

Church Planting as Spiritual Warfare -- Part 2

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EDITOR'S NOTE:

This is a sequel of a 2-part series by Prof. Damian Emetuche on spiritual warfare in relationship to church planting. This and several related articles will be published in a forthcoming volume by Peter Lang Publishing.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

In these two pieces, I attempt to demonstrate that beyond theological convictions and missiological paradigms, church planting is a spiritual warfare. It is actively being involved in the incessant warfare between God and the devil. No sinner can be saved and transformed without first binding the strongman that holds him or her captive. As Jesus said, "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil." (Luke 11:21-22) Without this understanding, much of our principles and strategies would amount to nothing because lives would not be transformed even if they join our churches.

Introduction

While Part 1 of the article examined spiritual warfare as it relates to church planting within the context of Old Testament Scripture, Part 2 will be devoted to the teachings and ministry of Jesus Christ in the gospels and the apostles in the book of Acts. As stated in Part 1, "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil." (Luke 11:21-22) Without this understanding, much of our principles and strategies would amount to nothing because lives would not be transformed even if they join our churches.

Jesus and Spiritual Battle

Charles Kraft in his book, *Christianity with Power: Your Worldview and Your Experience of the Supernatural* reminded us that Jesus and the Pharisees of his time shared

similar worldviews, but Jesus had a kingdom perspective, and his assumptions transcended those of his culture to the heart of God.¹ George Ladd also affirmed the fact that “Jesus taught that the kingdom of God in a real sense was present in fulfillment of the prophetic hope, while the age of consummation remained future. The presence of the kingdom of God was seen as God’s dynamic reign invading the present age without transforming it into the age to come.”² Here is my abbreviated version of the assumptions that influenced the ministry of Jesus according to Kraft.

1. Jesus assumed the existence of God. He also had very definite assumptions concerning the nature and activities of God. He saw God as A. A Father with absolute authority over his children. Remember a Hebrew father not an American Father (Lk 15:11-32) B. One who is actively involved in and with his creation. (Jn 5:17, and Jn 15:16) C. One who stands against oppressors D. One who values people with agape love. E. One who understands and relates to people on the basis of their motives rather than their surface-level behavior or condition.
2. Jesus also assumed the existence of the spirit world. (Matt 4:11; 25:31)
3. Jesus believed in two kingdoms, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. (Matt 12:22-29)
4. Jesus also seems to assume that this is a power confrontation. (Luke 4:32, 36, 39)
5. Jesus received all his power from the Holy Spirit. (Acts 10:38)
6. Jesus only does God’s works as he sees and does what the Father is doing. (Jn 5:19; 8:28-29)
7. Faith is very important. (Matt 9:22; Mark 10:52)
8. Obedience to God brings knowledge. (Jn 7:15-17)
9. Agape love is the appropriate human response both to God and to humans. (Matt 22: 37-40)
10. Jesus assumed that forgiving others enables God to forgive us, while unforgiveness of others blocks God’s forgiveness of us. (Matt 6:12, 14-15)
11. If we acknowledge our sin, God will forgive us. (1John 1:9)
12. We are not to fight back. (Luke 6:29)
13. Concern for the kingdom and faithfulness to God are the only worthwhile goals for which to aim. (Matt 6:33)
14. As God’s stewards, we are to risk with God rather than to preserve for God. (Matt 25:14-30)
15. To be great in the kingdom, become like a child. (Matt 18:1-5)
16. One who would lead should seek to serve. (Matt 20: 25)³

¹ Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity with Power: Your Worldview and Your Experience of the Supernatural* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1989), 107-108.

² George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 149.

³ Kraft, 1989, 108-114.

In view of these assumptions, one can understand why exorcism became one of the motifs of Jesus' ministry according to the gospel of Mark. From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus confronted powers of darkness. Mark recorded,

And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, 'What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.' But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him!' And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, 'What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.' (Mark 1:23-27)

Here are some scriptural descriptions of the spiritual battle as encountered by Jesus. He referred to Satan as "a strong man who guards his house." (Mark 3:27) Men must be saved from his power. (Matt 6:13) He may take possession of the wills of men and cause them to perpetrate monstrous evil, as in the case of Judas' betrayal of the Lord. (Luke 22:31) He is eager to bring testing upon Jesus' disciples (Luke 22:31) and constantly aims to frustrate the working of the kingdom of God among men (Mark 4:14; Matt.13:39)."⁴ Furthermore, "Disease may be described as a bondage to Satan. (Luke 13:16) Matthew 12:26 (Luke 11:18) speaks of Satan's kingdom or realm, and the demons who are able to take possession of men are his 'angels' (Matt 25:41). The tragedy of men who are outside the blessings of God's kingdom is described by the phrase, 'sons of the evil one' (Matt 13:38)."⁵ Ladd again pointed out that this reference, "sons of the evil one," does not "refer to particular sinfulness but only to the fact that so far as the controlling principle of life is concerned, it is satanic in source rather than of God."⁶

The gospel of Mark is very instructive in seeing Jesus as the Warrior King, who appeared to liberate humanity from the bondage of sin and Satan just as God did in Egypt. "Mark's echoes of the Old Testament texts are redolent with the anticipation of a New Exodus. The blend of Exodus 23:20; Malachi 3:1; and Isaiah 40:3 suggest the motif of a procession in the desert through which the divine warrior will march to his sacred mount, defeating his foes and

⁴Ladd, 1974, 119.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

establishing his sovereign rule.”⁷ The gospel of Mark starts with the announcement of John the Baptist, a vivid description of Elijah who “was centrally related to holy warfare in his day, most plainly in his dramatic assumption into heaven by fiery chariot (2 Kings 2:11-12). Moreover, he was prophesied to reappear before the coming of the ‘great and terrible day of the Lord’ (Mal 4:5-6; Matt 3:2-3).”⁸

Like a movie, the first act was Jesus’ baptism, a sign of his identification with the new repentant Israel, his anointing with the Holy Spirit for battle against the forces of evil. The significance of the Holy Spirit is underscored by the voice from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:11) With the infilling of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was tested by Satan and the first strategic battle was fought in the wilderness, and its aim was to misguide, frustrate, and possibly stop his mission before it even started. Furthermore, the strategic importance of the battle was underlined by the presence of angelic beings whom Mark said “were ministering to him.” (Mark 1:13)

According to Tremper Longman and Daniel Reid, “In the biblical story we read of the angel of the Lord that led Israel through the desert (Ex 14:19; 23:20-23) and an angelic warrior who reassured and strengthened Daniel after his vision concerning a ‘great war’ (Dan 10:1, 12-21). The role of angels in aiding and strengthening faithful Israel was also applied to the Qumran War Scroll’s script for eschatological battle.”⁹ Therefore, Longman and Reid suggested that “the angels of Mark 1:13 are not simply emissaries of heavenly hospitality, but in their assistance (*diakoneo*) provided strategic counsel to Jesus the divine warrior at a crucial moment of eschatological warfare.”¹⁰

From that initial skirmish in the wilderness, Jesus returned to Galilee ready and empowered for war against all the agents of Satan. The rest of the book of Mark gives a vivid

⁷Tremper Longman III, and Daniel G. Reid, *God Is a Warrior* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 92.

⁸Ibid., 93.

⁹Ibid., 97.

¹⁰Ibid.

account of how Jesus engaged the enemy. The exorcism, the healing, the preaching, and teaching of the gospel of the kingdom of God were all tailored toward liberating humans from the forces of Satan and his agents and restoring humanity back to God. Peter summarized the ministry of Jesus in these words, “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.” (Acts 10:38)

It is difficult reading the synoptic gospels without noticing overwhelming stories of Jesus’ encounters with demonically oppressed individuals. In Mark alone we learn of a man in the synagogue with an unclean spirit (Mark 1: 21-26), and in the house of Simon and Andrew, it was reported, “And the whole city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.” (Mark 1:33-34) The following day, in and around Galilee, “And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.” (Mark 1:39)

In Mark chapter 2, Jesus heals a paralytic; and in chapter 3, he heals a man with a withered hand, and also had a great crowd following him from Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. And the Scripture said, “For he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him. And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, ‘You are the Son of God.’ And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.” (Mark 3:10-12)

When he called the twelve, it was with a specific mission. “And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.” (Mark 3:13-15) Jesus used the criticism of the scribes to highlight his ministry as a spiritual engagement, “binding the strong man.” (Mark 3:22-30) In Mark 4, Jesus discussed the kingdom of God through the parables. Even in the parables, he disclosed the activities of the evil one who steals the word sown in the heart of some people. “The sower sows the word. And these are the ones along the path, where the word is

sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them.”
(Mark 4:14-15)

Mark 5 is the power encounter with the demoniac of Gerasenes who lived in the cemetery and was so possessed that no one could bind him. Chapter 6 has the record of Jesus sending out the twelve with express authority over unclean spirits. Mark 6:12-13 summarized the ministry report of the apostles, “So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.” Power encounters permeate the gospels and Jesus was on the offensive. It made no difference; anyone held by the powers of darkness whether through possession or sicknesses and diseases, regardless of their socio-cultural or religious background, was healed. The enemy was the devil, and Jesus came to destroy his works. (I John 3:8; John 10:10)

While the wars of the Old Testament were proxy wars through the nations; in the New Testament, it was a direct conflict against the “ruler of this world.” (John 12:31) C. Peter Wagner said, “Instead of going about His business and allowing Satan to choose the time and place of attack, Jesus took the initiative and went on the offensive immediately after His baptism.”¹¹ Wagner continued, “He announced His agenda in the synagogue of Nazareth before He called the 12 disciples, before He preached the Sermon on the Mount, and before He fed 5,000 or raised Lazarus from the dead. He knew He must engage in some crucial strategic-level warfare.”¹² The place of this strategic battle, the “wilderness” is significant according to Wagner. Wilderness is known as a territory of Satan, because “*eremos*, the Greek word for wilderness or desert, is ‘a place of deadly danger...and of demonic powers.’”¹³ In other words, Jesus took the battle to the devil’s ground.

¹¹C. Peter Wagner, *Warfare Prayer: How to Seek God’s Power and Protection in the Battle to Build His Kingdom* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1992), 53.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

The Cross: The Decisive Battle

The ultimate battle was of course, on the cross. Walter Wink writing about the religious-political forces that confronted Jesus said,

The powers are so immense, the opposition so weak, that every attempt at fundamental change seems doomed to failure. The powers are seldom content merely to win; they must win overwhelmingly, in order to demoralize opposition before it can gain momentum. Always there is the gratuitous violence, the mocking derision, the intimidating brutality of the means of execution.”¹⁴

The devil was using the Jewish religious leaders, the mob, and the Roman political authorities to get rid of Jesus whom they considered a threat to the status quo. In the Scriptures, we can see how different entities collaborated to serve powers of darkness. The Jews hated Jesus because they perceived him as a threat to their power, culture, and way of life. After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, John reported, “So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, “What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” (John 11:47-48) Furthermore, the gospel of John stated, “So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.” (John 11:53)

But the religious leaders needed a collaborator within the followers of Jesus Christ. John reported Satan entered Judas and he became the willing instrument. (John 13:27) In Luke’s account, it was after Satan entered Judas that the plot to kill Jesus thickened.

Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd. (Luke 22:3-6)

Jesus himself recognized who was in charge of the forces against him. It was never the religious leaders, the ignorant mobs, and the political establishment, but the devil. This is why at his arrest he said to the Evil One, “...this is your hour.” Luke recorded it in these words,

¹⁴Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 139.

Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, 'Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.' (Luke 22:52-53)

As Wink noted, the crucifixion of Jesus was standard, unexceptional, it was the Roman way, and Jesus on the surface died just like all others who were criminals or who challenged the powers that dominate the world. However, something went awry.

They scourged him with whips, but with each stroke of the lash their own illegitimacy was laid open. They mocked him with a robe and a crown of thorns, spit on him, struck him on the head with a reed, ridiculed him with the ironic ovation, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' –not knowing that their acclamation would echo down the centuries.¹⁵

Furthermore, "they stripped him naked and crucified him in humiliation, all unaware that this very act had stripped them of the last covering that disguised the towering wrongness of the whole way of living that their violence defended."¹⁶ Jesus, by submitting to die, destroyed the powers behind his death. The writer of Hebrews said,

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. (Heb 2:14-15)

John Stott observed, "What looks like (and indeed was) the defeat of evil by goodness. Overcome there, he was himself overcoming. Crushed by the ruthless power of Rome, he was himself crushing the serpent's head. (Gen 3:15) The victim was the victor, and the cross is still the throne from which he rules the world."¹⁷ Consequently, the cross is 'dramatic' because it pictures the atonement "as a cosmic drama in which God in Christ does battle with the powers of evil and gains the victory over them."¹⁸ Henceforth, the cross became the place, the symbol, and decisive victory over sin, death and the devil. In the light of the cross, Stott noted,

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷John R.W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 228.

¹⁸Ibid.

What the New Testament affirms, in its own uninhibited way, is that at the cross Jesus disarmed and triumphed over the devil and all the ‘principalities and powers’ at his command. First-century hearers of the gospel will have had no difficulty accepting this, for ‘it is perhaps hard for modern man to realize how hag-ridden was the world into which Christ came’.¹⁹

Reading through the Scriptures, Stott suggested that the conquest of Satan can be categorized into six stages. Although the decisive defeat of Satan took place at the cross, stage one of the conflict is the conquest predicted. *The first prediction was by God himself in the Garden of Eden as part of his judgment on the serpent:* “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (Gen 3:15) *The second stage was the ministry of Jesus.* Satan recognized him as his future conqueror, and, therefore, made many different attempts to get rid of him, from Herod’s murder of the Bethlehem children, through the wilderness temptations to avoid the way of the cross, through the crowd’s attempt to force him into a politico-military kingship, even to Peter’s contradiction of the necessity of the cross in Matthew 16:22-23 which reads,

And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.’ But he turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.’

The third stage, *‘the conquest achieved,’* happened at the cross. Three times, according to the gospel of John, Jesus referred to Satan as ‘the prince of this world’ (John 12:31; 14:30; and 16:11), adding that he was about to ‘come’ (i.e. launch his last offensive), but would be ‘driven out’ and ‘condemned’. Jesus was evidently anticipating that at the time of his death the final contest would take place in which the powers of darkness would be routed. It was by his death that he would ‘destroy him who holds the power of death- that is, the devil...’ and so set his captives free. (Heb. 2:14-15)

The fourth stage was the resurrection. *‘The conquest confirmed and announced.’* Stott maintained that “we are not to regard the cross as defeat and resurrection as victory. Rather, the

¹⁹Ibid., 231.

cross was the victory won, and the resurrection the victory endorsed, proclaimed and demonstrated.”²⁰ Therefore, as Stott insisted,

It was impossible for death to keep its hold on him, because death had already been defeated. The evil principalities and powers, which had been deprived of their weapons and their dignity at the cross, were now in consequence put under his feet and made subject to him.²¹

The fifth stage, Stott reasoned is ‘*the conquest extended*’ “as the church goes out on its mission, in the power of the Spirit, to preach Christ crucified as Lord and to summon people to repent and believe in him. In every true conversion there is a turning not only from sin to Christ, but ‘from darkness to light’, ‘from the power of Satan to God’, and ‘from idols to serve the living and true God’; there is also a rescue ‘from the dominion of darkness...into the kingdom of the Son God loves.”²² Therefore, Stott concluded, “every Christian conversion involved a power encounter in which the devil is obliged to relax his hold on somebody’s life and the superior power of Christ is demonstrated.”²³ Apostle Paul would, in his pastoral letter to Timothy, liken the Christian life to military service. “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.” (2 Tim 2:3-4) Later in the same letter, Paul made no distinction regarding who will be involved in this spiritual battle; it will be all believers, and the reason for suffering is Christ. “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” (2 Tim 3:12)

The sixth and final consummation of the battle will be at the *Parousia*. In the interim, between the cross and the advent, is the mission of the church. The church is engaged in enforcing the victory of Jesus, announcing the good news and liberating people enslaved by sin and Satan and proclaiming liberty in Christ.

The Lord’s Anointed is already reigning, but he is also waiting until his enemies become a footstool for his feet. On that day every knee will bow to him and every tongue confess him [as] Lord. The devil will be thrown into the lake of fire, where

²⁰Ibid., 235.

²¹Ibid., 235-236.

²²Ibid., 236.

²³Ibid.

death and Hades will join him. For the last enemy to be destroyed is death. Then, when all evil dominion, authority and power have been destroyed, the Son will hand over the kingdom to the Father, and he will be all in all.”²⁴

The ministry of church planting is therefore enforcing the victory Christ won through his death and resurrection, announcing Jesus as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and constituting the new believers into a kingdom community totally dedicated to Jesus Christ. Although the devil has been defeated decisively, he is still fighting. Not because he can reverse the outcome, but to obscure and hinder people from recognizing the victory and turning to Jesus to be saved. Paul said, “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” (2 Cor 4:3-4) Satan is not just blindfolding people; he is also in the business of wanton destruction. He is out to destroy and kill in order to hinder people from hearing the gospel; a situation that calls for the urgent proclamation of the gospel. Peter advised the church, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” (1 Pet 5:8) This is a call, unfortunately, to which the contemporary American church has not given adequate attention. On the contrary, we have been distracted by cultural wars rather than engaging in spiritual warfare.

Spiritual Warfare in the Book of Acts

The book of Acts is an interesting book in the Scriptures, especially the New Testament. There is no debate about the authorship. Early Christian tradition ascribed the authorship of the third gospel and Acts to Luke. From the references of Luke in the New Testament (Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11; and Phile 24), he was a physician, missionary, and companion of Paul during his imprisonment in Rome. Judging from the preface in Luke 1:1-4, “it appears that the author was a

²⁴Ibid.

second generation Christian who was not personally involved in the ministry of Jesus, but who had contact with those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.”²⁵

To a certain extent, Acts is the continuation of the gospel of Luke. David Peterson explained that when Luke described himself as having “carefully investigated everything from the beginning (Luke 1:3), he could be claiming something more—at least some personal involvement in the events recorded in his second volume.”²⁶ The evidence of his participation in the missionary activities of the church can be seen in the use of the first person plural in the book of Acts. (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27; 28:1-16)

In other words, the book of Acts is not just an account of the expansion of the gospel by the immediate disciples of Jesus, but also a historical and well researched document on the spread of the gospel and the consequent planting of churches beyond Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and to the rest of the Greco-Roman world. From the beginning Luke mentioned that after his resurrection, Jesus continued teaching for forty days to help the disciples have a clearer understanding of the kingdom of God and the implication of his death and resurrection. “He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.” (Luke 1:3)

To underscore the spiritual warfare of their assignment, although they have been trained by the greatest teacher that ever lived, they covered more course work than any theological seminary could ever cover in three and a half years and finished their practicum and internships as he sent them out in pairs to preach and teach (Luke 9 and 10). Jesus then asked the disciples to wait until they had received the Holy Spirit who would become both the power and director of their mission. “And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, ‘you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’” (Luke 1:4-5)

²⁵David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 2.

²⁶Ibid.

While it is not my desire to get involved in the controversy of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit as the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches advocate, or the objections of the evangelical and mainline churches to such teaching, all true believers in Christ regardless of their ecclesiological background agree that it will be impossible to live the Christian life and minister effectively without the help of the Holy Spirit. Donald Bloesch commented,

Scripture tells us that the Spirit of God does many works and that these works are indissolubly related not only to each other but also to the work and mission of the Son of God. While charismatic endowment is indeed a special work of God's Spirit, it is not wholly separate from his regenerating work or his revealing work.²⁷

In other words, the mission and task of the Holy Spirit is to fulfill and actualize the victory of Jesus Christ here and now through conversion, regeneration of hearts, deliverance from a life of sin and satanic bondage, to faith and life in Christ Jesus. Once in Christ Jesus, "Faith does not lead us beyond conflict but right into conflict, for the devil fights for our souls as we try to remain steadfast in our determination to give glory to Christ."²⁸ Jesus in the gospel of John chapters 14-16 emphasized the works of the Holy Spirit and the need for believers to follow his lead if they are to honor and glorify God and win victory over the evil one.

According to Jesus, the Holy Spirit will be another Helper like Jesus (John 14:16; 15:26; 16:7). The word for Helper translated in the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible as "Counselor" and in the King James Version (KJV), as "Comforter," is actually "*parakletos*," a verbal adjective of the Greek word, *parakaleo*. It has a meaning of one called to come alongside. One called to encourage, and to exhort. "The verbal adjective has passive force, and roughly equivalent to *ho parakeklemenos*, one called alongside."²⁹ According to D.A. Carson, "In secular Greek, *parakletos* primarily means 'legal assistant, advocate' i.e. someone who helps another in court, whether as an advocate, a witness, or a representative."³⁰

²⁷Donald G. Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit: Works and Gifts* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2000), 285.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 321.

²⁹D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According To John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 499.

³⁰*Ibid.*

In the Gospel of John, Carson insisted, “the legal overtones are sharpest in 16:7-11, but there the *Paraclete* serves rather more as a prosecuting attorney than as counsel for defense.”³¹ It will be the task of the Holy Spirit to direct the disciples’ conduct, answer their accusers, and direct the line of the attack against the kingdom of the devil and his cohorts. Jesus himself, the Bible said, ministered by the power and direction of the Holy Spirit. At his baptism, Luke reported, “the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’” (Luke 3:23) It was the Holy Spirit who filled and guided him through the first major spiritual attack in the wilderness. Again Luke recorded, “And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil.” (Luke 4:1-2)

Although Jesus’ detractors accused him of having an evil spirit (Mark 3:28-30), he reminded them that it was by God’s Spirit (the Holy Spirit) that he drove out demons (Matt 12:28). In short, Jesus’ life and ministry was a demonstration of life in the Holy Spirit. He did not live as God, although he was God. He lived as a man full of the Holy Spirit, and acted as he would want us to rely on the Holy Spirit to live, walk, serve, and fight our battles. As Paul stated in Philippians 2,

Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil 2:6-8)

The writer of Hebrews also said, “In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.” (Hebrews 5:7-8)

Jesus prayed not because he was God, but prayed to the Father because he was God-man. He fasted, not because as God he needed to fast to obtain favor, but as God-man he needed discipline, focus, and direction from the Father through the Holy Spirit. He did not choose to act

³¹Ibid.

as God, because as God he could not die, but as man he was subject to death, and it was through death that he destroyed the power of the evil one. As Peter pointed out, he was leaving us an example, so that we might follow in his steps. His ministry patterns, his lifestyle, his suffering, his dependence on the Father, his being filled with the Holy Spirit, his prayer life, and his battles were all example of how he wants Christians to live.

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. (1 Pet 2:21-23)

Within the context of setting an example for Christians, Jesus' statement to the apostles in John 14:12-14 could be well understood.

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

His works were prototypes of the Christian ministry. His desire from the beginning has been to save humans from the powers of darkness to the kingdom of God. This can only be carried out by the power and direction of the Holy Spirit.

Whatever interpretation one would attach to "works," it is the sum total of his ministry here on earth (miracles, healings, casting out demons, and teachings, etc.), and they demonstrate a manifestation of the works of God in Christ. And to Jesus, whatever and however he ministered, we could do more because of the presence, guidance, and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Paul said, "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation." (2 Cor 5:19) The church has no ministry, or mission of her own, but a continuation of the ministry of Christ Jesus.

Therefore, in Acts 1:8, Jesus responded to the disciples' question about restoring the kingdom to Israel said, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the

earth.” He was reminding them that his kingdom is not a localized geopolitical entity, but spiritual and universal in nature, and, therefore, could only be propagated by the power of the Holy Spirit. Human intellect, persuasive argument, and position of influence with the religious or political authorities of the day will not be a force in spreading the Good News and planting his church. It will take the infilling of the Holy Spirit because it is a spiritual battle, it concerns transformation of lives by invading the “strong man’s” house (Luke 11: 14-22) and liberating his captives.

With the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, we see the empowered Peter declaring the gospel and the result was 3,000 joining the church in a single day from the original 120 nucleus (Acts 1:15 and 2:41). Apart from the 3,000, we have the following statistics; first, people were joining the Jerusalem church daily. “And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:47) Second in Chapters 3-4, we read about the healing of a crippled man who was lame from birth. His healing and the preaching of Peter led to 5,000 men coming to faith. But the devil reacted by arresting and detaining the apostles.

To understand the spiritual nature of the attack, (1) the leaders were against preaching the resurrected Christ, which means they were antichrist (Acts 4: 1-4, 17). (2) It was the Holy Spirit who led their defense and refuted the charges against the apostles (Acts 4: 8-12). The Jewish leaders noted their extraordinary boldness and were forced to release them. (3) The apostles on their release spent time praying for boldness and were filled with the Holy Spirit to continue preaching the Word. (Acts 4:23-31) They never raised a political action committee, hired a lobbyist to influence government policies, or set up a commission to further their interest. Because the apostles saw it as a spiritual battle, they prayed and were filled with the Holy Spirit, who alone can empower, guide, and lead the church of Jesus Christ in spiritual battle.

In Chapter 5, the battleground shifted. The devil infiltrated the believers to destroy the body of Christ from within through the secret and dishonest lifestyle of Ananias and Sapphira. To fully appreciate the story as an assault masterminded by the powers of darkness, note the following: (1) Peter said to Ananias, “why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and

to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?" (Acts 5: 3) In other words, it was Satan who planned to infiltrate the rank of the leaders through fake generosity to destroy the church. (2) The deceit was designed to test the Spirit of the Lord (Acts 5:9). It was a deliberate affront on the household of God to undercut the plan and expansion of the kingdom of God through his church. The judgment on Ananias and Sapphira is an illustration of the severity of the attack and it underscores the spiritual nature of the power encounter. (3) It was only through the discernment of the Holy Spirit that Peter unmasked the plot, underscoring the fact that human knowledge and understanding are never sufficient in spiritual battles; it requires leadership and guidance from the Holy Spirit.

When the attempt to undercut the growth of the church from within failed, the devil's reaction resulted in more imprisonment, threats of death, and beatings; (Acts 5:17-42) which was all calculated to hinder the preaching of Christ who alone can save from sin and Satan. The early church encountered warfare throughout the book of Acts. The religious and political institutions served the purpose of the devil to frustrate and hinder the gospel. In Acts chapter 6, the disciples had to settle internal strife that could have destroyed the unity of the faith. Stephen was framed in order to eliminate him. He was falsely accused, tried, and in chapter 7, he was stoned to death. In Chapter 8, we have report of more persecutions and the scattering of believers to other regions like Samaria. Chapter 9 recounted the threats of Saul against the church and his eventual encounter with the risen Christ that led to his conversion.

Because he converted and started preaching Christ, Acts 9:2-23 recorded, "But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ. When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him." He became a prime target to be eliminated. Much of the rest of the book of Acts recorded his missionary journeys and the spiritual attack he suffered from the devil through the Jews, Gentiles, political, and religious leaders. Because the early church followed the example of Jesus, and they understood the ministry as spiritual, the disciples resulted only to prayers. They prayed for every

situation, and when arrested with a threat of death as in Acts 12, they prayed. They never courted for the favor of any human authority.

Paul writing to the Corinthians would summarize his ministry in these words:

Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? (2 Cor 11:23-29)

Paul recognized that preaching the gospel is a spiritual battle hence he stated, “For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.” (2 Cor 10:3-5)

As DomNwachukwu pointed out, “A relentless opposition from the Jewish leaders characterized Paul’s ministry. They followed him everywhere he went for the primary purpose of arousing a rebellion against him and his teaching.”³² He knew that the Jewish opposition was a veil; the real opposition was coming from principalities and powers. He acknowledged this fact in his letter to the Ephesians when he wrote, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” (Eph 6:12) In reality, Paul was revealing that the opposition, the attack on his person, the riot, the persecution, the stoning, the imprisonment, and the jealousy he faced in cities like Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:48-50),

³²Chinaka Samuel DomNwachukwu, *Incessant Warfare: A Critical History of Spiritual Warfare Through the Ages* (Bloomington, IN: Cross Books, 2011), 153.

Iconium (Acts 14:1-6), Lystra (Acts 14:19-20), Philippi (Acts 16:16-24), Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9) and many other cities where he preached were instigated from forces of evil.

Peter's understanding of the spiritual battle associated with the Christian faith can be seen in his Epistles (1 and 2 Peter). DomNwachukwu was right in identifying Peter's epistles as addressing oppositions from within and without. "The First Epistle addressed opposition from outside the church, and the Second Epistle address opposition from within the church."³³ The call to endure pain, suffering, and submission to authorities was not based on weakness on the part of the Christian, but the understanding that the Christian is an alien, living in a hostile territory representing another king, Jesus Christ. Suffering and persecution becomes the badge of honor for living for King Jesus. Therefore, for the believer not to forget this perspective, Peter warned, "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." (1 Pet 5:8)

In the second epistle, Peter, probably in cognizance of his experience with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), reminded the diaspora believers of the need to watch out for the infiltration of the evil powers through false teachers and prophets.

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. (2 Pet 2:1-3)

And in chapter 3 of his second letter, Peter called for patience as believers wait for the glorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ. The primary assignment for the church is to engage in rescue mission. The church is not called to save infrastructures, traditions, institutions, or cultures, remembering that according to Peter, "all these things are thus to be dissolved" (2 Pet 3:11), but to rescue the perishing as God is not "wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." (2 Pete3:9) He called for a life of holiness and devotion to God

³³Ibid., 29.

because, “a life of total devotion to God and His Christ is the most powerful spiritual weapon at our disposal. It simply makes available to us all the resources of heaven, and any opposition from the realm of satanic darkness will be dealt with swiftly and with vengeance.”³⁴

Church planting, therefore, is like being on the front lines of military conflict. As Jesus said, “When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil.” (Luke 11:21-22) The devil as the god of this world is the strongman fully armed, dangerous, and guards the unsaved humanity from knowing the truth in Christ. He controls the world of non-believers through sins, worldliness, cultures, traditions, religions, and deceptions. (Eph 2, Col 2:8; 1 John 4; 2 Cor 4:3-4)

For the unsaved to become saved and become a member of the household of God through Christ, there must be a spiritual engagement, a conflict, not fought with human armory, but through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is why Paul said, “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit.” (1 Cor 12:3) True conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit because he is the one that convicts of sins and leads the nonbeliever to Christ. Jesus said of him

And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. (John 16:8-11)

³⁴Ibid., 35.