

THE INVISIBLE WAR

What Every Believer Needs to Know about
SATAN, DEMONS, AND SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Updated and Expanded Edition

CHIP INGRAM



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To Fred and Bebe with gratitude beyond what we could ever express for your love and support of Theresa, myself, and all of our children in the midst of our greatest spiritual battles.

Chip

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Introduction

What an exciting opportunity to get to update and revise this book on spiritual warfare. Although the truth has not changed, the influence and manifestation of evil has morphed and grown exponentially.

Little did I know eight years ago that this material would be taught on radio, television, and the internet and become a small group resource, bringing it to millions of people around the globe. The feedback and testimonies from people of various cultures, denominations, and countries encouraged me to refine the material and provide more current illustrations and warnings to believers, especially to the subtle attacks on our children.

I invite you to join me on this journey as we uncover the truth from God's Word about the Invisible War we face every day as Christians.

The year was 1990. God had made it clear that my time in Texas as pastor of Country Bible Church was coming to an end. We had enjoyed serving in this rural community for eight years. This was where I had learned to be a pastor. I had developed deep foundations and grown personally in this small town, but God was moving us to a new ministry. His direction was very clear for me and my family. But with every turn came the same warning: "Be

on your guard, Chip. You are entering an area of fierce spiritual combat, and you need to prepare yourself.”

As we interviewed for the job in California, a number of people said this to us in a variety of ways. The elders, key staff members, and specific lay leaders individually welcomed us wholeheartedly, but they also warned us of what we might experience with regard to spiritual warfare. To be honest, I thought they were just a little paranoid. I was a pastor and had dealt with spiritual warfare in ministry before. I had traveled to many countries around the world and seen firsthand the reality of the battle. Besides, God had prepared me with an excellent seminary education—I could exegete Ephesians 6 with the best of them. Or so I thought.

But I began to realize that God was up to something when one of my closest friends and mentors in Texas scheduled a special lunch with me. He was always very discerning and had the habit of regularly fasting and praying for me. I don’t remember him ever being more serious than he was at that lunch. “Chip, you are entering a new era in your ministry, and I have the strongest impression from the Lord that you need to prepare yourself for a whole new level of spiritual warfare. I believe God is going to use you in a very significant way, but you will experience spiritual opposition like you’ve never known before. You need to get ready for the battle.”

Those words were prophetic. Our twelve years in Santa Cruz, California, proved to be a graduate course in spiritual warfare. I would come to learn that this town was a renowned center of occult activity with satanic bookstores and openly active satanic worshipers. I would be confronted with the most fearful experiences in my spiritual life. I would live in an environment where the occult, New Age beliefs, and cults were so common that ads on coffee shop bulletin boards included “how to cast spells,” “how to contact your spirit guide,” and “warlock coven meets 7 p.m. Monday nights.”

During those twelve years, we experienced very bizarre—as well as very subtle—spiritual warfare tactics. My intellectual understanding of key Bible passages was woefully inadequate for the

issues we were facing. But as I prepared myself in the midst of the battle, I constantly ran into two extremes in the resources I studied. It was easy to find quality biblical information about spiritual warfare that was rooted in the meaning of words, the tense of verbs, and how the armor of God was a metaphor Paul had derived from a Roman soldier. But application was almost nonexistent. There was no real sense of how to use God's truth in the midst of the frightful and often bizarre experiences we were facing.

On the other hand, there was an equally plentiful array of resources that were highly experiential when it came to this subject. They described conversations with demons, extreme manifestations of the spiritual world, and anecdotal answers for which I could find very limited, if any, biblical basis. In fact, some of them made it sound as if the final outcome was still up in the air. While one group of people was virtually ignoring any practical warfare, the other was fighting as though Satan might actually win.

This book is my best attempt to bridge the gap in the teaching available on spiritual warfare. Although it is an exposition of Ephesians 6, the reader will find the application of this passage far from theoretical. When one is ministering in a culture where witches are actively praying against you and a horse's head is placed on a stake across from your church to cast a spell on it, there's no room for platitudes or vague, spiritual answers to pressing, difficult questions.

Much of satanic opposition, however, is extraordinarily subtle and has no dramatic manifestations. For this reason, most of the book will deal with the everyday schemes of the evil one in a forthright, biblical, and relevant manner.

The book has been structured for easy access. My experience with most believers is that they have bits and pieces of teaching on spiritual warfare, but they have a difficult time putting the pieces together and knowing how to apply them. As a result the book is divided into four sections:

Spiritual Warfare 101—What Every Believer Needs to Know

Spiritual Warfare 201—How to Prepare Yourself for Spiritual Battle

Spiritual Warfare 301—How to Do Battle with the Enemy and Win

Spiritual Warfare 401—Deliverance from Demonic Influence

At the beginning of each section, you will find the biblical text to be studied, an overview, a preview of what the section will cover, an outline, and a reference key to biblical passages for easy review. This will allow the reader a quick overview of the content of each section and provide a ready reference for dealing with spiritual warfare issues in the future. Preachers, teachers, and Bible students may find this material most helpful. Some readers may prefer to dive right into the chapters, but I hope many will use this outline and the content of this book to systematically apply the truth of God's Word on this subject in a way that will break strongholds in their lives. As I've had the privilege of teaching this material around the country, I have seen firsthand what God can and will do when we understand our position in Christ, put on the full armor of God, and know what it looks like to stand firm, "taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5).

The chapters within each section, however, will follow a more traditional pattern of teaching, using illustrations and suggesting relevant uses in the reader's life. My hope is to provide a resource to the body of Christ that will be personal, biblically accurate, interesting, and, most of all, spiritually helpful; and, at the same time, be structured in a way to prove valuable as a timeless resource for those who teach, counsel, or find themselves in environments where a systematic, clear, and practical reference is needed.

My prayer is that God will use this material to help you know the truth that will set you free—"because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

SECTION 1

Spiritual Warfare 101

What Every Believer Needs to Know

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.

C. S. Lewis

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 6:10–12

Introduction: Opening Your Eyes

In this central New Testament passage about spiritual warfare, Paul tells his readers the nature of the battle and how they are to fight it. This first section—Spiritual Warfare 101—will cover Paul’s general command in v. 10, his specific command in v. 11, and the reason he gives in v. 12 for both commands. As we move on through the passage, we will discover five basic truths to ground us in the reality of the invisible war and to guide us in our thinking.

The General Command—“Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might” (v. 10)

The full meaning of this command is captured in this expanded translation: “Allow yourself to be continually strengthened by the power already made available to you in your new position and relationship with Christ.” It is the power that raised Jesus from the dead and now dwells in you.

The Specific Command—“Put on the full armor of God” (v. 11)

How do you allow yourself to be strong in the Lord? By continually and repeatedly putting on the spiritual protection God has provided for you at specific points in time, for the express purpose of holding on to your position in Christ as you are bombarded by satanic strategies designed to destroy you or render you ineffective in kingdom pursuits.

The Reason for the Commands—“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood” (v. 12)

Our real struggle—our battle, our wrestling match to the death—is not against physical or material adversaries like people, circumstances, and organizations. It is against a hierarchy of demonic forces doing battle in the spiritual realm.

Executive Summary (chaps. 1–4)

Five Basic Truths about Spiritual Warfare

1. *There is an invisible world.*

The invisible world is just as real as the visible world, and both Old and New Testaments refer to it often.

- a. 2 Kings 6:15–19: Elisha, surrounded by a hostile army, tells his servant that invisible hosts are protecting them.
- b. Daniel 10: An angel reveals to Daniel the battle he has been waging.
- c. Ephesians 6:12: One of many references by Paul to a conflict that is not of the flesh.

2. *We are involved in an invisible war.*

This cosmic conflict has eternal implications; lives are at stake. The enemy's strategies affect us every day. When was the last time you honestly considered that some struggle or relational conflict was rooted in satanic opposition?

- a. 2 Corinthians 10:3–5: "Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ."
- b. 2 Corinthians 4:4: "The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

3. *Our foe is formidable.*

The goal of Satan is to destroy God's people and discredit the cause of Christ. He is not to be taken lightly. He is real. He was an angel, the highest of all created beings, who rebelled against God out of pride.

- a. 1 Peter 5:8: “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”
- b. Jude 9: “Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’”
- c. Is Satan for real?
 - the authority of the Bible: Genesis 3:1; 1 Chronicles 21:1; Revelation 12:9.
 - the testimony of Christ: Matthew 4:1–11; also Christ refers to Satan twenty-five times.
 - the reality of demons: Satan is their “prince” (Luke 11:15).
- d. Who is Satan?
 - a created spirit: Job 1:6; Colossians 1:16.
 - an angel: Matthew 25:41; Revelation 12:7.
 - a cherub: Ezekiel 28:14.
 - the highest of all created beings: Ezekiel 28:14.
- e. Where did he come from?
 - created perfect: Ezekiel 28:12–13.
 - had a heavenly estate: Jude 6.
 - a guardian of God’s glory: Ezekiel 28:14.
 - the occasion of his sin = power and beauty: Ezekiel 28.
 - the nature of his sin = pride: Isaiah 14:13; 1 Timothy 3:6.
 - the cause of his sin = personal, free choice: Habakkuk 1:13; James 1:13.
4. *We must respect our foe but not fear him.*

Our responsibility is to become acutely aware of Satan’s methods but not be preoccupied by them. We can become educated about his schemes by examining his names in Scripture; all of them reveal something of his tactics. Scripture

is very clear about his agenda and his targets. But he is limited, and we have no need to fear him if we follow God's instructions in faith.

- a. 2 Corinthians 2:11: Paul agrees to forgive a brother along with the Corinthian church—in order that “no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.”
- b. The vital question: how can we make sure we are not ignorant of his schemes?
- c. Satan's names reveal his tactics.
 - Satan (adversary): Job 1:6–7; 1 Thessalonians 2:18.
 - Devil (slanderer): 1 Peter 5:8.
 - Lucifer (son of the morning): Isaiah 14:12.
 - Beelzebub (lord of the flies): Matthew 12:24.
 - Belial (a false god): 2 Corinthians 6:15.
 - Evil one: 1 John 5:19.
 - Tempter: 1 Thessalonians 3:5.
 - Prince of this world: John 12:31 (NIV).
 - Accuser of the brethren: Revelation 12:10.
 - Representations include:
 - Serpent: Genesis 3.
 - Dragon: Revelation 12.
 - Angel of light: 2 Corinthians 11:14.
- d. Satan attacks God's program, the church, by:
 - False philosophies: Colossians 2:8.
 - False religions: 1 Corinthians 10:20.
 - False ministers: 2 Corinthians 11:14–15.
 - False doctrine: 1 John 2:18.
 - False disciples: Matthew 13:24–30.
 - False morals: 2 Thessalonians 2:7–12.
- e. Satan attacks God's people by:
 - Directing governments: Daniel 10:13.
 - Deceiving people: 2 Corinthians 4:4.

- Destroying lives: Hebrews 2:14.
- Persecuting the saints: Revelation 2:10.
- Preventing service: 1 Thessalonians 2:18.
- Promoting schisms: 2 Corinthians 2:10–11.
- Planting doubt: Genesis 3:1–5.
- Producing sects and cults: 1 Timothy 4:1.
- Provoking sin:
 - Anger: Ephesians 4:26–27.
 - Pride: 1 Timothy 3:6.
 - Worry: Matthew 13:22.
 - Self-reliance: 1 Chronicles 21:1.
 - Discouragement: 1 Peter 5:6–8.
 - Worldliness: 1 John 2:16.
 - Lying: Acts 5:3.
 - Immorality: 1 Corinthians 5:1–2.

f. Satan's power is limited.

Balance and wisdom are crucial in our assessment of spiritual opposition. To assign too much or too little credit to the reality of demonic activity is to err greatly.

- He is created, therefore not omniscient or infinite.
- He can be resisted by the Christian: James 4:7.
- God places limitations on him: Job 1:12.

5. *We do not fight for victory; we fight from victory.*

As believers in Christ, we are invincible. The Bible has given us numerous promises of victory over the power of the enemy.

- a. 1 John 4:4: "You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world."
- b. 1 John 5:4–5: "Whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the

world—our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”

- c. Revelation 12:11: “They overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.”
- d. James 4:7: “Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

Personal Application

What You Need to Remember

- 1. *Satan is a defeated foe.*
“Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out” (John 12:31).
- 2. *Jesus destroyed the works of the devil.*
“[Jesus] canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him” (Col. 2:14–15).
- 3. *We are victors in Christ.*
“‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:55–57).
- 4. *We have the power and resources to resist Satan and demonic attacks.*
“You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

5. *We must learn how to put on the full armor of God to experience in daily living the victory we already possess.*

“Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:13–17).

1

Why You Struggle

Life is a hard fight, a struggle, a wrestling with the principle of evil, hand to hand, foot to foot. Every inch of the way is disputed.

Florence Nightingale

The warnings God gave me through friends, mentors, and leaders at Santa Cruz Bible Church were not in vain. Within a year, a number of incidents occurred that let me know we were certainly in a spiritual struggle.

I'll never forget preaching on a Sunday night and hearing bizarre sounds coming from the back of the auditorium. Soon there were more than strange sounds. A man was walking down the aisle as he shouted and screamed. At first I continued to speak, hoping the ushers would be able to handle the situation. But as he walked toward me, our eyes met. I saw a wildness that I can't quite describe. He not only disrupted the service and my message, but he made a scene that only those who witnessed it could believe. What shocked me was how unsurprised the people in the church were.

Apparently this had happened before. Three or four ushers got to this man before he got to me, and I was informed later in a debriefing session that this individual, as far as they could tell, was demonized. Blasphemies against God, the church, and my message spewed from his mouth that night, and it took three or four men to restrain him and usher him out of the auditorium. If I didn't believe in spiritual warfare before, I certainly did now. I got an introduction I would never forget.

That's just one example among many of the reality of the invisible war. You'll read a lot of examples in this book that come from my time in Santa Cruz, simply because the invisible war is so much more visible there. But it's raging everywhere else on this planet too. It may be behind the scenes—in fact, it probably is—but in your house, your church, and your community there is a violent conflict between kingdoms. We're on the winning side, but we have to be aware of the fight. We have to understand spiritual warfare.

Ephesians 6:10–20 is the central teaching in the entire New Testament on spiritual warfare, and it begins with two commands: “Be strong in the Lord,” and, “Put on the full armor of God.”

The General Command: “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might” (v. 10)

People who suddenly find out that they are in the midst of a cosmic conflict often have one of two extreme reactions: fight or flight. Those who flee do so because they don't feel up to the task. Those who are ready to jump into the fight do so because they feel strong enough to handle it. Ephesians 6 has an answer to both extremes: be strong in the strength of *God's* might.

We may not know much about this battle when we first realize it exists, but we can at least know that it's not about our ability to muster up our own strength. That's good news if you want to avoid the battle because of your own weakness; your strength (or lack of it) isn't really the issue. And it's also good news if you have the urge to rush into battle under your own abilities; you won't have to run from it when you realize how overpowered you are. There

is power available, and it's the greatest power in the universe. The only way to win this war is to be strong in the Lord—in the strength that Paul spent most of Ephesians assuring us is already ours.

This general command to be strong in God's power applies to every believer at all times. Note that word *command*. This is not optional for a Christian. There is nothing in this passage or in the New Testament to indicate that we can dismiss ourselves from the battle—not without suffering great harm or missing out on substantial blessings. Grammatically, this instruction is in the present imperative tense and the passive voice. That means it's an order and a matter of obedience, yet it's a passive obedience—something we have to allow someone else to do for us.

If I were to paraphrase this verse, it would look something like this: “Allow yourselves to be continually strengthened by the power already available to you in your new position and relationship with Christ.” And if we were to dig into the meaning of *power*, we would find that it is the Greek word from which we get *dynamite*. This is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and now dwells in us. That may take a while to sink in, but it needs to. That's the basis for winning this battle. Our churches, our families, our relationships, and our work lack something absolutely crucial if we miss this. We need to allow God to develop our lives in such a way that the power made available to us in our new relationship with him gives us the strength to win.

The Specific Command: “Put on the full armor of God” (v. 11)

The second command tells us how to fulfill the first one. It is a specific command. We are to put on the full armor of God for the purpose of standing firm—or literally, holding our ground. How? By continually and repeatedly putting on the spiritual protection God has given us.

The verb in this command is a little different from the verb in the first command. The tense refers to a specific point in time, and it has a sense of urgency. We don't have time to consider carefully

whether we want to be in this war; we are in it whether we acknowledge it or not. This verb also implies something we do for ourselves—there's nothing passive about it. We don't wait for God to do this for us, and we don't do this once and think we never have to do it again. This lifestyle of putting on the armor implies consistent and multiple efforts. We live this way because of what can happen if we don't: relinquishing the benefit of our position in Christ as we are bombarded by schemes designed to destroy us and render us ineffective in kingdom pursuits.

This is not an add-on only for the deluxe-model Christian. Those schemes affect everyone. They are orchestrated in order to tempt us, deceive us, draw us away from God, fill our hearts with half-truths and untruths, and lure us into pursuing good things in the wrong way, at the wrong time, or with the wrong person. The English word *strategies* is derived from the Greek word Paul uses that is translated “schemes.” That means our temptations are not random. The false perspectives we encounter do not come at us haphazardly. The lies we hear, the conflicts we have with others, the cravings that consume us when we are at our weakest points—they are all part of a plan to make us casualties in the invisible war. They are organized, below-the-belt assaults designed to neutralize the very people God has filled with his awesome power.

The Reason for the Commands: “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood” (v. 12)

The Ephesians weren't living in a vacuum. There's a reason Paul gave them these instructions. They may have been having some relationship issues or negative circumstances—they may have even been undergoing intense persecution from government authorities or worshipers of pagan gods and goddesses, for all we know—but that's not why Paul urges them to be strong and put on their armor. The real issue, he says, is behind the scenes. They are in an intense, to-the-death wrestling match with supernatural, evil beings.

That's what his word *struggle* really means. It's a hand-to-hand combat practiced in ancient Greece in which two people would

fight until one could hold the other person down. It required constant exertion and concentration. When Paul uses the word in Ephesians, he makes it clear that he's not writing about their outward circumstances or about people. The battle may have been manifesting itself in circumstances, city policies, oppression, and evil behavior, but the source was not flesh and blood. The battle is "against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, [and] against the spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places" (v. 12). It's an *invisible* war.

This list of spiritual powers has connotations of hierarchy and organization. Just as there are generals, privates, and a lot of ranks between them in our military structures, demonic powers also seem to be arranged according to role and power. I've heard people get much more detailed about demonic activity than the Bible ever does, delineating specific hierarchies and describing specific domains of various demons. These are interesting speculations, but they are only speculations; Scripture doesn't spell these things out for us. But even though the Bible doesn't tell us how these vast structures function, it does acknowledge the existence of these evil adversaries doing battle in the spiritual realm, and it is very clear on this point: this is where our fight is.

Many people in the twenty-first century might step back at this point and question the validity of this worldview. After all, it does sound a little weird in a modern, scientific age. If you were to say something in a public gathering about the devil and demons, you would know to brace yourself for incredulous stares and laughter. You might not be taken very seriously. But the Ephesians would have had no such reservations. They had seen demonic power. It was a very common observation. The question for them—and for us, if we embrace the biblical worldview—was not whether evil entities were real but what to do about them. Paul was teaching the Ephesians a God-given strategy for dealing with something they already knew was true.

Our sophisticated worldview can actually hinder us in the situations we confront. We start thinking that the problem is a spouse, a child, a boss, a policy, an illness, or a circumstance. These

symptoms are easy to see, and I certainly wouldn't imply that they are never relevant. But they are often just symptoms, not the source of the problem. Behind many of the things we see on the surface is an archenemy who wants to destroy our lives.

Please don't misunderstand this point of view as a denial of personal responsibility. We all make choices. Sometimes the consequences are bad. We can't blame all difficulties on hostile acts of the enemy. We live in a fallen world, and bad things happen. Not everything occurs because of demonic schemes. But everything *can* be exploited by demonic forces. As C. S. Lewis said, the danger is to put either way too much emphasis on Satan and demons or way too little. For most people today, it's way too little.

The fact is, you are going to be assailed. You will have to withstand the onslaughts of the enemy of God. Paul warned us that it would be a rough ride, so fasten your seat belt and focus on your role. Your first responsibility is to be aware of the battle, your second responsibility is to depend on God's strength, and your third responsibility is to use the protection God has provided.

Personal Application: What about You?

Some people are comfortable with the issues we've discussed to this point. For others, the idea of demonized people blustering up the center aisle of a church or of demonic voices coming from a seemingly normal guy raises some eyebrows. Many of us don't encounter such manifestations in our churches and communities, and a lot of people are pretty sure there's a better explanation than demons. But I can assure you that there are some things that psychology, sociology, and biology can't explain. There are spiritual realities that every believer will either face up to or be defeated by, and only a solid understanding of our spiritual armor can prepare us for those realities.

Before we get into the value of the spiritual armor, however, there are five basic truths we need to be sure we firmly believe. Understanding the role of God's protection will not help us very

Why You Struggle

much if we don't first understand exactly why we need it. If your eyes are not yet open to the behind-the-scenes context of our new life in Christ—if you are still skeptical about the whole business—prepare to be jolted by the reality of the conflict raging around you.

In Your Life

- Have you ever sensed that you were in a spiritual battle? If so, when?
- When someone says “spiritual warfare,” what immediately comes to your mind?
- What is your natural tendency in a conflict—to fight or to flee?
- Does this tendency undermine God's strength in your life? If so, how?
- Have you ever considered that a besetting sin or an unresolved conflict could in any way be related to spiritual warfare?
- How does it help you to know that the power residing in you is the same power of God that raised Jesus from the dead?