

CHURCH. SUPPLEMENT 13

[CHURCH RESTORING MINISTRY] EVIL SPIRITS AND SPIRITUAL WARFARE

What does the Bible teach about evil spirits and spiritual warfare? We will learn what the Bible teaches about evil spirits and their fall, their aims to destroy, and their disarmament by Christ. Finally we will learn what Christians ought to do in their spiritual warfare against the evil spirits.

The Bible clearly teaches that Satan has already been “bound” and his demons have been “disarmed” during the first coming of Jesus Christ, 2000 years ago. The binding of Satan or putting a limitation on him is clearly taught in the Gospels in Matthew 12:28-30, Luke 10:17-20 and John 12:31-32 and also in the Letters in Colossians 1:13, Colossians 2:15, Hebrews 2:14 and 1 John 3:8. The book of Revelation describes this “binding” of Satan in apocalyptic pictures in Revelation 12:7-9 and Revelation 20:1-3.

A. EVIL SPIRITS AND THEIR FALL

Discover and discuss. Who are the evil spirits?

1. The creation of angels.

Read Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:14. When God created the universe, he also created different kinds of angels, called “powers and authorities” (Ephesians 6:12). These powers and authorities were originally created *by* Christ and *for* Christ, that is, they must contribute glory to Jesus Christ and serve his purpose. “Angels are ministering spirits that are sent by God to serve those people who will inherit salvation”. There are many accounts of how angels appeared to Christians, but also to non-Christians in a dream or a vision so that they turned to Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord.

2. The fall of the evil angels.

Read Revelation 12:4,9. When the archangel Satan fell (between Genesis 1:28 and 3:1), he swept many other angels into sin together with him. (Revelation 12:4; cf. 2 Peter 2:4). Since then these fallen angels are called *Satan’s angels* (Revelation 12:9), or *demons* or *evil spirits* (Matthew 12:22-28,43-45). False teachers of many religions are constantly referring to these fallen angelic beings or evil spirits as *gods* (1 Corinthians 8:4-5) and even worship them as their *gods* (1 Corinthians 10:20).

3. The good and the evil angels.

Read 1 Timothy 5:21; Ephesians 1:21-22; 6:12; 1 Peter 3:22. The apostles Paul and Peter do not deny the existence of good or elect angels and their ability to exert influence for good. They also do not deny the existence of evil angels and their ability to exert influence for evil. However, they emphasise that no angel has power apart from Jesus Christ. All these spirit powers are in complete submission to Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:4-8)!

Read Colossians 2:9-10; Romans 8:35-39. The good angels cannot add anything to what Christians already have in Jesus Christ and the evil angels can never separate Christians from the love of God!

Read Galatians 1:3-9. Some fallen angels and false prophets preach “a different gospel” (religious message) that does not come from the God of the Bible. These fallen angels and their accomplices are eternally condemned.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:24-25; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6. The day is approaching when even evil angels will no longer have the ability to do harm in God’s universe or attack Christians! The fallen angels or evil spirits cannot be saved and will certainly be judged on the final judgement day.

B. THE DIFFERENT OBJECTIVES OF EVIL SPIRITS

1. Satan tries to claim the whole world.

Discover and discuss. What is the extent of Satan’s authority and power in the world?

(1) **Satan is only the prince of the evil world.**

Read Luke 4:5-6; John 8:44; John 12:31; 1 John 5:19; Ephesians 2:2.

Notes. Satan *claims* that “all the kingdoms of the world and all their authority and splendour” has been given to him and that he can give it to anyone he wants (Luke 4:5-6). John warns that “the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). Paul says that Satan is “the ruler of the kingdom of the air”, “the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient” (Ephesians 2:2). Do these three Bible passages teach that Satan possesses all the countries in the world and controls all the people on earth? Do they teach that Satan and his evil spirits are most powerful in the world?

No! Satan does not possess or control the whole world and its people! When John speaks of the “world”, then he means only the evil world, that is, the whole society of evil people, who are alienated from God or who oppose the God of the Bible, Jesus Christ and Christians in the world (John 15:18-25).

The Christians in the world do not belong to Satan and also are not under his rule and control, but rather belong to the kingdom of Jesus Christ in this world and are under the rule and control of the King of kings (cf. Matthew 13:37-39; John 18:36; 17:14-15; Colossians 1:13).

When Paul speaks of Satan as “the ruler of the kingdom of the air”, then he means that Satan is able to carry on his destructive work through his evil angels only within the society of evil people on earth and its surrounding atmosphere. Satan is only the limited prince of this evil world (John 12:31). Satan and his evil spirits can only act within the limits of God’s sovereign power and permission.

Therefore, when Satan claims that he owns and rules the nations and that he has the right and might to dispose of them and of their wealth as he pleases, then he is a liar. Jesus Christ says, Satan is a murderer from the beginning, a liar and the father of all lies” (John 8:44)!

(2) Jesus Christ is the King of the whole universe.

Read Matthew 28:18; John 13:3; Ephesians 1:21-22; 1 Peter 3:22; Revelation 1:5; 17:14; 19:16.

Notes. During this present age and in the age to come, all power in heaven and on earth has been given to Christ” (Matthew 28:18). “God has put all things under his power” (John 13:3). “God has seated him far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age, but also in the one to come, And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything” (Ephesians 1:21-22), “Angels, authorities and powers are in submission to him” (1 Peter 3:22).

Jesus Christ has authority and power over everything in the universe and over everyone on earth! It is not Jesus Christ who takes a back-seat in this present world, but Satan and his evil spirits. The only thing the above mentioned Bible verses say is that Satan still exercises a powerful influence for evil in the lives of wicked people, non-Christians and unbelievers who acknowledge Satan as their master!

2. Satan’s evil spirits try to control certain territories on earth.

Introduce. The Bible relates how people sometimes believe in “territorial spirits”. They believe that the whole world is divided into many territories and that each territory is controlled by certain evil spirits and their demon prince. In order to appease these evil spirits and their demon princes, non-Christians believe that they have to worship each spirit in its own territory.

(1) Possible territories in which evil spirits are active.

Discover and discuss. What seem to be certain territories which Satan’s evil spirits try to control?

- Evil spirits in empires and countries.

Read Daniel 10:11-14,20-21. The Old Testament relates that before the first coming of Jesus Christ, the earthly kingdoms or empires of Persia and Greece had their spiritual representatives among the demon princes. From these passages it seems that evil spirits and their demon princes (for example: the prince of the Persian kingdom) had a great interest in specific countries of the world (for example: Persia).

- Evil spirits in cities and towns.

Read 2 Kings 17:29-31; Revelation 2:13. When people from different nations were resettled in Samaria, each national group worshipped and served its own gods in the towns where they settled. Each idol had its own shrine and priests. The Samaritans seemed to believe that certain spirits controlled certain territories and needed to be worshipped in that territory through the means of their territorial idols and territorial shrines.

The New Testament relates that at a certain time, Satan had his throne in the city of Pergamum. This city was an old royal city and at that time the seat of the Roman government of the province of Asia. In that city there was much idolatry, including the worship of the Roman Emperor. Thus, in that city, Satan had almost unimpeded power and he exercised his evil work with a vengeance. Yet, Jesus Christ assured the Christians who lived there that he was fighting against these idol worshippers with the sword of his mouth! He said that just by speaking his words, he would judge the unrepentant people and strike down their false teachers (Revelation 1:16; 2:12,16; 19:15). From these passages it seems that evil spirits have a great interest in particular cities and towns.

- Evil spirits in human cultures.

Read Revelation 18:2; 19:20; 20:10. “The city of Babylon” is an apocalyptic picture of Satan’s anti-Christian immoral power expressed in human culture. The city is described as *the great prostitute* (Revelation 17:1-5). When this city falls, it is described as a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit (Revelation 18:2). This does not mean that those evil spirits or demons would still be active after the fall of the city. This passage is an announcement that the future fall of Babylon is so certain that it is depicted as if it had already happened! So quickly and so certain will its fall and

desolation be at the second coming of Christ, that even the evil spirits will not be able to escape! The evil spirits will, as it were, get imprisoned or trapped in the ruins of Babylon! The Bible teaches that the evil spirits will be judged and punished together with Satan and his demon princes at the final judgement! From these passages it seems that demon princes and their evil spirits have a great interest in certain human cultures or national cultures.

In Corinth some Christians “were eager to have spirits” that had the ability to grant certain spiritual gifts to people. (The Greek text does not say: “they were eager to have spiritual gifts”, but: “they were eager to have spirits”) (1 Corinthians 14:12).

- Evil spirits as territorial spirits.

Today, many tribes believe in their own *territorial spirits*. Nomads never make camp outside their own territory unless they have first secured permission from *the spirit owner* of that place. The nomads do not conceive themselves as owning that land, but they believe that they are only using it with the permission of its true *spirit owners*. They also believe that these territorial spirits in a sense adopt them while they live in their territory. In Papua New Guinea the territorial spirits of the marshes are first invoked and venerated before they hunt crocodiles within the marshes.

The New Testament does not picture these evil spirits as actually in *control* of any territory. It only describes these demons as *active* in many places on earth. Their major purpose is to try to prevent the spread of the gospel and the glorification of God in all these places. However, these evil spirits cannot prevent Christians from entering any place on earth. Christ has already tied up (bound) the devil and his evil spirits (demons) at his first coming and is applying this reality through the prayers and the missionary work of Christians. Wherever Christians pray and the gospel is proclaimed, the evil spirits (demons) loosen their grip on people and that area and God’s kingdom takes hold (Matthew 12:29)!

(2) All territories are under the sovereign control of Jesus Christ.

Read Isaiah 14:24,27; Daniel 10:11-14,20-21.

Discover and discuss. Who controls the territories and the present and future historic events on earth?

- God controls every territory on earth in a sovereign way.

Although it seems that evil spirits and their demon princes have tried to control certain territories (cf. Isaiah 14:13-14), the Bible clearly teaches that they never *actually controlled whole territories*, like for example the whole empire of Babylon, of Persia or of Greece. They never controlled everything that happened in those countries! For example, Daniel lived and served in the empires of Babylon and Persia and he was never under the control of evil spirits! Although many non-Christians and even some Christians believe that their territory is controlled by evil spirits and their demon-princes and not by God, the Bible clearly teaches that God in Jesus Christ is the sovereign King who controls every territory on earth and in the whole universe (Psalm 2:1-12; 24:1; 145:13; 146:10; Matthew 28:18)!

- God controls the historic events on earth in a sovereign way.

Non-Christians often believe in a hierarchy of demons who control the historic events on earth. For example, in the Old Testament times, they believed that strong countries like the empires of Persia and Greece had demon princes who were stronger than the spiritual powers of the weaker countries like the small country of Israel. But the Bible clearly teaches that the hierarchy of demons in the air is not a replica of the hierarchy of kings on the earth! Although Israel was an insignificant nation and Persia and Greece were great world empires, Michael, the angel prince of Israel, was much stronger than the demon princes of Persia and Greece! It was not these demon princes of Persia and Greece, but our sovereign God who controlled the historic events of Persia, Greece and Israel!

The Bible consistently teaches that it is God who in a sovereign way binds and destroys evil spirits and their demon princes. For example, we read that the Assyrian king of the mighty Assyrian Empire boasted that the gods of other nations could not deliver their nations from his mighty army. However, when king Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah cried out in prayer to the God of the Bible, God sent *just one angel* who completely annihilated the mighty Assyrian army (185000 men)(2 Chronicles 32:1-21; Isaiah 37:36; cf. Revelation 12:7-9)!

- God reveals the future historical events on earth in a sovereign way.

God revealed to Daniel that the spiritual warfare in the air was going to be directed against Persia first and then against Greece, because each of these countries would as world empires have power over Israel for a limited time. Israel was regarded as God’s people in exile. Although God’s people seemed defenceless, they had God and all God’s angels on their side (cf. Matthew 26:52)! Although the conflict on earth would be such as to cause doubt as to whether God’s people could survive, God’s vision to Daniel was intended to give Daniel the unshakeable assurance that however desperate the situation on earth might be, God is always in control of all the events on earth. The outcome of the spiritual war in the air had already beforehand been determined!

3. Evil spirits try to destroy people by attaching themselves to certain things.

(1) Evil spirits try to destroy the bodies of people.

Discover and discuss. How do evil spirits try to destroy the bodies and spirits of people?

Read Matthew 4:23-24; 12:22; Luke 11:14; 13:11,16. Sometimes evil spirits cause *physical disabilities*. Although not all sicknesses and physical disabilities are caused by evil spirits (cf. John 9:1-3), some evil spirits have the power to make some people blind (Matthew 12:22), deaf and mute (Luke 11:14) or cripple (Luke 13:11,16).

Read Matthew 12:43-45; Luke 8:2,30. Sometimes evil spirits *possess or attack people*. Some evil spirits sometimes enter the bodies of non-Christians (that is, of people who do not have the Holy Spirit living in them). Such people are then called *demon-possessed*. Although evil spirits attack born-again Christians (Ephesians 6:10,16), they can never possess a born-again Christian, because “the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4; cf. Matthew 12:43-45; cf. John 10:28; 14:16-17).

(2) Evil spirits try to destroy the spirits (minds, souls) of people.

Discover and discuss. How do evil spirits try to destroy the spirits (minds, souls) of people?

Read Luke 8:27-29,35; Mark 9:20-22. Sometimes evil spirits cause *spiritual disabilities*. Some evil spirits have the power to make some people mad (Luke 8:27-29,35) or to drive them to commit suicide (Mark 9:20-22). However, we must make it very clear that not all sicknesses, pains, physical disabilities and mental diseases are caused by evil spirits, because the Bible clearly distinguishes between these in Matthew 4:23-24!

Read Deuteronomy 32:16-17; Psalm 106:34-39; 1 Corinthians 10:18-21. Evil spirits use especially *idolatry* to destroy the minds and spirits of people! Evil spirits attach themselves to idols and to the sacrifices made to these idols. Thus, idolatry is really a worship of evil spirits!

Read 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 1 John 4:1-6; 2 John 7-11. Evil spirits attach themselves to *false teachers and their false teachings* in order to destroy the minds and spirits of people! The Bible says, “Some (nominal) Christians will abandon the (Christian) faith and follow deceiving spirits, and things taught by demons.” Evil spirits are certainly involved in the false teachings of the religions, the philosophies and the ideologies of the world. Evil spirits are certainly involved in the lies and slander that are often spread by the mass media (John 8:44). Evil spirits are probably also involved in the deliberate false assumptions, which are sometimes made by scientists.

Read Leviticus 19:26,31; 20:6,27; Deuteronomy 18:9-13. Evil spirits attach themselves to every kind of *occultism* in order to destroy people! Evil spirits control occultism, like sacrificing people in the fire, divination, sorcery, interpreting omens, witchcraft, casting spells, mediums and spiritists, consulting the dead and the other detestable ways of the nations that do not know the God of the Bible. Satanism is the worship of Satan, usually through all kinds of revolting practices, like occultism, sexual immorality and violent murder.

(3) Evil spirits try to destroy God's people by political persecution, religious perversion and moral seduction.

Discover and discuss. How do evil spirits try to destroy God's people?

Read Revelation 16:13-14; 17:1-6. John describes three evil spirits (literally: three *unclean* spirits) who come out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. They perform miracles in order to deceive the leaders of the nations and turn them against God. These evil spirits look like frogs in order to indicate their abominable, loathsome and repulsive characters. These evil or unclean spirits represent the satanic, hellish ideas, plans, projects, methods and enterprises, which are born in hell and are introduced into the minds of people through Satan himself and his two agents, the beast and the false prophet. Satan's third agent is the great prostitute, Babylon.

- “The beast out of the sea” represents Satan's antichristian governments and its persecutions (Revelation 13:1-10), especially in the great world empires (the nations as political units)(Daniel 7:17) with their kings (all rulers)(Daniel 7:24) that follow one another throughout the period from the first to the second coming of Christ, symbolised by 42 months (Revelation 13:5-7). This 3½ years period symbolises *a demarcated period of time* that begins with the first coming of Christ (Revelation 12:5-6) and ends suddenly and unexpectedly with the second coming of Christ (Revelation 11:2-12). Coming from “the sea” indicates that the beast arises out of the roaring sea of the raging nations” (Psalm 65:7; Isaiah 17:12; Revelation 17:15). This beast is Satan's antichristian political persecutor (oppressor) throughout the whole New Testament period till the second coming of Christ.

- “The beast out of the earth” or “the false prophet” represents Satan's antichristian knowledge, its misleading and its advocates (Revelation 13:11-18), especially in the religions, ideologies, philosophies and sciences of the world with their advocates throughout the period from the first to the second coming of Christ. Coming from “the earth” indicates “lacking heavenly nature and significance” (Philippians 3:19) and “being unspiritual, devilish” (James 3:14-15). The beast out of the earth represents all people and institutions, which advocate antichristian religions, ideologies, philosophies and sciences, which persecute Christians throughout the period from the first to the second coming of

Christ, symbolised by the 42 months of the reign of the beast out of the sea (Revelation 13:5,12-13). The number “2” indicates “witnessing” or “advocating and defending” (Deuteronomy 17:6; Matthew 18:16; Luke 10:1). The false prophet is Satan’s antichristian religious corrupter (liar, deceiver) throughout the whole New Testament period till the second coming of Christ.

“The great prostitute” or “Babylon” represents Satan’s antichristian world and its seductions, especially in industry and commerce, business and finance, education and justice, luxuries and pleasures, art and sports, and certainly also in every kind of worldly religion (cf. Revelation 18:2-3,20,22). In short, it is a symbol of Satan’s antichristian culture connected to the world empires throughout the period from the first coming to the second coming of Christ. By means of all these seductions, she seeks to entice and seduce people, to infatuate and blind people, in order to turn them away from God (cf. Revelation 19:2). “Babylon” represents the world viewed as the centre of luxury, glamour and vice, as the embodiment of “the cravings of sinful man, the lust of the eyes and the boasting of what he has and does”, “the world and its desires that pass away” (1 John 2:16-17). Babylon, the great prostitute, is Satan’s antichristian moral seducer (tempter) throughout the whole New Testament period till the second coming of Christ.

During the first century A.D., the temptation to become worldly and to deny Christ came from three directions:

- From the side of antichristian politics with persecutions by the sword, wild beasts, the stake, imprisonment and the constant accusations before the Roman courts (Revelation 2:9-10,13; 3:9).
- From the side of antichristian religion (lying religions), like the emperor worship, Gnosticism and the Mystery religions (Revelation 2:6,13-15).
- From the side of antichristian culture (moral values), as the seductions of sexual immorality. People were constantly invited to join in the immoral feasts of the heathen, in order to make their social position secure and to enjoy the pleasures of the world.

In every age, Christians must consider who and what represents antichristian politics, antichristian religions and antichristian culture in their time and within their own society!

In the vision of John, these evil spirits go out to the nations of the whole world (and thus also to your nation today), in order to seduce them and to stir them up against the God of the Bible and God’s people (Christians)! The closer we come to the second coming of Jesus Christ, the more active the antichristian politics with its persecutions, the antichristian religions with its lies and the antichristian culture with its seductions will become! Their activity will become most violent during the last days just before the second coming of Christ!

The evil spirits are often called “unclean”, because not only in a religious sense, but especially in a moral sense, they pervert people. It is therefore possible that many evil spirits have a strong influence on the sexual moral corruption among people, like pornography, adultery, prostitution, homosexuality and any other kinds of sexual immorality. The activities of the third antichristian spirit, called Babylon, the great prostitute, point in the direction of enormous moral perversion.

Again we must make it very clear that not all evil originates from Satan or his demons, because the Bible says that the greatest problem is not Satan or evil spirits or even the evil world. The Bible says that the greatest problem is the sinful heart of man (Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 8:5-8)!

Conclusion. Evil spirits or demons like to attach themselves to some political rulers of nations, to idolaters and false teachers of antichristian religions and to sexual immoral people.

C. THE DISARMAMENT OF THE EVIL SPIRITS

Discover and discuss. What did Jesus do to the evil spirits?

1. Jesus Christ disarmed all evil spirits.

Read Colossians 2:14-15. **Teach.** “The written code with its regulations” is here especially the Old Testament ceremonial law. By his death on the cross, Jesus Christ not only fulfilled the law, but also *cancelled* the law (as God’s demand for righteousness) once for all time. The law had functioned as the impersonal accuser of people, because everybody transgressed the law and nobody could keep the law! Because Jesus Christ fulfilled the law as God’s just requirement for justification, he could also cancel this law. Christians are set free from the Old Testament Law and every other law as a means of gaining justification or salvation! Christians are also no longer under the obligation to observe the ceremonial laws and the civil laws of the Old Testament!

“The powers and authorities” refer to the evil spirits in the atmosphere around the earth and to the evil authorities in the world. By his death on the cross, Jesus Christ not only “bound” Satan, but also “disarmed” all the evil spirits once for all time. The evil spirits had functioned as the personal accusers of people, because Jesus Christ had not yet been crucified and therefore their sins had not yet been atoned for (Romans 8:33; Revelation 12:10). By the great redemptive acts of Jesus Christ, which are his death, resurrection, ascension and enthronement in heaven (Colossians 2:15; Revelation 12:10; Ephesians 1:20-23), God disarmed these evil spirits and publicly exposed them to disgrace by leading

them away as captives (prisoners of war)! He led them as it were chained to his chariot in his triumphal journey (ascension)! This happened once for all time at the first coming of Jesus Christ 2000 years ago. Through the triumph of Jesus Christ, Christians have become “more than conquerors” once for all over Satan and his evil spirits (Romans 8:37-39)!

Jesus Christ bound Satan (Matthew 12:29; Revelation 20:3) and disarmed all his evil spirits (Colossians 2:15). This does not mean that Jesus Christ *bound* or *disarmed* them *in every respect*, because other passages in the Bible teach that Satan and his evil spirits still exercise very powerful influence for evil over the lives of all those people who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord. And although Satan is bound and his evil spirits are disarmed, even Christians still need to put on the full armour of God and resist their attacks (Ephesians 6:10-18). Christians are able to resist Satan and his evil spirits (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9) only because Satan has been bound and his evil spirits have been disarmed! Disobedient Christians, who neglect to put on the whole spiritual armour, still experience severe defeats in their personal lives and will have to face the judgement of Christ (Revelation 2:14-16,20,24).

2. Jesus Christ rescued Christians from the dominion of evil spirits.

Read Colossians 1:13-14. **Teach.** “The dominion (Greek: *exousia*) of darkness” refers to the domain where Satan and his evil spirits exercise power. Colossians 1:13 says that God *rescued* Christians from this domain of darkness once for all time and brought them into the kingdom (domain of power) of Jesus Christ. He did this through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which brought forgiveness and redemption to all people who believe in Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is “the Head of the Body (the Church)” (Colossians 1:18). He is also “the Head of every (good and evil) power and authority” that exists (Colossians 2:10), but not in the same sense as he is the Head of the Church. He is their Head in the sense of “the highest and almighty Lord/Master” (Colossians 1:16; Ephesians 1:22) so that apart from him no good angel can help people and no evil spirit can harm them (cf. Jeremiah 10:5)! Christians “have overcome them (among others the spirit of the antichrist), because the one who is in you (the Holy Spirit) is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

3. Jesus Christ causes people to escape from the trap of Satan (and his evil spirits).

Read 2 Timothy 2:25-26. **Teach.** “God causes people *once for all* (aorist) to become sober or to come to their senses (literally: set them free from spiritual “drunkenness” or rashness) (Greek: *ana-nefó*) and so “(escape) from the trap of the devil and his evil spirits who had taken them captive alive (Greek: *zó-greó*) to do his will. God rescues people from Satan and his evil agents by granting people repentance (a change of thinking) that leads them to the knowledge of the truth (the Word).

Every Christian, who remains in Jesus Christ and continues to depend on him, need not fear Satan or any of his evil spirits. Satan has been bound and his evil spirits have been disarmed. They cannot harm Christians (1 John 5:18) unless Christians become disobedient to God and thus allow these evil spirits to harm them!

D. THE WARFARE AGAINST SATAN AND HIS EVIL SPIRITS

1. Christians should resist evil spirits.

Discover and discuss. How should Christians resist Satan and his evil spirits?

Christians should resist the attacks of evil spirits. Although Satan and his evil spirits have been conquered and their absolute power over people has been curbed, the Bible still teaches that Christians should be watchful and should wage spiritual warfare against them! Christians need not fear these evil spirits or demons. They are disarmed. However, the spiritual war against them will have to continue until the second coming of Christ, because these evil spirits or demons still do great harm to people without Jesus Christ and they also try to harm Christians who do not have their spiritual armour on.

(1) Christians must first submit themselves to God. Then resist the devil.

Read James 4:7-8. James urges Christians to first come near to God, to purify their hearts before God and to submit to God. Then they should resist the devil. God promises that the devil will flee from them!

(2) Christians must first be self-controlled, alert and stand firm in the Christian faith. Then resist the devil.

Read 1 Peter 5:8-9. The apostle Peter warns that Satan prowls around Christians as a roaring lion, all the time looking for a weak spot to attack them. Christians should therefore first live a self-controlled life, be alert against the devil’s attacks and stand firm in their Christian faith. Then they should resist the attacks of the devil and his evil spirits. Christians should know that other Christians throughout the world undergo this same kind of struggle and suffering.

(3) Christians must first get rid of bitterness and anger.

Then not give the devil a foothold again.

Read Ephesians 4:26-27,31. The apostle Paul urges Christians to get rid of bitterness (the unwillingness to forgive) and anger (against those who treated you unjustly), brawling and slander (speaking evil of certain people), along with every form of malice. Only in this way you avoid giving the devil a foothold in your life (a hole in your defence).

Other things that would give the devil and evil spirits a foothold in your life are entertaining a forbidden relationship, getting involved in an evil activity or going to a questionable place.

(4) First be very assured that the Holy Spirit lives in you.

Then test the spirits to see whether they are from God.

Read 1 John 4:1-6; 2 John 7-11. The apostle John urges Christians to believe that the Holy Spirit living in them is the Spirit of the truth. Therefore Christians should not believe the lying spirits within people, who do not acknowledge that Jesus Christ is God that took on the human nature (John 1:1,14) or who do not continue to live according to the teachings of Jesus Christ. Many false teachers have gone out into the world (Matthew 24:24). Christians should test them and refuse to believe their lies. While God has given to some Christians the gift of distinguishing between spirits (1 Corinthians 12:10), he has given the Bible to all Christians to know and discern the truth (John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)!

Christians must resist false teachers, because they are the false agents of evil spirits. They should resist them by refusing to listen to them or to their false teachings. They should especially refuse to read their false books and magazines! And they should refuse to welcome them into their homes.

2. Christians should wage war against evil spirits.

Discover and discuss. How should Christians wage war against Satan and his evil spirits?

Christians should wage war against the Satan and his evil spirits with spiritual weapons.

(1) Use the spiritual armour to extinguish flaming arrows and to counter attacks.

Read Ephesians 6:16-18. It says, "Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ... Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions."

Christians should especially use faith, specific Bible verses and prayer to wage spiritual warfare against the devil and his evil spirits. "The flaming arrows of Satan" are his attacks on the body, mind and spirit of Christians, for example, his lies and false accusations. However, Christ has given to Christians faith in his promises as a shield to *extinguish* the flaming arrows of the evil one. Christians believe that God's Words and promises are true and he acts on the basis of this assurance. Christians use specific Bible verses (appropriate Bible texts) (Greek: réma) (for example: Matthew 4:4) to overcome specific attacks of the evil one. And Christians pray to show their complete dependence on Jesus Christ. That is why Christians should not try to counter the attacks of the evil spirits by relying on their own strength or wisdom without relying on God's Word and on God's presence through the Holy Spirit.

The first purpose of spiritual warfare is not to win, but to remain standing (Ephesians 6:13).

(2) Use spiritual weapons to demolish strongholds (proud assertions and claims) and thus to rescue captives.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. It says, "Though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does (in the flesh). The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." Christians should use the wisdom, truths and arguments of the Bible to wage spiritual warfare against the devil and his evil spirits.

The second purpose of spiritual warfare is to demolish the strongholds of the evil spirits. These "strongholds" of evil spirits are their false arguments, pretensions and claims.

The third purpose of spiritual warfare is to rescue people in the world, who have been captured alive to do the will of Satan and evil spirits (2 Timothy 2:25-26).

3. Some Christians have authority and power to drive out evil spirits.

Although Christians have authority and power in prayer and in the proclamation of the Word of God, Jesus Christ has given his authority and power to drive out demons (evil spirit) to certain people (especially his apostles).

Read Matthew 10:1,8 (the apostles); Mark 16:9-20 (the disciples of Christ); Luke 10:18-20 (the disciples of Christ); Acts 5:16 (the apostles); 8:7 (the evangelist Philip); 13:6-12 (the apostle Paul); 16:18 (the apostle Paul); 26:17-18 (the apostle Paul); 2 Corinthians 12:12 (the apostles); Hebrews 2:3-4 (the disciples of Christ).

In the Gospels Christ gave this authority to his twelve disciples (later called: apostles) and to a larger group of his disciples (the 72). In the Book of Acts Christ gave this authority only to his apostles, the apostle Paul and the evangelist Philip. Just as in the Gospels they rebuked the evil spirits in the Name of Jesus Christ and the evil spirits left people. In

the New Testament Letters it is taught that Jesus Christ gave this authority and power to his apostles as “the mark of an apostle of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3-4).

Mark 16:9-20 is not an original part of the Gospel of Mark. The oldest and most reliable manuscripts in Greek, Latin and Syriac show that the Gospel of Mark ended with Mark 16:8. We do not know whether Mark ever completed his Gospel and if not, why not. And if he did complete his Gospel, we do not know what happened to the last part and of how many verses it comprised.

A later writer wrote Mark 16:9-20 at the end of his Gospel as an interesting summary of the other Gospels and Acts. Mark 16:8-20 is a summary of a couple of appearances of Jesus Christ after his resurrection, his ascension and the continuance of his work through his apostles.

- Mark 16:9-11 is a summary of John 20:11-18, the appearance of Jesus Christ to Mary Magdalene.
- Mark 16:12-13 is a summary of Luke 24:13-35, the appearance of Jesus Christ to two men on their way to Emmaus.
- Mark 16:14-18 is a summary of Matthew 28:16-20, the appearance of Jesus Christ to eleven of his disciples on a mountain in Galilee.
- Mark 16:19-20 is a summary of Acts 1:9-11, the ascension of Jesus Christ and the continuance of his ministry through his disciples.

In the light of the Bible Mark 16:17-20 refers to the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ. It was they who first did not believe (Mark 16:11,14). But when they believed, the Lord confirmed their word by the signs that accompanied it (Mark 16:17,20; Matthew 10:1,8; Luke 10:18-20; 2 Corinthians 12:12, also compare Acts 19:13-16).

Mark 16:9-20 is binding for Christian faith and practice only to the extent that it agrees with the rest of the Bible. Because “picking up snakes” and “drinking deadly poison” (Mark 16:18) is not supported anywhere in the rest of the Bible, we must regard these as not being normative in God’s Word, but rather as apocryphal material of which the authenticity is doubtful and which was later added by someone to the end of the Gospel of Mark to look as if it is the Word of God.

Thus, in order to prevent the abuse of the ministry of breaking the power of evil spirits by driving them out, this ministry should only be carried out under the leadership and supervision of the council of elders in the church.

4. All Christians have authority and power in spiritual warfare.

(1) Authority and power in the proclamation of the Word of God.

Christ still employs Christians to free people from the power of evil spirits.

Read Matthew 12:29-30; Luke 10:18-20; Colossians 1:13-14; 2 Timothy 2:25-26.

Christians must not only *resist* the devil, but also *attack the areas where evil spirits have their strongholds*. Christians through their prayers and proclamation of the Gospel are the instruments of Christ through which people are liberated from the dark territories of Satan’s dominion, and brought over to the kingdom (kingship) of Christ (Colossians 1:13-14). Christ saw, “Satan *once for all time* (aorist tense) fall (Greek: *piptó, pesonta*) from heaven (the sky) (Luke 10:18-20) and “he now lies smacked down (perfect tense) (Greek: *piptó, peptókota*) on the earth” (Revelation 9:1)! Therefore Christians are also able to fight the spiritual warfare and conquer!

The most important goal of evil spirits in the world, regardless whether they defend a specific “territory” or “stronghold” or not, is to prevent the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the glorious reality of the God of the Bible (Luke 8:12)! But when Jesus Christ continues “to bind” these evil spirits in answer to the prayers and missionary work of Christians (Matthew 12:29-30), then these evil spirits lose their grip on people and the kingdom (kingship) of Christ takes hold of them!

(2) Authority and power in prayer.

- Not the prayer of Daniel, but the sovereign God who acted against the evil spirits.

Read Daniel 9:1-3; 10:1,12-14. From the Book of Jeremiah Daniel understood that Israel would remain for 70 years in exile. Daniel had humbled himself before God and had prayed to God about this distressful situation of Israel. He had confessed the sin of Israel and had acknowledged that God’s punishment of Israel was just. He pleaded with God to have mercy on Israel and Jerusalem. God answered him in a sovereign way and revealed to him in a vision what would happen in the near future.

In Daniel 9 and 10 Daniel’s prayer was about understanding Israel’s condition and not about binding demon princes. The angel explained to Daniel what would happen in the near future, about the spiritual war in the air and its outcome. *It was nothing Daniel or the believing Jews did that bound and conquered the demon princes in their territories*. It was rather the sovereign God who sent his angel Michael to bind and conquer the demon princes and in this way fulfil his sovereign plan with his people!

Although the conflict on earth was such that there was reasonable doubt whether God's people would survive the conflict, the purpose of God's vision to Daniel was to encourage him. God gave Daniel the unshakeable assurance that no matter how desperate the situation on earth may be, God would always remain in control of events and that the outcome of the spiritual war has already been determined! The purpose of Daniel 9 and 10 is not to teach Christians what they need to do in spiritual warfare, but to encourage Christians with what God has done already! Of course, Christians may follow the good example of Daniel, pray and confess the sins of their nation, but this Bible passage does not teach us the method of the so-called "strategic prayer against territorial (evil) spirits"!

- Not strategic praying of Christians, but the sovereign acts of God "binds" evil spirits.

Read Revelation 3:7-9; Isaiah 14:24,27; Matthew 28:18. The One who opens closed doors in areas (territories), is Jesus Christ and not Christians or their prayers! The following thoughts are not biblical:

- Some people believe that because no-one opposes the evil spirits, these territorial spirits are free to do what they want. The Bible does not support this notion.
- Some people believe that Christians can do no evangelism or missionary work in that territory before they have "bound" these territorial spirits. The Bible does not support this notion.
- Some people believe that a particular place (country, territory) is cursed because of its sin and the evil spirits (gods) in them and that this territory needs to be liberated before evangelism or missionary work can be conducted. The Bible does not teach this.
- Some people believe that Christians must first identify (diagnose the names, intensions and strongholds) of demonic spirits before they can pray against them. After that they must "bind" and "drive out" these demons by their names preferably within that territory itself in the Name of Jesus Christ. The Bible does not teach this.

The above views with regard to "binding" evil spirits and their demon princes overestimate the power of these evil spirits and underestimate the triumph of Jesus Christ and his sovereign power! They also overestimate the responsibility and prayers of Christians and underestimate the already completed work of salvation of Jesus Christ as well as his continuing work on this basis! The Bible does not teach "the method of strategic prayer". It is not the strategic praying of Christians, but the sovereign acts of God that "binds" evil spirits.

The Bible teaches that in contrast to evil spirits and their demon princes, the sovereign God through Jesus Christ controls all areas (territories), all events in history and all people (including non-Christians) on earth (Psalm 24:1,10; Isaiah 14:24,27; Matthew 28:18; Acts 17:26-27; Ephesians 1:21-22; Colossians 2:10)¹.

The Bible does not teach that Christians open closed doors for the proclamation of the gospel through their prayers, but rather that Jesus Christ has the keys and that he in a sovereign way opens all closed doors in the world and creates opportunities to proclaim the gospel. "I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut!" (Acts 14:27; 1 Corinthians 16:9; Colossians 4:2-4; Revelation 3:7-8)!

- Not the prayers of Christians, but the answers of God to the prayers of Christians that break the power of evil spirits and open closed doors.

Read Matthew 12:29; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Ephesians 6:10-11; Colossians 4:2-4. Which place does prayer have in spiritual warfare? The Bible teaches that Christians must dedicate themselves to prayer so that the sovereign God in his own time and own way opens closed doors and creates opportunities to proclaim the gospel! Prayer is not the means to open closed doors, but the means to ask God to open closed doors if it is his sovereign will (Luke 22:42)! Prayer is not a human authority or power that automatically moves the hand of the sovereign (almighty) God to for example bind an evil spirit, drive out an evil spirit or open a closed door! This is an arrogant thought and would make man more powerful than God! The Bible gives no ground for this thought. Prayer is rather the open and empty hand of people that receives from God's hand what he in a sovereign way has determined and is pleased to give!

The Bible teaches that Christians must put on the full armour of God so that they (the Christians) can remain standing against the cunning complots of the devil when they are praying, preaching the Bible and living what the Bible teaches in every place on earth! And the Bible teaches that on the basis of the complete work of salvation of Christ on the cross, Jesus Christ will continue to bind evil spirits and their demon princes, open closed doors in every place on earth and draw people (families, from different religions, towns, countries) in a sovereign way to himself (John 12:31-32). He certainly also does this in answer to the prayers and missionary work of Christians!

The God of the Bible is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to his power (that is the Spirit of Christ) that is at work within us (Ephesians 3:20)!

(3) Authority and power in faith.

Read Matthew 6:9-10; 18:19; Luke 22:42; John 14:13; James 4:15. What is the place of faith in relationship to prayer?

¹ The fullness which Christians possess in Christ is not a reference to their authority to drive out demons, but is Jesus Christ Himself and his completed work of salvation as the Source of everything the Christian needs (Matthew 6:33; John 15:5; Ephesians 1:3). This fullness cannot be found in human philosophy (science), human traditions or religious laws (the ceremonial law including circumcision) (Colossians 2:6-15).

Faith in God's promises causes Christians to pray with conviction and wait patiently for God's answers.

In Matthew 18:19 Jesus Christ promises, "If two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for (desire to ask) (Greek: aiteó), it will be done for you by my father in heaven." And in John 14:13 he promises, "I will do whatever you ask in my Name." Such promises help Christians to come to the place of prayer with confidence and truth. Christians need courage and encouragement when they pray for open doors with opportunities to proclaim the Word of God and to fight the spiritual warfare. These promises promise that God who is able to do everything and not withhold anything that is good for us, will hear and answer all our prayers!

But the one thing these promises do not encourage or allow, is that we should pray with a stubborn insistence that we know what is right and that our will must be done! God's promises do not intend to promote human arrogance.

The essence of faith in prayer is to pray with confidence, then to wait with expectation for God's sovereign will and to accept that God may decide otherwise. James 4:15 teaches that the essence of life and of prayer is, "Not my will, but your will be done" (Luke 22:42). Jesus teaches that this attitude is essential in all our prayers. He teaches, "This is how you should pray, 'Hallowed be your name; your kingdom (kingship) come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven' (Matthew 6:9-10)!" Therefore, in "the prayer of faith", our faith is not that we believe that God will automatically do what we have asked or what he has promised, but that we rest trustfully in the will of our sovereign, faithful and loving God. It is for this reason that Christians must say in all their prayers "Your will be done!"

Every time we Christians pray, "Your (perfect) will be done!", we remove all possible human limitations (imperfections) from our prayers! Our knowledge of the real situation in any territory (country, city, group of people or individual) is always limited! Our proposed solutions and our understanding of God's sovereign will are always limited! Sometimes we impose a limitation on our prayers by our knowledge of what needs to be done. Sometimes we impose a limitation on our prayers by our proposals of what will meet the needs. And sometimes we impose a limitation on our prayers by our sense of what is the best for a particular situation. But when you pray, "Not my will, but yours be done" it is not a sign of weakness or doubt, but rather a sign of strength and faith! Then you impose no restriction on your prayer, but rather lift it above all human limitations and earthly restrictions! The petition, "Your will be done", places the territory, the situation, the group of people or the individual unreservedly into the hands of God and his infinite wisdom, love and power. There is no safer place to leave a territory, a situation, a group of people or an individual than to place them in the hands of God! "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). And there is no solution to any problem that is better, more fitting, more beneficial and more glorious than the answer or solution that God has in mind! "The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

Revelation 8:3-5 teaches that our limited and *imperfect* prayers on earth are mixed with the incense of Christ's *perfect* prayer in heaven for us (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25). That is why our limited and imperfect prayers always reach the throne of God in absolute perfect form! He always gives mercy and grace to help us (Christians) exactly at the time we need it (Hebrews 4:16). God always answers our prayers, but not by doing what our imperfect prayers suggest, but by doing what his perfect will has planned for us!

5. All Christians finally have complete victory over Satan and his evil spirits.

Read Revelation 16:13-16 and 20:7-10. **Teach.** Just before the second coming of Christ, during the Great Tribulation, Satan and his demons will be the driving force of rebellion against God. However, at the second coming, Jesus Christ will throw them all into hell, from where they will never escape and where they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever (Revelation 20:15)!