative principle position—a *sola scriptura* position—we would be left with the whims and suggestions of men. We would be unmooored from the New Testament's clear epistolary instruction. We would then conclude whatever seems reasonable, as opposed to what is lawful, commanded, explicitly instructed, and permitted by the word and only by the word. As it is, what we have been left with are the simple, ordinary prayers of the Bible we all know and hold so dear. Through them, we have access to our Father in heaven, who has absolute sovereign authority over the dark spiritual realms.

Let us end with our Father's words from the book of Job, regarding the great beast of the Sea, Leviathan, from Job 41:9-11,

⁹ Behold, the hope of a man is false;
he is laid low even at the sight of him.
¹⁰ No one is so fierce that he dares to stir him up.
Who then is he who can stand before me?
¹¹ Who has first given to me, that I should repay him?
Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.

Through the illustration of Leviathan, God is effectively saying, "Satan is mine", and "who can stand before me?" We have been granted access to *that* God, by prayer in his Son. That is the gift the Christian soldier has in prayer. Let the believer avail himself of that precious, though oft-forgotten, weapon of our warfare.

⁴⁸ Perkins, *Volume 9*, 396.

⁴⁹ Perkins, *Volume 9*, 397.

⁵⁰ Perkins, *Volume 9*, 397.