

Spiritual Warfare:

Should It Be Included In A Missions Curriculum?

From biblical, missiological and contemporary perspectives should we train missionaries, especially ones from the secularized Western world, in the art of spiritual warfare? Professor Laughlin makes a good case for the point that "we should do nothing less."

In their introduction, the editors of *Wrestling with Dark Angels* state that, "If the real battle for the advancement of the kingdom of God is spiritual, we need to learn as much as we can about the rules of the war, the battle plans, the nature of our enemy, the resources at our disposal and the best tactics for employing them."¹

Few, if any, would debate this assertion. Yet we know that issues exist related to spiritual warfare that generate debate. One debate-generating issue among Christian educators centers on the need to design a curriculum which would include spiritual warfare.

This paper affirms that such a need exists today. Three sections are presented: First, a review of biblical imperatives and objectives, second, the contemporary necessity, and third, the specific placement of such a curriculum within a mission orientation.

Biblical Imperatives and Objectives

LeRoy Ford states that, "A curriculum design reflects appropriately the great foundation disciplines."² From a Christian perspective, nothing is more foundational than the Scriptures. Therefore, one of the first steps in considering a spiritual warfare curriculum is the consideration of biblical imperatives and objectives related to such a curriculum.

The task of theological/missiological education is captured in two imperative statements the Apostle Paul makes to Timothy. First, Paul exhorts Timothy to be diligent in presenting himself to God as a laborer who handles the Word of God precisely.³ The objective here is careful exegesis of the discernment of the

Scriptures and their applications.

When we connect this imperative with Paul's command to the Ephesians to, "... take ... the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God,"⁴ we can sense how essential it is to successful spiritual warfare that the believer understands and applies God's Word with discernment. In fact, the context in which Paul encourages Timothy's diligence describes the consequences of not precisely handling the Scriptures. Ruined hearers and ungodliness are not the goals of the servant of Christ and are counter-productive to successful spiritual warfare.

Theological education, therefore, must equip students to handle precisely God's Word so they understand and apply the Scriptures with discernment. Successful spiritual warfare depends in great part on this discernment for it is the Word of God that provides our armament for battle.

The second imperative with which Paul exhorts Timothy calls for him to entrust to faithful men those things which he had learned from Paul.⁵ The larger objective of this imperative is to transmit truth from generation to generation.

Paul follows this imperative with the image of a soldier engaged in warfare. The spiritual warfare of the believer demands, among other requirements, that what is learned is to be entrusted to others. Therefore, it is crucial that what is taught to students who will teach others must reflect the eternal truth of God.

Continued success in spiritual warfare requires the faithful transmission of God's truth from generation to generation. Theological and missiological

education provides the atmosphere in which students can be equipped to be those transmitters of truth.

These two imperatives with their objectives, in harmony with other biblical imperatives and objectives relating to spiritual warfare, find their ultimate objective in pleasing our Heavenly Father. We are to be diligent in precisely handling God's Word so we may be "... approved by God," and as soldiers be able to discharge our duties so that we, "... may please him who enlisted us ..."

Contemporary Necessity

Once biblical imperatives and objectives are ascertained, we seek to understand the contemporary necessity of including spiritual warfare curriculum in Christian education. All would agree that spiritual warfare has been, and will continue to be, a necessary topic to be taught.

Traditionally spiritual warfare has been incorporated into other related courses like Spiritual Life or a course in Angelology. For some, this is sufficient. But others believe that contemporary necessity warrants designing a curriculum that addresses the current trends, practices, and teaching associated with spiritual warfare.

SIM Position Paper

We read the following from an SIM position paper on power encounter:

The related subject of the miraculous in Christian ministry is currently receiving unusual attention. Contempo-

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rary Bible colleges and seminaries are rapidly adding courses on spiritual warfare, power encounter, and signs and wonders to their curriculums. Current Christian books and magazines . . . are flooded with discussion on this topic. Popular lecturers crisscross the continents to expound the issue. A new denomination . . . is growing rapidly. Indeed, a movement identified as “The Third Wave” calls upon the evangelical world to accept that signs, wonders, and miracles, as seen in the miracles of Jesus and the apostles, are to be expected in today’s church.⁶

Observations of the contemporary church informs us that the demand for credible training and application of truth is multiplying. Today’s church faces a new epistemology, a new secularism, and new definitions of familiar terms.⁷ With such an infusion of new ideas and ways of thinking, it is my belief that a specialized class on spiritual warfare is necessary.

Another reason I believe such a curriculum is needed is that as worldliness increases, there is a correlating increase in demonic activity. Paul warned, “. . . that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.”⁸ Living in a post-Christian era in America it becomes essential we prepare for increased demonic activity and train believers for authentic biblically based spiritual warfare.

In addition to determining the contemporary necessity of designing such a curriculum, it is vital to evaluate what objectives the curriculum should seek to fulfill. These objectives will reflect why the curriculum is being designed in the first place: contemporary trends in epistemology, secularism, and terminology.

Another objective to be carefully considered relates to the practice of what is learned in the classroom. In one controversial situation, a prominent seminary discontinued a class on spiritual warfare because the practice of what was taught became disruptive.⁹ This experience serves to alert us to issues that are very much a part of the rationale for designing this curriculum.

One advantage of such a curriculum is that it can restrict its focus to material relevant to spiritual warfare. Determination of biblical parameters, discussion of related issues, and development of practical strategies can be

better generated from this focused approach.

Biblical parameters as to what constitutes genuine spiritual warfare should be determined by exegetical study and integration with other theological disciplines. Exegesis enables the student to better understand what God says, and does not say, about this issue. Exegesis informs and validates our experience. Rather than relying on the “arm of flesh” which will fail, we lay a strong foundation with the truth of God’s Word.

Integrating what one believes about spiritual warfare with other areas of systematic mission theology enables the believer to see the effect of that teaching on other doctrines. Hence the determination of biblical parameters establishes the plumb line by which the discussion of related issues and the development of practical strategies must be measured.

The discussion of related issues will be, to a large degree, open-ended. However, two important issues to include are the role of various theological viewpoints and their effect on understanding spiritual warfare (e.g. pentecostalism, dispensationalism) and the dynamic relationship between mission activity and spiritual warfare in other cultures.

Developing practical strategies prepares the student for the application of the lessons learned through this curriculum. Strategizing provides for the effective integration of Scriptural truth with particular issues and needs which the student could encounter in cross-cultural settings as well as in the student’s personal life. The study and evaluation of case studies can assist the student in developing strategies that are true to God’s Word in responding to the mandate to evangelize the lost and equip believers for a life of victory.

Contemporary necessity, then, favors the designing of a spiritual warfare curriculum that will respond to current needs and anticipate future developments with biblically sound strategies.

A Mission Orientation

From the standpoint of both biblical imperatives and contemporary necessity, I have sought to demonstrate

the need for designing a curriculum focused on spiritual warfare. If we answer affirmatively the question, “Should there be a spiritual warfare curriculum,” then the question which the title of this paper raises remains. The question assumes that a relationship exists between spiritual warfare and the equipping of men and women for mission. I believe that this assumption is correct.

Although this curriculum could very well fit into a theology or pastoral orientation, the missions orientation is entirely appropriate. Both in Scripture and in church history, when men and women involved themselves in mission, they were spiritually opposed and needed to do spiritual battle.

Christ was opposed, the apostles were opposed, ministers and missionaries have been, and are, opposed. Responses to that opposition have differed in different periods of God’s work. Nevertheless the principle stands: Mission begets spiritual opposition as Hesselgrave observes,

. . . the sobering fact is that the twentieth century has been characterized by a terrible outcropping of opposition to the cause and people of Christ. Moreover, there are few signs of abatement . . . Rather, there are many signs of an increased opposition directed especially to those involved in the spread of the Christian faith.¹⁰

In addition to this principle, three reasons suggest that inclusion of spiritual warfare curriculum within a missions orientation is appropriate.

First, mission agencies support this assertion. Position papers, requests for help, and concern for present and future missionaries evidence the need for a curriculum that focuses on spiritual warfare within the context of mission.¹¹

Second, the intensity of demonic activity in areas of mission ministry support this assertion. “Work among the unreached peoples reveals at least one reason why the unreached peoples have been unreached—acute spiritual bondage . . .”¹² Therefore the effects of long term occult practices among the “hidden peoples” require that those who reach out to them are adequately equipped for what they will encounter.

Third, contemporary missions have been a major contributor to the shift in the way many think about and

practice spiritual warfare. To be certain that this change, or any change, is biblical rather than just pragmatic or expedient, or more Western cultural baggage requires adequately trained mission leadership. Such training must include two basic elements: a grounding in the Word of God and an understanding of contemporary missions. A failure to equip leadership with a proper biblical foundation can result in mission which runs the risk of being built on sand instead of the solid rock.¹³ A failure to equip leadership with a proper understanding of contemporary missions can result in mission which inadequately engages in fulfilling the Great Commission.

Believing that missions begets opposition and recognizing the increased requirements in missions for confronting spiritual opposition today, I believe that a curriculum for spiritual warfare fits best within a mission orientation and training program.

Conclusion

Thomas Ice writes,

The call for today is to let the Bible tell us who our enemy is, what our battle plan involves, and how to carry it out. As believers we must be completely submissive to Jesus Christ and His Word.¹⁴

I believe the imperatives and objectives of Scripture, the contemporary necessity, and the character of mission necessitate the designing of a curriculum focused on spiritual warfare offered in the context of a mission orientation. In view of Satan's increased and persistent attacks, we should do nothing less.

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References

1. C. Peter Wagner and F. Douglas Pennoyer, ed., *Wrestling with Dark Angels*, (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990), 10.
2. LeRoy Ford, *A Curriculum Design Manual for Theological Education*,

(Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 36.

3. 2 Timothy 2:15
4. Ephesians 6:17 (NKJV)
5. 2 Timothy 2:2
6. Howard Brant, "Toward an SIM Position on Power Encounter" (Charlotte: SIM, n.d.), 3.

7. The new epistemology is really the old existentialism masquerading in evangelical cloth. Rather than Scripture being sufficient for knowing truth, some evangelical leaders appeal to experience and other extra-biblical disciplines for authoritative teaching as well. Empiricism and pragmatism vie with Scripture as the basis for what is believed.

The new secularism, "... stressing that God is peculiarly present in this (the miraculous), as distinct from natural healings, borders dangerously on an unbiblical dualism." Ben Patterson, "Cause for Concern," *Christianity Today* (August 8, 1986): 20. There is a rethinking as to what is "sacred" and what is "secular".

New definitions of familiar terms produce confusion. Important distinctions have been blurred. Attempts to define demon possession confront one with several choices. Which is right? See Thomas Ice, "Demon Possession and the New Clinical Deliverance," *Biblical Perspectives* (May-June 1992): 2.

8. 2 Timothy 4:1 (NKJV)

9. Ben Patterson, "Cause for Concern," *Christianity Today* (August 8, 1986): 20.

10. David J. Hesselgrave, *Today's Choices for Tomorrow's Missions*, (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1988), 199.

11. Admittedly, opposition to mission is not a new and novel idea. Opposition has always existed to the mission of God. However, due to changes in the way evangelicals think about spiritual warfare, the apparent increases in overt satanic activity in areas not thought to be problematic, and the outreach to the unreached peoples who exhibit acute spiritual bondage, a renewed emphasis on the biblical response regarding this matter is necessary. Michael Pocock, Class Lecture Notes, Mission 847,

Summer 1992.

12. Michael Pocock, Class Lecture Notes, Missions 847, Summer 1992.

13. Matthew 7:24-27

14. Thomas Ice, "Demon Possession and the New Clinical Deliverance," *Biblical Perspectives* (May-June 1992):

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