

Metaphysical Dualism and Spiritual Warfare: A Reading of Ephesians 6: 10-19¹

Godfrey Harold, Lecturer Cape Town Baptist Seminary, Associate Researcher University of Pretoria.

Abstract

In recent years, there has been considerable attention given to the realm of “Spiritual Warfare” (Dawson 1989; Renner 1991; Jacobs 1997; Beam 2000; Wagner 2012). These books were published as a necessary corrective emphasis within the Evangelical western church on the Gospel as only truth and on evil as fundamentally human weakness. In bringing spiritual realities into focus, one faces encounters with witchcraft, spiritism and demon possession as the onslaught of the devil against God’s world. This article seeks to address the question, is God at war and with whom? In addressing this issue, the article will address the different opinion and forms of dualism that are prevalent within the Evangelical and African tradition. This article will also attempt to examine the extent to which spiritual warfare has shifted from its basic moorings from being a metaphor for the Christian life to “spiritual combat techniques” so that the Christians can “take back what the devil has taken from us”. In this article, I shall argue that Paul writing the Epistle to the Ephesians focused on proclaiming the peace of God and nowhere does he consider any techniques for battling “territorial” demons but instead focuses on the Christians protection to stand against the devil.

1. Introduction

Stories of conflict between good and evil, power encounters between good gods and evil demons are to be found in many religious narratives. In Hinduism, Rama battles Ravana, in Buddasim, Buddha fights Mara, in Islam, Allah wars against Shaitan. In ancient Greek mythology gods fight each other for conquest. However, in Judo-Christian world view there is no form of cosmic dualism. Before discussing the theological nature of spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6:10-19, I shall define metaphysical dualism and articulate some world views that shape the current Christian debate regarding spiritual warfare. Many Evangelicals adopt or build their case for a “warfare” strategy based on experience which, they then in turn use to interpret or proof text the biblical text. This is done in-order to justify their views or experience. Evangelicals often fail to examine their worldviews and experiences before they begin to interpret Scripture.

2. What is Metaphysics?

According to Hasker (1983:13-16) metaphysics seeks to answer the question what is “ultimately real” and what is “mans” place in that which is real. D’Souza (2007:125) addresses the literal meaning of *metaphysics* when he states, “our world looks so physical, and yet we know... that it was the result of a force beyond physics. This is the literal meaning of the term *metaphysics*—that which is after or beyond physics”. Metaphysics therefore, is concerned with what is ultimately real and beyond understanding. Hasker (1993:13) elaborates that out of the different sorts of being in the universe, there is special emphasis placed on human beings in answering the metaphysical question... what are the “ultimately inevitable- issues” of human life? In answering this question about reality, develops into a world view. A world view is a process that ties together the varied experience we have (Erickson 1998:146). It is through these experiences that we create a frame of reference that enables us to use and make sense of reality. Thus, a world view *Weltanschauung* meaning “a world and life view” can be defined as how one interprets reality. Mathema (1997) quoting Fowler defines the term *worldview* as “a construct about the make-up of life as it struggles with the questions of reality, truth, ethics and history. It is a construct that provides a point of departure, a sense of direction, a locus of destination, and a strategy of unity for human thought, life and action.” A world view thus determines how one views God, origin, evil, human nature, value and future. For the purpose of this article I shall focus on metaphysical dualism. Metaphysical dualism can be clearly defined as a belief that there are two co-eternal principles in conflict with each other; such as matter and form, good and evil or a conflict between God and the Devil.

Before an engagement on the discussion of “spiritual warfare” can begin, I first need to investigate some of the current worldviews that have impacted the modern Evangelical knowledge regarding this phenomenon.

3. Various Worldviews

A. Natural Worldview

The world view of the West or what is perceived as a Western worldview has been shaped by a sixteenth century French scholar and theist named Rene Descartes. Geisler (1999:194-195) states “Descartes is a mixed blessing to Christian theism. On the one hand, he is a rational theist who offers argument for the existence of God. On the other hand, his formulation of rationalistic dualism is a significant negative factor supporting a view that is contrary to a biblical worldview”. Descartes divided the world into two realities specifically: the supernatural world (spirit world) made up of God, angels and demons and the natural material world (matter world) that consists of humans, animals and plants. This became known as Cartesian dualism. The Cartesian approach led to two different perceptions regarding western/modernist view reality. First, there are those who deny the existence of God and the supernatural world.

They reduce reality to the natural world that can be better studied by science. They reject the supernatural by demythologizing Scripture to fit the shape of the secular scientific worldview. Therefore, spiritual warfare is seen as fighting against exploitative human systems such as human injustices, misery and poverty etc.... that are brought into being by governments, business and even religion.

The second expression of spiritual warfare that emerged out of Cartesian dualism in the West is that God and the devil are involved in a cosmic war in heaven, while everyday life on earth can be explained through science and technology. For example, people pray to God for salvation but continue to use modern medicineⁱⁱ for healing and psychology for deliverance from so-called demon possession, because they believe that the devil and demons do not exist. McKay (1978) is a scientist who believes in God but denies miracles on the grounds that they are opposed to the scientific method. Therefore, this world view fails to provide biblical answers to the work of Satan on earth because the intervention of the supernatural within the natural world is denied.

B. African Worldview

While one could argue that the African worldview has not impacted Evangelicalism doctrinally, it is worthy for consideration because most Africans (Black) who join an Evangelical church will still have their lives impacted by this world view because of their private cultural practices (Mulenga, 2013).

For most Africans, ancestors, earthly spirits, witchcraft and magic are very real. This traditional/tribal world view has a strong influence on shaping the African mind, in that it unifies the African's ideas and reality. It defines what a good life is and how it must be pursued, preserved and protected. For the traditional African, in general, human existence remains coherent and structured, although the construct of the hierarchies varies from culture to culture. Whatever, the African anthropological thought and setup, these systems are there to help each person live under those entities of power to pursue a good life. Burcher (1980:15) as cited in Mathema (1997) states that hierarchies and entities of power are there for the good of the people who fall under them. According to this construct, the intrinsic hierarchical structure and entities of power have God as the ultimate reality. In between are divinities, ancestors, mystical powers, sacred days with specific features and events, rites of passage, religious specialists, and restrictive laws and taboos. At the lowest level of the hierarchy is the sacredness of interpersonal relationships and kinship. While the traditional African believes in a supreme one God, they also believe that this God lives far from those who are living. However they understand God's government to any human administration. Within the African world view God represents the leader and the greatest ruler imaginable. According to this philosophy, if God has no subordinate chiefs to help Him, then He is no leader, meaning He is not God (Chigewedere 1998: 242). In order to have access to God, His power, and all His other benefits, the living

have to go through intermediaries (junior chiefs/leaders) who are between those on the level of human existence and the supreme God Himself. Individuals should benefit from God if they know the entities of power in their descending order down through the elders and other specialists. The African world view can also be seen as sacred. J. Mibiti (1969:5) clarifies this by stating that:

Traditional religions are not primarily for the individual, but form part his community of which he is a member. Chapters of African religions are written everywhere in the life of the community and in traditional culture there are no irreligious people. To be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so [belong] involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, and festivals of that community.

Within the African world view there is no such thing as spiritual warfare or cosmic dualism. Africans believe that the ancestors are the conduit of blessing and curses. Daneel (1971:133) states that curses within the African context are seen as the result of an aggrieved person of the relative that comes back after death to demand justice and retribution.

It is this worldview that determines position, acting or doing, and the determining values within the African person's mind. According to African understanding, there is a close relation between the visible and the invisible world. They are connected so closely together that (Schmidt 2005:1) describes the African worldview as mono-sectional. The dead don't leave the living but are always available, whether it is for good or for bad.

C. A Biblical Worldview: Ephesian 6:10-19

Warfare is an important construct in Scripture and therefore must be taken seriously. Peterson (1997:122) argues this position when he writes that this battle that Christians encounter is "an all-out moral battle". McArthur (1986: 49) states that the issue of the cosmic battle between God and His angelic host and Satan and his demons is a matter of great importance in Scripture. The question then is what is the nature of this warfare? In the Old Testament, when a nation defeated Israel in battle, they saw it as success not only over Israel but also the God they worshipped. Israel's defeat was evidence that their god was more powerful. However, from the perspective of the biblical writers of the Old Testament, Israel's defeat was not by the hands of a pagan god, but was seen as judgment from God for their sins (Judg 4:1-2, 1 Sam 28:17-19; 1 Kgs 16:2-3).

In the New Testament, the gospels clearly indicate the existence of demons or unclean spirit that oppresses/possesses people which, is seen to be a cosmic battle. Hiebert (2000) using Ephesians 6:12 states that "the bible is clear: there is a cosmic battle between God and Satan". Boyd (2000:430) also interprets this spiritual warfare as God

and Satan doing battle. He argues that the scope and magnitude of misery and suffering we encounter in the world are only adequately accounted for when viewed against the backdrop of a cosmic struggle between God and Satan. In this conflict the church is called into action to “help” God. Billheimer (1982:58) argues that it is the church that holds the balance of power in world affairs and by engaging this conflict the church actually decides the development of human destiny or events. However, in this section I would like to propose an alternate perspective on the issue of spiritual warfare. Watchmen Nee (1998) in dealing with spiritual warfare and being triumphant over the enemy begins with keeping our eyes on the Lord (Ps 25:15). While, the enemy (devil) has power stronger than ours, what we have is authority over his power that is in Christ. I am in agreement with Guthrie who provides an excellent starting point to my hypothesis that this war is not a cosmic/metaphysical dualism that is a war between God and the Devil, but an ethical dualism. He (1981:150) states:

There is a general belief that although the *kosmos* is God’s world, it is under the influence of evil to such an extent that the word itself can be used of mankind at enmity with God. An impression of dualism is unavoidably created by this means, but it is never a metaphysical dualism, only an ethical one.

The summary of Ephesian 6:10-19 is an appeal for believers to preserve and appropriate all that has been done for their salvation and their conduct in Christ, and to do so in the face of evil, seen from the perspective of its ultimate transcendent source. The apostle Paul illustrates this in terms of a battle against the devil in which the believer must put on the whole armour which God supplies in order to be withstand and overcome. The armour of God that is described is given by God to the saint so that “we may be able to stand against the wiles/ method of strategy of the devil” (Eph 6:11). This, therefore, does not present a picture of a march or an assault, but the holding of the fortress of the soul and of the Church for the heavenly King (Foulkes 1963:171). While Hendrickson (1987:273) states that “this ‘standing’ of which Paul speaks of is not that of a brick wall that is waiting passively, as it were for the assault of a battering ram but rather a soldier that is rushing into battle. They are both defending themselves and attacking while repulsing the onrush of the devil and even gaining ground”. Thus it can be concluded that this battle is not cosmic but an ethical one in that the devil and church are on a collision course. That is why the apostle Paul tells the believer to be fully equipped with the amour of God. So that when the evil day comes (Eph 6:13) the saint is able to withstand the attacks. The call to withstand is a call to resist the devil. Lincoln (1990:445) list four main competing interpretations specifically: 1) That the evil day has reference to a particular time of special tribulation preceding the end of the world referring to the evil day as only a single day that takes place just before the *parousia*. 2) Has reference to any time of crisis or in the time of temptation. 3) That the evil day represents the present age. The fourth interpretation tries to incorporate 1 and 2. I however hold that interpretations 2 and 3

to be more plausible for our discussion. The reason for my understanding is that the armour of God and the orientations of this ethical battle are present. Therefore, this moral/ethical spiritual warfare is not engaged through self-propagating methods but on the contrary, the victory we have is due to our standing in the finished work of Christ on the cross. One of Satan's greatest fears is a believer with total consecration. Thus Paul (Eph 6: 10-12) calls for us to be aware of the methods of the devil. The methods of the devil as articulated by Stott (1979: 263) are powerful, wicked and cunning. While Paul never undermines the ability of the devil to attack and assault the Christian, he does encourage us to note however, that it is only the power of God that can defend and delivers us from the might and craft of the devil. This power that the Christian has is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and enthroned him in the heavenly place (Stott 1979:266). Thus, Satan is defeated at the cross and is under Christ's feet and ours. Therefore, in putting on God's armour, the Christian must draw upon the might and power of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 6:10-11) to overcome the devil.

4. Spiritual Warfare

Over the last 30 years the Evangelical church has been dealing with the extraordinarily grievous effects that misguided practices of spiritual warfare called spiritual mapping, prayer walking, and prayer fire conferences. The effects of such "theology" have moved the evangelistic focus from winning the souls of the lost to "demons hunting". John Dawson, while director of YMCA was the first to introduce such a concept through his book *How to Break Spiritual Stronghold* (1989). In his quest to develop a more effective tool for evangelism, he taught that demons are responsible for the blocking of gospel efforts. He thus focuses on geographical areas such as cities, he posits Ephesians 6: 10-19 as his theological base and states that the power and influence of the "principalities and powers" over a city must be broken before the gospel will significantly advance. He (1989:19) said that "satanic forces manifest(ing) themselves in the culture of the city," and will prevent conversions from occurring. Lowe (1998) argues that:

This type of methodology has swept away exegetical, historical and empirical caution, and that it has unwittingly produced a synthesis uncomfortably closer to The Testament of Solomon (an Inter-Testamental magical writing) and to animism than to any biblical understanding of demonology and spiritual warfare.

When engaging Ephesian 6: 10-19 one must take into consideration that the Apostle Paul

1. Does not discuss the origin of demons;
2. Does not reconstruct spirit hierarchies;
3. Does not affirm territorial jurisdiction;
4. Does not name the powers
5. Does not list the functions of various spirits;
6. Does not teach techniques for thwarting demons.

Somehow, in the quest for fulfilling the great commission of Jesus Christ through the preaching of the gospel and the disciplining of “men” a stream of the Evangelical churches has turned to “shamanism”. It is my understanding that an over emphasis on spiritual warfare is a trick of the devil to create an imbalance in the mind Christians who become so captivated by thinking about spiritual warfare that they see the devil behind everything that occurs- thus paralysing them from functioning normally in everyday life, thus also eliminating them from being useful in the kingdom of God, because they magnify the devil’s power to a greater degree than it deserves. It is because of this overemphasis that many “Christians” are held hostage by the devil in their minds. John 3:8 states “the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. The Greek word, destroy (*luo*) means to loosing or untying. The work of Jesus “unlooses” the binding work of Satan over us and it is God’s power that now works in us (Eph 1:19-20).

5. Conclusion

Therefore, central to the understanding of spiritual warfare in my view, must be the cross. At the cross Jesus demonstrates his power over Satan. At the cross it not Jesus who is judged but the devil, and through the cross the devil is overcome. Hebrews 2: 14 states that the “death of Jesus on the cross rendered Satan powerless”. The cross is not an end in itself, but rather it removes obstacles to God’s purposes in creating people fit for his Kingdom. Therefore, our focus should focus on putting on the amour of God to overcome personal attacks. Believers who stand in the Lord’s power need not defeat any enemy, even Satan, because our feet are firmly rooted on solid ground in the finished work of Jesus Christ. This is the best and only way described in scripture to overcome the devil and his methods. Thus, the redemption of the believer is a demonstration of God’s power (Eph 6:12). While it is acknowledged that Satan and his host tries to thwart the plan of God and are in constant rage against the work of the kingdom, God is above all even the devil. Therefore, the point to be acknowledged is that the power of God applied in the believers behalf cannot be overthrown, negated or defeated, because this power in Christ surpasses Satan and his hosts (Eph 1:19-20). This article therefore concludes that God is not at war with any persons including the devil, and there is no metaphysical dualism as Paul reminds us in (Eph1:21, Mt 28:18) that everything in this world/age and in the world/age to come is placed under the rule and dominion of Christ, even those who do not believe in or know Jesus Christ, the Messiah and Anointed One. However, this does not mean that Satan is not at war. Satan “tries” to thwart the plan of God by coming against the “sons” of God. Thus, by keeping our eyes on Jesus Christ and putting on His armour, the believer is able to resist and overcome the Devil’s moral and physical onslaught upon our lives.

6. Notes

1. This paper is an outworking of a lecture that was given at Cape Town Baptist on the 24 May 2013 entitled “Is God at War and with whom?”
2. It should be noted that the author subscribes to modern medicine, while also acknowledging that modern medicine cannot cure all sickness.

7. Bibliography

Beam J 2000. *Seeing the Unseen*. New York: Howard Books

Billheimer E 1982. *Destined To Overcome*. Minneapolis: Bethany House.

Chigwedere AS 1998. *Roots of the Bantu*. Harare: Matupa Publishing House

Collins F 2007. *The Language of God*. Great Britain: Pocket Books.

Daneel M L 1971. *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches* Vol. 1
The Hague: Paris.

Dawson J 1989. *How to Break Spiritual Strongholds*. USA: Charisma

D’Souza D 2007. *What’s So Great about Christianity?* Washington DC: Regnery.

Erickson M 1998. *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker.

Foulkes F 1963. *Ephesians*. Great Britain: IVP

Geisler N L 1999. *Baker Encyclopaedia of Christian Apologetics*. Grand Rapids:
Baker.

Guthrie D 1981. *New Testament Theology*. Leicester: IVP.

Hasker W 1983. *Metaphysics: Constructing a World View*. USA: Downers Grove.

Heibert P G 2000. “Spiritual Warfare and Worldviews” in *Direction*. Fall Vol.
20/114-124.

Hendriksen W 1968. *Galatians and Ephesians* Grand Rapids: Baker.

Hubert B 1980. *Spirit and Power: An Analysis of Shona Cosmology*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

Jacobs C 1997. *Possessing the Gates of the Enemy*. Grand Rapids: Chosen Books.

Lenski C H 1937. *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians and Philippians*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House.

Lincoln A T 1990. *Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians*. Dallas: Word Books.

Lowe C 1998. *Territorial Spirits and World Evangelization*. Great Britain: Mentor.

Mathema Z 1997. "The African Worldview: A Serious Challenge to Christian Discipleship." <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2007/10/the-african-worldview.html>. 20/3/2013.

McArthur J 1986. *New Testament Commentary: Ephesians*. Chicago: Moody Press.

McArthur J 1986. *Ephesians* Chicago: Moody Press.

McKay D M 1978. *Science, Chance and Providence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Mibiti J 1969. *African Religions and Philosophy*. London: Heinemann.

Mulenga K C 2013. "African Cosmology" A lectured delivered at Cape Town Baptist Seminary on 13 August 2013.

Nee W 1998. *Secrets to Spiritual Power*. USA: Whitaker House.

Nurnberger K 2007. *The Living Dead and The Living God*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.

Peterson E 1997. *Leap over a wall: Earthy spirituality for everyday Christians*. San Francisco: Harper

Renner R 1991. *Dressed To Kill*. Tulsa: Albury Publication.

Schmidt G 2005. "The Role of the Ancestors and the Living -Dead in the Life of Kenyan Christians". http://www.comboni.de/literatur/schmidt_gregor_ancestor.pdf . 13/04/2013.

Stott J 1979. *The Message Of Ephesians*. Great Britain: IVP

Wagner P 2012. *Territorial Spirits: Practical Strategies for How to Crush the Enemy through Spiritual Warfare*. Shippensburg: Destiny Image Publishers