

COSMIC WAR

By

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When Sir Philip Sidney was twelve years old someone asked him what he would do when he grew up. He replied, "If there are any good wars, I will go to them."

At the moment the Israelis claim they have a "good war" going to eradicate terrorism, but they fail to consider that they gained their land by terrorism and that their leader, Begin, was the most notorious terrorist of them all. Wars usually prove good only for those who use them to gain power or wealth.

But there is a good war. It is warfare, not against "flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of the present darkness, against the spiritual host of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). Christ warned his disciples that they were being sent out into the world as "sheep in the midst of wolves," and that they should expect the hatred and opposition of the world. He Himself came to bring a sword, and to engage in the great conflict in the world.

REALITY OF SATAN. The masterstroke of Satan is to persuade men NOT to take him seriously. They look upon evil as an abstract force in the world and thus fail to come to grips with the real enemy.

Apart from Satan there is no accounting for the fall of man, and without this account the entire Bible loses significance. Satan is real. Jesus confronted him in the temptation recorded in Matthew 4:1–11. He stated that the Jews were children of the devil (John 8:44). Peter affirmed the reality of Satan when he asked Ananias and Sapphira, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the holy spirit?" (Acts 5:3). Paul was to preach the gospel to the nations, "to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts 26:18). Satan's power is the "power of the air of the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2), and Jesus said he was the "strong man armed" (Luke 11:21).

Satan has lots of help. Just as God has myriads of angels to serve Him (Heb. 1:14), Satan also commands countless numbers of fallen angels (Jude 6, II Pet. 2:4). Paul viewed Satan as the "god of this world" (II Cor. 4:4), having organized a great counterfeit of the Kingdom of God. He has his own "synagogue" (Rev. 2:9), his own ministers who "fashion themselves as ministers of righteousness" (II Cor. 11:14–15), and his own set of doctrines (I Tim. 4:1). There is a vast host of demons and men following Satan's purpose, seeking to destroy the faith by which man is saved.

God's express purpose is to have man in His own image, beginning with the subjection of his mind to God by faith. Satan's purpose is to subvert the truth, so that man will never come to faith and obedience to God. The first step was to convince Adam and Eve that they would NOT die for sin, a most obvious lie, and one that persists until this day. Jesus said that Satan was a "murderer from the beginning." He said, "He is a liar and the father thereof; but because I say the truth you believe me not" (John 8:44–45). This is the battleground, the mind's of men — truth against all the lies of Satan and the world.

THE WARFARE. Christ said that to follow him one must deny himself. This is where the battle begins, with self. It means one must tear out all the strongly entrenched

instincts of success and self-preservation in the world. He must “lose his life” for Christ’s sake. It may place him in opposition to those close to him, who seek to turn him from what they think is an irrational course. Satan does not turn loose of his servants easily. He makes success in the world so appealing, justifying and such a natural and necessary part of life that one can deny self only by a kind of death — and that is just what Christ requires — that one die to the world and live for the purpose of Christ.

The warfare includes all human activities. There is no neutral corner. Educators speak of a “neutral” position toward religion in schools, and politicians pretend to be neutral with regard to religious controversy. But wherever a human mind exists, there is the battleground — he must be subject to Christ or he is in opposition to Him. To teach history without the God of history, to teach science without a Creator of all things, to teach social patterns and concepts without relation to the basic pattern of God’s image, is to openly oppose God and His purpose. Adam and Eve turned from God because Satan promised they would “know good and evil” and thus be as “God” (Gen. 3:5), making their own laws of good and evil. Modern education, by claiming a neutral position, teaches young people to decide for themselves what is good and evil without and in defiance of God’s purpose.

The war rages in government and in business. No one is neutral. If one does not submit to Christ’s commands, he is in opposition to His purpose.

THE WEAPONS. God exercises His power through His word. “He spoke and it was done.” With His words Christ withered the fig tree, healed the sick, stilled the storm and raised the dead.

God’s word is still the powerful tool by which He accomplishes His work. It is the only weapon given to His servants, described as “the sword of the spirit which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17). “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God, to the casting down of strongholds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (II Cor. 10:4–6). We are in a struggle for the minds of men, opposing every thing that is raised up against the truth of God, with the intention of bringing all thoughts into harmony with Christ until Christ is obeyed.

It is God’s word we use to defend ourselves against temptation, as Jesus did, confronting Satan with, “It is written...”, driving him off with the same word of truth which has been given to us. God’s word is our weapon against the Satanic cults now flourishing in the land. It is the weapon to use against the mistaken theory of evolution. It is the weapon to take into the market place and use against all injustice and error.

Christ said that the holy spirit would bring to remembrance the things He had taught. However, if we have never learned those things from the Bible, the holy spirit cannot bring them to remembrance. No one is equipped to engage in the great warfare of God until he has read and studied God’s word. Jesus calls every disciple to “take my yoke upon you and LEARN of me.”

VICTORY. It is the instinctive nature of man to war. It is also the natural desire of man to win the war. In recent years we have seen most wars fought with no apparent winner. World War II was the grandest battle ever on earth, from which one might expect a power to emerge that would glory in victory for hundreds of years. Instead, the victory became the victim of betrayal. In the Korean and Vietnam wars no victory was ever intended, in spite of the shedding of so much valiant blood. This may account for the

popularity of the film, Star Wars. Young people, who are familiar with the policy of a government which does not hesitate to send them to war but does not allow them to win, return again and again to see their heroes fight over great forces, and win, In Star Wars.

Significant is the popularity of the J.R.R. Tolkien story about the Hobbits and the war against the Dark Lord. The battles are fierce and blood; the enemy has superhuman power; and the road to victory demands terrible sacrifice. But in the end the King in white comes forth and the war is won at last. Young people of draft age are the ones who have made the Tolkien books the best sellers for several years. If there is to be war, they want to see it won.

To the Christian this is not a mere wish. Every trial and affliction is a stepping stone to personal victory. Peter writes that trials are the means of developing our faith (I Pet. 1:6–7). The internal war is won daily as we bring ourselves into subjection to God, subduing evil thoughts and the temptation to covet-ness and pride. Every step toward God's image is a personal victory and a telling blow against Satan.

There is also external victory. Wielding the sword of God brings victories for others which we may never see. A word, spoken or written, is like a seed which remains hidden for a while, but finally sends up a visible shoot that springs into life. Be sure that God's word is living and active, and does not fail in doing its work. We are not sowing the seed for the sake of a great applause, or a big "amen" by the public. How good it makes one feel, when appearing in public, to be interrupted with loud approval. But all such public approval is suspect. We are warned against receiving glory one from another. The victory is not in winning man's approval, but in what the word of truth does in the minds and lives of people, whether or not they approve of our witness.

The test of a true Christian is when he stands firm for truth in the face of a hostile audience. The trial of Polycarp in 156 AD is a good example. Before a great tumult he was urged to renounce Christ and swear by Caesar. Polycarp answered, "Away with the atheists." The proconsul begged him to save his life by compromise, but the aged saint continued to uphold the truth of Christ. Finally the crowd "cried out with uncontrollable fury", demanding that he be burned alive, because he preached Christ in opposition to their own gods. Polycarp stood in the midst of the pile until the flames enveloped him, with the declaration of victory on his lips and in his face.

It was not the murderous pagans who went home jubilant with victory, but the one who wielded the sword of truth. Jesus had promised him and his church as Smyrna, "Be faithful even to the point of death, and I will give to you the crown of life." Polycarp died in the assurance that Jesus would resurrect him from the ashes of that funeral pile and give him a body glorious and immortal like His own (I Cor. 15:42–44). This is the ultimate victory, victory over death, guaranteed by Christ's own resurrection.

It is where the doctrine of God is unpopular that the warfare is the hardest. It's easy enough to profess faith when no controversy is involved, but when the lines are drawn between popular tradition and God's word it is easier to be silent. It seems less dangerous to offend God in heaven than to offend the audience immediately present. Luther said, "If I profess with loudest voice and clearest exposition very portion of the truth of God except precisely **that little point which the world and the devil are at the moment attacking**, I am not **confessing Christ**, however boldly I may be **professing Christ**. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides is merely flight and disgrace if he flinches at the point."

We are at war. It is bigger than the Panama Canal controversy (raging as I write this) and bigger than the Israeli-Arab conflict (promising to escalate). Our warfare is cosmic. It is Star Wars of the highest order. We are soldiers of God, and we war for keeps — the victory will be eternal — truly a war to end all wars.

We have read the last page, and the winner is already announced. The King will come, raise the dead, destroy the enemy and lead all his faithful ones in triumph into his own land, where there will never be another enemy to fight, another war, another sorrow nor another death.

“But thank be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

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