

Undermining the Faith of Believers by Adopting Extrabiblical Teachings of
Spiritual Warfare

by

Donald W. Linscott

Systematic Theology II

THEO 530

Dr. Russell Hobbs

May 11, 2008

Underming the Faith of Believers

CONTENTS

Thesis Statement.....	3
Introduction	3
Experience Supplants Bible Study	4
A Biblical Definition of Spiritual Warfare	6
Underming the Faith of Believers	11
Conclusion	15
WORKS CITED.....	17

THESIS STATEMENT

In moving from a biblical template of spiritual warfare to an extra-biblical model of spiritual combat, a growing number of popular modern day authors and lecturers have invented numerous rituals and methods which have moved believers into a realm where they are far from the peace, comfort and security of being held firmly in the palm of a supreme God and are instead focused, often fearfully, on the actions of the enemy, Satan, and his demons who do his bidding and have the power to destroy them. The focus of this paper will be to make the reader aware of major extra-biblical teachings of the proponents of spiritual combat and provide a biblical response which will shore up the believer and provide a foundation for security in Christ Jesus.

Introduction

Modern day fascinations with the supernatural have led to a widening body of work discussing the nature and methods of Satan in relation to mankind. Much of the material being developed is originating from accounts of experiences with the unexplained. Courses of study, techniques and methods for recognizing and defeating Satan have taken hold and have even supplanted correct biblical exegesis in a growing number of Christians. The end result, rather than strengthen and liberate believers, has been an undermined belief in the security of the saints, the elevation of individuals who claim unique powers and fear in the heart of Christians who sense Satan hiding behind every bush or corner.

Experience Supplants Bible Study

A movement labeled “The Third Wave¹” by C. Peter Wagner, a faculty member at Fuller Theological Seminary School of World Missions from 1971 to 1999², began growing in popularity largely at the hands of Wagner and John Wimber, founder of the Vineyard Church movement.

Third Wave theology is based on signs and wonders, interaction with demonic forces and the miraculous.

“The distinctive teachings of the Third Wave movement center around (1) a new perspective on what is called “worldviews”; (2) the presence of the future, or the ministry of God’s kingdom, in the present age, not just in a future-only kingdom; and (3) “power evangelism,” evangelism accompanied by dramatic manifestations of miraculous healings and prophetic utterances.”³

Wagner’s Third Wave theology was largely based on experience and shared accounts of like-minded people who clearly did not believe that they need restrict themselves to the teachings of Scripture.

“Never before has God entrusted to His church the level of spiritual warfare which is occurring in every continent in the 1990s. Even ten years ago, we did not have the vocabulary to describe what is almost commonplace these days, such as strategic-level spiritual warfare, spiritual mapping, identificational repentance, and prayer evangelism. The notion of confronting the Queen of Heaven⁴ is not fun

¹ According to Wagner the "first wave" was the strengthening of modern Pentecostalism at the beginning of the 20th century and the "second wave" occurred in the 1960's when the charismatic movement impacted every mainline denomination to some degree.

² C. Peter Wagner is listed as president of Global Harvest Ministries. *Global Harvest Ministries*, 2002, "Global Harvest Ministries," <http://www.globalharvest.org/> (accessed May 1, 2008).

³ Colson, Charles, J.I. Packer, R.C. Sproul, Alistar McGrath, et al *Power Religion*, ed. Michael Scott Horton (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 62.

⁴ This reference ties one of the gods of Mesopotamia in ancient Israel to Satan.

and games. It is an advanced, high-risk assault against the powers of evil that no one would want to undertake other than by a direct command of God.⁵

Thorough exegetical study and well-established norms of bible study were pushed from the forefront and conclusions were instead based on, or overridden by experience and the interpretation of experience.

“Another major proponent of modern day spiritual combat or power encounter theology, John Wimber, founder of the Vineyard movement said, ‘I have talked with many evangelical theologians who have undergone significant changes in their theology because of an experience.’”⁶

This experience-based approach supplants scripture in the life of the believer and sets up the need for one who will interpret the true meaning of events and discern God’s will and actions in the life of the believer. This interpreter, “apostle⁷” or “anointed one” is immediately elevated to a place of power while the believer becomes more and more dependant.

Third Wave theology has opened doors for discussions of demonic activity, redefining bondages, following the activities of the enemy and even “mapping” and indentifying so-called “territorial spirits” by name, and developing an entire course of study to combat the enemy. Few are loosely tied to Scripture and others have absolutely

⁵ C. Peter Wagner, *Confronting the Queen of Heaven* (Colorado Springs, CO: Wagner Institute for Practical Ministry, 1998), 5-7.

⁶ C. Peter Wagner and Kevin Springer, *Power Evangelism* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 88; quoted in Charles Colson, J.I. Packer, R.C. Sproul and Alister McGrath, *Power Religion*, ed. Michael Scott Horton (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 88.

⁷ The reader who cares to delve into further study beyond the bounds of this brief paper will quickly discover common vocabulary within the third wave movement. While some of the terms do occur in Scripture, they rarely carry the same meaning and significance as has been ascribed in this modern day vernacular.

no basis in Scripture or are esoteric interpretation which is when people search for a hidden message or secret meaning in the text.⁸

A Biblical Definition of Spiritual Warfare

C.S. Lewis wrote, “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to not believe in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.”⁹

One need not spend too much time in Third Wave research to discover a proclivity for the demonic, engaging the enemy in battle, advancing and establishing God’s kingdom and taking regions in the name of Christ.

Michael Horton correctly points out that spiritual warfare is real and biblical but is careful to place it in its proper biblical framework as a side dish to the believer’s foundational purpose of knowing Christ and Him crucified.¹⁰ Horton believes that, at least among Third Wave proponents, this defining scriptural principal has been replaced with Ephesians 6:12 as the core or motto which says, “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (NIV).”

⁸ James W. Sire, *Scripture Twisting* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 107.

⁹ C.S Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: MacMillan, 1961), 3.

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 2:2

This war has long been evident. The reader may be reminded of the Christian classic *The Holy War* by John Bunyan. Bunyan's allegorical work, like C.S. Lewis', put warfare in its correct context being focused on Christ.¹¹

“And yet, even this spiritual warfare Paul describes in Ephesians is not a matter of anything more than proclamation and defense of the gospel of Christ crucified. This is clear when the weapons and armor are described: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, feet prepared ‘with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace’ (v. 15)¹²

Kenneth Boa, is another who includes the C.S. Lewis quote found at the beginning of this section. Boa breaks down biblical spiritual warfare into three areas: the world, the flesh and the devil. Boa, unlike Wagner and others of the Third Wave leaning, provides a thorough exegesis of scripture in making his points. While acknowledging the use of numerous military metaphors throughout scripture, Boa asserts that the believer's goal should be more as an over comer than attacker.

“As new creatures in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), we face a daily battle against the opposing forces of the world system, fleshly desires, and ‘spiritual forces of wickedness’ (Ephesians 6:12b). For us to be overcomers, we need discipline, resistance, the skillful use of spiritual weapons, and dependence upon the power of God.”¹³

However, even Boa seems to be influenced by the modern Third Wave thought when it comes to battling Satan. While he says it is clear that the Christian is equipped with weapons to help him stand when attacked, he later leans closer to the Wagner camp when discussing demonic activity in the life of the Christian stating, “But the indwelling

¹¹ John Bunyan, *The Holy Way* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1948 (1795)).

¹² Colson, et al., 16-17.

¹³ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 329.

of the Spirit does not exclude the presence of evil within the saint ... the Bible does not teach that Christians are immune to demonic entry, and it is clear from the experience of many missionaries and counselors that believers can be internally oppressed.¹⁴

In that regard, Boa's exegesis becomes thin. He fails to acknowledge that nowhere in the New Testament are believers instructed to cast demons out of believers. Also, 1 John 4:4 tells believers that they overcome "because the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." No scripture suggests shared residence. Shared residence sets up the need for an eviction which would require what Wagner and Wimber referred to as "power encounters."

Scripture is clear that believers are not to give the devil a foothold through their choosing sin. It is also clear that the devil will do all he can to discourage, tempt and influence the believer but to suggest that he can enter the believer, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, does not find merit in scripture.

The observant reader will also notice that Boa, in describing his third area, uses a Third Wave litmus test discussed earlier to validate his conclusion when he says it is "clear from the experience." It is unclear in scripture yet clear from experience? Of experience John H. Armstrong wrote, "If we put experience before Scripture, there is no reason we should not return to medieval superstition, such as the relics of the saints."¹⁵

Ray C. Stedman sees little support in the New Testament letters of the apostles for demons entering believers and points out that there are very few mentions of straight attack from Satan especially after Jesus physically left the earth. Stedman believes that

¹⁴ Ibid., 346.

¹⁵ Colson, et al, 79.

the Bible shows increased demonic activity that was perhaps “stirred up” by Christ’s ministry on earth but notes a decline after His ascension.¹⁶

It would be interesting to see what examples Stedman might have used if his book was written after 1990 when the Third Wave movement and teachings of aggressive spiritual warfare gained more popularity. He does speak to one of the principles taught by Third Wave proponents who routinely “bind” and “rebuke” Satan or anoint doorframes and windows to battle the demonic and keep them from entering a structure.

“There is much written about Satan’s indirect attack in the letters of Paul, but Paul has little to say about the direct attack of satanic forces. Nowhere do we read that Christians should ‘bind’ the powers of darkness before entering a room, nor that we should ascribe all the common problems of life to demonic activities. That idea is not in the New Testament.”¹⁷

Some would debate Scripture supports this practice claiming that Matthew 12:29 and Mark 3:27 in which Jesus talks of “binding the strong man” as evidence that they are to speak to Satan and bind him. Theologian John Gill, however, reveals the error in this thought process showing that Jesus was providing a rationale to oppose those who claim He is casting out evil spirits under the power of Satan. Gill says that Jesus uses the defense that He is operating under the direction of the Father who bound Satan. It is not meant as an instruction to believers to bind or loose Satan as they desire.

Or else, how can anyone enter into a strong man's house, This is another argument of Christ's proving that his casting out of devils could not be by Satan, but by the

¹⁶ Ray C. Stedman, *Spiritual Warfare: Winning the Daily Battle with Satan* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, 1975), 61.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

Spirit of God; for if he did not act by any superior power to Satan's, and such by which he was able to master, overcome, and bind him, he could never *spoil his goods*, as he did; ... *except he first bind the strong man, and then he will spoil his house*: by the "strong man", is meant the devil, see (Isaiah 49:24 Isaiah 49:25) who is powerful and mighty, ... but Christ is stronger than he, and attacked him, and dispossessed him of the bodies of men; and restraining him from doing them any hurt, ... and keeps him from doing them any damage; as he will in the latter day "bind" him and shut him up in prison a thousand years; ... and therefore the suggestion that Christ casts out devils by his assistance, even out of the bodies of men, has no show of reason in it.¹⁸

J. Oswald Sanders notes that Jesus bound the strong man in this passage using three separate weapons. First, he used the Word of God to turn Satan away in the wilderness. Then, at Gethsemane, Jesus resisted Satan by submitting His will to the Father's and finally, he bound Satan in His death on the cross.¹⁹ Again, none of these examples provide Scriptural support for aggressive moves but rather indicate the importance of standing against the efforts of the evil one.

The same Ephesians six passage that modern strategic level spiritual warfare advocates build on to urge believers into an aggressive posture, when read in context, reveals that it is the task of the Christian to be prepared to stand when the attacks of the enemy come.

“Paul uses figurative symbols to suggest a very substantial reality. The armor he talks about is the way to be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. The armor, in short, is nothing more than a symbolic description of the Lord himself.”²⁰

¹⁸ <http://beta.biblestudytools.com/mybst/default.aspx?type=library&contentid=10258&category=REF> as cited in John Gill, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments* (Kansas City, MO: Baptist Standard Bearer, 2006), Mt. 12:29.

¹⁹ J. Oswald Sanders, *A Spiritual Clinic* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), 135-136.

²⁰ Stedman,97.

The biblical definition of spiritual warfare, at its simplest, is to stand firm, resist the attempts of the enemy and draw close to the Lord as defender and protector. The soldier for Christ is to wield the sword of the spirit, the Word of God, skillfully to ward off Satan and minister to saved and unsaved alike. It is not to chase after the devil, to participate in ritualistic prayer, to cleanse objects and identify demonic highways, territories and focus on the efforts of the enemy.²¹

Undermining the Faith of Believers

Proponents of an aggressive, enemy-focused approach to spiritual warfare, while thinking they are ultimately helping to free believers and non-believers from the bondages of Satan, often undermine the faith of listeners who begin to live in fear and assume a defensive posture in all of life.

While authors such as Neil Anderson often read as though they have a sound biblical approach to spiritual warfare, readers do not have to read long before they encounter mystical power encounters and have their senses titillated in the same manner as watching fanciful accounts of spirits on the Discovery Channel.

“I addressed my questions to the spirit in Evelyn which I had bound to silence on the basis of our authority of Christ.²² The spirit answered my question by speaking to Evelyn’s mind, which she heard as clearly in her head as she heard me with her ears.²³”

²¹ Fred C. Dickason, *Angels, Elect and Evil* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), 216-221.

²² Anderson uses the Mt. 12:29 passage discussed earlier as biblical support for speaking to demons, binding the strong man and then entering into conversations with demons to identify them and cast them out.

Amazon reports that more than 1.2 million copies of Anderson's *The Bondage Breaker* have been sold to date.²⁴ It can be assumed that many of those copies have influenced thousands of additional believers as a result of its use in numerous Sunday School classes, conferences and workshops.

Anderson teaches that research will not reveal the existence of demons and writes, "Revelation alone is our authoritative source on the reality and personality of evil spirits."²⁵ But, Anderson does not qualify this "revelation" in any way. Is it available through the revealed and inspired Word of God, the only authoritative source for believers, or does it include new and forthcoming revelation of those in the strategic level spiritual warfare camp? Again, the knowledge claimed and the methods used in battling Satan are from the latter.

Anderson is not alone in his leaning on revelation for guidance in spiritual warfare techniques. Wimber, Wagner and others have depended on the same because simply, the Bible provides very little in terms of methods for encountering the demonic apart from the armor and weapons designed to enable believers to stand and resist. Extra-biblical revelation should not be accepted lightly.

²³ Neil Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1990), 96.

²⁴ Amazon, "Amazon.com," http://www.amazon.com/Bondage-Breaker%C2%AE-Overcoming-Negative-Irrational/dp/0736918140/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1210347543&sr=8-1 (accessed May 4, 2008).

²⁵ Anderson, 104.

Richard Lee and Ed Hindson put it simply in writing, “Whenever someone claims to have a new revelation from God, he is making the same claim Muhammed made for the Koran and Joseph Smith made for *The Book of Mormon*.”²⁶

Written for a Christian audience, *The Bondage Breaker* presents numerous teachings which are, at best, thinly supported in Scripture. Christians, who should be taught to focus on Jesus and His completed work on the cross, are instead left to wonder what their personal “bondages” are and where they will find deliverance.

Anderson tells his readers, “It is my experience that no more than 15 percent of the evangelical Christian community is completely free of Satan’s bondage.”²⁷

He goes on to identify 65 percent experiencing Satan’s bondage as evidenced by thoughts of lust, envy, greed, apathy, hatred. Another 15 percent of Christians, according to Anderson are evil voices that “seem to overpower them.” The final 5% of believers hear voices and follow their leading.²⁸

What is “bondage?” *The Random House Unabridged Dictionary* defines it as slavery and involuntary servitude.²⁹ Eighty-five percent of believers, according to Anderson, are struggling with bondage.

This sets up several shaking questions about the work of Christ on the cross. Did Jesus truly defeat the enemy? Is His work enough or is more required? Does Christ’s

²⁶ Richard Lee and Ed Hindson, *Angels of Deceit: The Masterminds Behind Religious Deception* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1993), 42.

²⁷ Anderson, 104.

²⁸ Ibid., 107-108.

²⁹ *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*, 1st ed., s.v. “bondage.”

sacrifice free those who would put their faith in Him? Are new believers truly new creatures in Christ with a fresh start or might they still need help clearing bondages? Is God supreme and sovereign?

Is the fascination with experience and the accounts of angels and demons and the supernatural new to today? The Apostle Paul appears to have been dealing with some of the same issues when he advised the believers in the Colossian church not to be swayed off course by the remarkable stories and accounts of those he said had lost touch with the Head, the gospel message in Christ.³⁰

The system of spiritual warfare predicated by satanic bondages requires that someone be able to develop a system to deal with the spirits. Today, the numbers of these anointed ones have grown exponentially. As both evangelism and spiritual disciplines require tools for extensive warfare and continuous, direct battles with Satan, the need to have people trained in warfare techniques has become tantamount. Wagner's Leadership Institute is just one example of an organization committed to teaching others how to engage and defeat Satan using methods and techniques that are not found in Scripture.

Believers who have not been taught to engage in biblical spiritual warfare are left to seek out those who are trained to do so. Stephen Arterburn and Jack Fenton identify this system as dangerous and toxic. "The claim of special powers from God is another way for a person to feel valued, regardless of whether or not they have anything to do

³⁰ *Colossians 2:18* "Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. (NIV)

with God. This claim is often used to manipulate people into believing the gifted one is a great person of God.³¹

The bookshelves in Christian bookstores contain numerous accounts of demonic deliverance and various techniques that make the ungrounded believer question how secure he actually is in Christ.

One such book, *They Shall Expel Demons*, goes into detail of exorcisms but is unique in that the author writes of learning helpful information from the demons he has encountered.³² This goes in synch with those who have drawn up strategies for spiritual warfare based on their experiences. It is not Scripture that teaches them how to proceed; it is sometimes the demons themselves.

Conclusion

"There were fifteen [demons], packed into Carmen's body like crawling, superimposed maggots, boiling, writhing, a tangle of hideous arms, legs, talons, and heads."³³

When Frank Peretti wrote those words in the mid 1980's, it is doubtful that he had any idea of the role that his fictional, fantasy novel would play for so many who were about to embark on a journey beyond the bounds of Scripture into the experiential,

³¹ Stephen Arterburn and Jack Felton, *Toxic Faith* (Nashville: Oliver Nelson, 1991), 167.

³² Derek Prince, *They Shall Expel Demons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 1998), 44-46.

³³ Frank Peretti, *This Present Darkness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1986), 172.

mystical world of the Third Wave. Thousands received his work less as fiction and more as explanation of the demonic realm with demons lurking behind every bush and ready to pounce at every opportunity.

The self-defining and self-advancing teachings of power encounter preachers over the last two decades, continues to grow thanks largely to a societal fascination with the supernatural.

Robert A. Guelich, former faculty at Fuller Theological Seminary, warns against the danger of misrepresenting biblical spiritual warfare and the demonic believing to do so damages believers in that it “can create severe trauma to individuals while seeking to bring them health and wholeness.”³⁴

“In sum: “Peretti’s” accent on spiritual warfare as the fundamental description of the Christian life risks turning the “Prince of peace” into the “Commander-in-Chief,” a role that fits the messianic expectation of Jewish apocalyptic eschatology more than the Christology of the Gospels and the Pauline corpus.”³⁵

Today’s pastor, faced with a cancerous growth of the weak doctrine of modern strategic level spiritual warfare, must avoid the temptation to accept experience-based teachings despite their popularity and hold fast to the biblical model of spiritual warfare which demonstrates that believers in Christ are set free, overcomers who possess all the tools they need to stand in the face of trial and resist the devil.

Only through preaching the authoritative Word of God, will today’s pastor be able to shore up his congregation and help his congregants discover that Jesus has indeed triumphed over the evil one.

³⁴ Robert A. Guelich, "Spiritual Warfare: Jesus, Paul and Peretti," *PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society of Pentecostal Studies* Vol. 13 (Spring 1991)

³⁵ *Ibid.* 33-64.

The enemy is indeed real. His methods are defined in Scripture. His place is established and battles need not cause anxiety and fear for he who is Christ.

The forces of darkness are so chained by the victory of Christ that they are unable to do anything which does ultimate damage to His glory and kingdom. The battles we fight against them should not be occasions of anxiety. They force us back to reliance on Christ's redemptive work and enhance our dignity and authority as redeemed saints who have the power to judge angels.³⁶

WORKS CITED

- Amazon. "Amazon.com." http://www.amazon.com/Bondage-Breaker%C2%AE-Overcoming-Negative-Irrational/dp/0736918140/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1210347543&sr=8-1 (accessed May 4, 2008).
- Anderson, Neil. *The Bondage Breaker*. Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1990.
- Arterburn, Stephen and Jack Felton. *Toxic Faith*. Nashville: Oliver Nelson, 1991.
- Boa, Kenneth. *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001.
- Bunyan, John. *The Holy War*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1948 (1795).
- Colson, Charles, J.I. Packer, R.C. Sproul, Alistar McGrath, et al. *Power Religion*. Edited by Michael Scott Horton. Chicago: Moody Press, 1992.
- Dickason, Fred C. *Angels, Elect and Evil*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1975.
- Gill, John. *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*. Kansas City, MO: Baptist Standard Bearer, 2006.
- Global Harvest Ministries. "Global Harvest Ministries." <http://www.globalharvest.org/index.asp?action=peter> 2002. / (accessed May 1, 2008).
- Guelich, Robert A. "Spiritual Warfare: Jesus, Paul and Peretti." *PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society of Pentecostal Studies* Vol. 13 (Spring 1991): 33-64.
- Lee, Richard and Ed Hindson. *Angels of Deceit: The Masterminds Behind Religious Deception*. Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1993.
- Lewis, C.S. *The Screwtape Letters*. New York: MacMillan, 1961.

³⁶ Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-varsity Press, 1979), 142-143.

- Lovelace, Richard F. *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*. Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-varsity Press, 1979.
- Peretti, Frank. *This Present Darkness*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1986.
- Prince, Derek. *They Shall Expel Demons*. Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 1998.
- Sanders, J. Oswald. *A Spiritual Clinic*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1958.
- Sire, James W. *Scripture Twisting*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1980.
- Stedman, Ray C. *Spiritual Warfare: Winning the Daily Battle with Satan*. Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, 1975.
- Wagner, C. Peter and Kevin Springer. *Power Evangelism*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986, 88. Quoted in Charles Colson, J.I. Packer, R.C. Sproul and Alister McGrath, *Power Religion*, ed. Michael Scott Horton, Chicago: Moody Press, 1992, 78.
- Wagner, C. Peter. *Confronting the Queen of Heaven*. Colorado Springs, CO: Wagner Institute for Practical Ministry, 1998.