Contemporary Spiritual Warfare and Missiology
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D. Min. Paper for TEDS July, 2004

Throughout church history, the people of God have recognized that they need a strategy for overcoming opposition from Satan and his army of fallen angels, generally called demons, or evil spirits. This is most commonly referred to as "spiritual warfare." Spiritual warfare is generally considered to be the Christian encounter with these evil supernatural powers.

The original spiritual conflict was between Satan and God. Conflict began in the Garden of Eden as recorded in Genesis 3 and will continue until the fulfillment of events predicted in Revelation 20. Christians recognize that on the level of the heavenlies, the war has already been won decisively by God through the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ (Colossians 2:15; I John 3:8). Yet, on earth the battles continues, as believers in Christ face fierce and certain attacks from the Evil One and his helpers. In God's sovereign plan, our daily cbattless are not for the purpose of determining who will win, but to demonstrate whether as God's people we will appropriate the victory already won for us by Christ.

Spiritual conflict should be viewed as the normal experience for all obedient, maturing Christians. Jesus' life is portrayed in the Gospels as one of constant conflict with Satan, evil spirits, and sinful human beings. As Jesus introduced the kingdom of God in power to a fallen and darkened world, the kingdom of Satan resisted Him at every point. Christians who are obedient to Christ's command in Matthew 28:18 to make disciples of all nations will encounter many similar types of spiritual conflict. Godly missionaries – whether in the two-thirds world or in the "developed" world – will inevitably experience this ongoing opposition.

The apostles of the New Testament experienced spiritual conflict as they made disciples and started new churches in pioneer areas. It is significant that as Dr. Luke summarized Paul's church planting efforts on his first missionary journey (Acts 14:21-23), he makes the statement (verse 22), "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." As a missionary church planter, Paul encountered spiritual warfare in every place be traveled. Missionaries today should not expect any less spiritual conflict and warfare than that which is described in the New Testament. Satan, his minions, wicked people, and corrupted cultural systems will all resist, in varying degrees, the missionaries' attempts to proclaim the good news and thereby set people free from spiritual bondage to the Evil One. Thus, missionaries must be prepared to engage in spiritual conflict and know how to respond to spiritual attacks that they encounter.

C. S. Lewis reminds us, "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" (1976, 17). In Lewis' day the prevailing error, born out of theological modernism, was to disbelieve in the demonic world. In our post-modern world, the risk, even for many Christians and mission leaders, is to develop an unhealthy interest in the underworld. In the West, the occult is now all around us, often packaged seductively in our media. The church, and the missions movement in particular, have not been immune.

Observers of North American and Western culture have pointed out that there is evidence of an undeniable shift of worldview from scientific naturalism towards an eclectic spiritism. Missiologist A. Scott Moreau, seeing it ten years ago, explained, "This swing is seen in diverse ways, including the rise in popularity of magic and New Age thinking; the revival of occult, pagan, and wiccan traditions; and a heightened interest in angels" (1994, 1).

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This visible shift has not been limited to the larger culture. That the evangelical church has also been greatly impacted is evident from the broad popularity of Frank Peretti's novels, the rapid rise of deliverance ministries, the spate of new spiritual warfare titles from Christian publishers, and the numerous conferences and courses being offered even in conservative schools addressing this hotly debated issue. Not surprisingly, the mission movement has often led the way.

A New Strategy

In recent decades prominent missions theorists like C. Peter Wagner (1991,1992,1993,1996), Charles Kraft (1989, 1992, 1994, 1995), John Dawson (1989), and George Otis (1991, 1993, 1995) have personally embraced and publicly promoted a more supernaturalistic paradigm concerning the activity of Satan and his minions – and how global Christians can fight it. This paradigm, known broadly as the *spiritual warfare movement*, seemingly has been validated by the spectacular results reported by Latin American evangelists like Ed Silvoso and Carlos Annacondia. This approach to spiritual warfare has now been widely accepted[1] and is being called "*strategic level spiritual warfare*" (hereafter, SLSW). SLSW will be the primary focus of this paper. Our goal will be to examine the claims of this new strategy and to critique it biblically and theologically. We will then seek to present a more biblically balanced theology of spiritual warfare.

This new strategy of spiritual warfare seeks to remedy the casual, take-it-for-granted approach to prayer and spiritual conflict often characteristic of traditional evangelicals. "The new warfare engages in detailed analysis of the enemy and his methods of operation, identifies the links in his armor, and develops a strategy to defect him" (Lowe 1998, 11). The intent of its leaders is good: to further the cause of Christ around the globe and to give Christians victory in their personal Christian lives. SLSW advocates clearly see that the

rationalism of the modern age deadens people to the reality of spiritual warfare; they properly understand that many in our world have downplayed or demythologized spiritual realities and allowed prayer and worship to become hallow forms. They know that God's aid and power are little needed and little expected by many Christians.
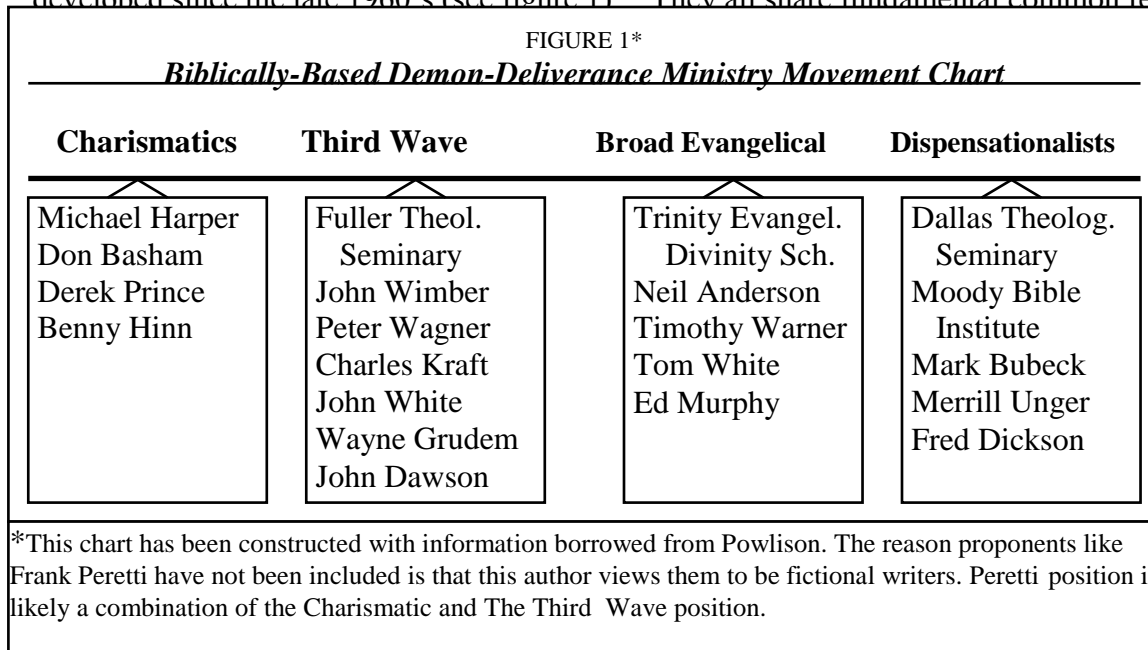
At the heart of strategic level spiritual warfare is a threefold approach. First, there is the need to identify and discern the "territorial spirits" assigned to a city or region being targeted for missionary outreach. Second, mission practitioners are told to deal decisively with the corporate sin they have identified. Finally, believers are urged to engage in aggressive "warfare prayer" against the territorial spirits perceived to be binding the city or region. Advocates claim this type of threefold warfare will best open the door to win a region or people for Christ and thus hasten world evangelization.[2]

While there are some accrued benefits to this new approach, as we shall see, its novelty and popularity demand we give it a careful examination. SLSW comes packaged in a new theology concerning demons which has begun to raise concern and to draw criticism. Robert Priest, Thomas Campbell, and Bradford Mullen were some of the first to raise hard questions concerning these new doctrines.[3] They charge, "Many missionaries and missiologists unwittingly have internalized and are propagating animistic and magical notions of spirit power which are at odds with biblical teaching, using such notions as the basis for missiological method" (1995, 11-12). Other evangelicals have criticized this new approach as too experience-oriented, often accepting missionary anecdotes, the testimonies of converted animists, or even the statements of demons being interviewed by exorcists.[4] The Intercession Working Group of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization has warned that the spiritual warfare emphasis carries the risk of leading evangelicals "to think and operate on pagan world views" (1995, 156). Even prominent members of the Pentecostal, charismatic

and "Third-Wave" networks have begun to object to some of SLSW's doctrines.[5] As Priest (1995), David Powlison (1995), and Chuck Lowe (1998) have all shown, the core issues of SLSW have significant theological and missiological ramifications and so cannot be dismissed as a mere quibble over words.

Four Varieties: One Movement

Before we examine the main teachings and practices of SLSW, it will be helpful to briefly overview the spectrum of positions evangelical Christians take on the topic of demon deliverance spiritual warfare today.[6] At the very least this survey will remind us that there is no unanimity in the spiritual warfare movement and it will help us gain a better understanding of the history and distinctives of the varieties of demon deliverance ministries being promulgated today. David Powlison has pointed out that there are actually four prominent varieties of demon deliverance ministries within one larger movement, all of which have developed since the late 1960's (see figure 1). "They all share fundamental common features

FIGURE 1*
Biblically-Based Demon-Deliverance Ministry Movement Chart

Charismatics	Third Wave	Broad Evangelical	Dispensationalists

Michael Harper
Don Basham
Derek Prince
Benny Hinn
	Fuller Theol.
	   Seminary
	John Wimber
	Peter Wagner
	Charles Kraft
	John White
	Wayne Grudem
	John Dawson
		Trinity Evangel.
		   Divinity Sch.
		Neil Anderson
		Timothy Warner
		Tom White
		Ed Murphy
			Dallas Theolog.
			   Seminary
			Moody Bible
			   Institute
			Mark Bubeck
			Merrill Unger
			Fred Dickson

*This chart has been constructed with information borrowed from Powlison. The reason proponents like Frank Peretti have not been included is that this author views them to be fictional writers. Peretti position is likely a combination of the Charismatic and The Third Wave position.

First, there are the ***Charismatics***, "the first popular exponents of this new view of spiritual warfare." Representative of this position are influential teachers like Derek Prince, Don Basham (author of *Deliver Us From Evil* in 1972), and faith healer Benny Hinn. The early theology of this movement was somewhat crude and in process. "Talkative demons were seen behind every bush and the fireworks were spectacular" (32). Sin and addictions were demonized: sins that previously had been viewed as arising out of one's sin nature, were now blamed on the devil or his cohorts – the demon of lust, the demon of drink, etc. Some went so far as to view all problems of life as demonically animated. Deliverance ministries were set up with the goal of breaking demonic strongholds inside Christians: their basic premise was "when the demon goes, the Christian grows."

Dispensationalists were the second camp that developed. They were distinctly non-charismatic and arose out of evangelical schools like Dallas and Moody. Their approach was to use private pastoral counseling and prayer instead of extraordinary "power encounters" with demons. This groups had a more finely-tuned theology with lots of proof texts. Influential authors such as Merrill Unger (*What Demons Can Do to Saint*, 1977), Fred Dickason (*Demon Possession and the Christian*, 1987), and Mark Bubeck (*The Adversary*, 1975) promoted this popular viewpoint (32-33).

A third variety, according to Powlison, later developed and could be called "***Third-Wave***." This camp centered out of Fuller Theological Seminary and was led by respected pastors and scholars such as John Wimber, Peter Wagner, John White, Wayne Grudem, John Dawson, and Charles Kraft. Their emphasis was on church growth, power encounters, signs and wonders, and third-world missions. Third Wave theology focused on the coming of the

kingdom of God in power and had a quite developed and systematic theology. It should be noted that the idea of "territorial spirits," now prominent in SLSW, is a "recent innovation within the third wave teaching" (33).

The fourth variety of demon-deliverance ministry might be characterized as "**broadly evangelical**." Its practitioners focused on helping demonized believers realize their position in Christ through truth encounters, discipleship-counseling, and self-deliverance. Prominent leaders of this group are Neil Anderson (of Freedom in Christ Ministries) and Timothy Warner (a former and now visiting professor at TEDS). Also probably in this camp are moderates like Thomas White (of Frontline Ministries) and Ed Murphy (of OC International and author of the massive *The Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*). Significantly, this more moderate approach seeks to weave features of the above three camps "into a more traditional evangelical perspective" (33).

Each of these four camps claims to be based on the Bible and represents sincere and dedicated believers. Certainly all share points of commonality. All agree, for example, that through Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension Satan has been decisively defeated and believers are delivered. All agree that Christians will face some kind of spiritual warfare and that the lord of darkness, the devil, is a real enemy who seeks to devour and destroy us. All believe in the power of prayer and share a concern for the barrenness of modern secular society. All share a passion to reach lost mean held in bondage to sin and Satan. All these views encourage Christians to take their lives seriously and remind us of what is at stake – the salvation of the lost and sanctification of the saints. What they differ on is *how* lost people are best reached for Christ and believers made holy.

We shall now set out to examine the key tenets of strategic level spiritual warfare, this new approach commonly associated with what we have called demon-deliverance ministry. Our focus will be limited to three "new" doctrines being promulgated by the movement.

Territorial Spirits and Mapping

A key element of SLSW is their understanding of territorial spirits, or fallen angels that hold sway over cities, regions, and countries. According to proponents, these evil spirits actually control people's spiritual receptiveness to the gospel. The SLSW approach recommends missionaries identify such "strongholds" and come against them in the name of Christ. Once these demons are removed or neutralized, the theory goes, people will be more open to spiritual truth.

According to leading advocate Peter Wagner, demons fall into three categories: ground-level, occult-level, and strategic-level (1991: 20, 1992: 16-19; 1996: 21-22). Chuck Lowe explains:

> Ground-level spirits are the sort that possess people and must be exorcised. Occult-level spirits empower magicians, witches, warlocks, and shaman. Strategic-level spirits (otherwise known as cosmic-level, or territorial spirits) are the most powerful of the three categories. Their function is to rule over specific domains, preventing the people that reside there from coming to faith (1998, 17).

In practice, SLSW advocates are hard pressed to show specific biblical examples of this third-level class of powerful demons.[7] Often the examples they do cite refer to ground-level and occult-level spirits.

There is much ambiguity as to what the distinctive characteristics of "territorial spirits" are. Is it function, rank or geographic assignment that sets them apart from others? When one reads the SLSW literature one finds, for example, that so-called territorial spirits "are purportedly assigned not only to geographical regions, but also to geo-political

institutions, such as nations or states; to topographical features such as valleys, mountains or rivers; to ecological features, such as trees, streams and rocks; or to smaller physical objects such as houses, temples, or idols" (Lowe, 19).[8] Are these spirits custodial or residential? That is, do they merely govern territories or do they also occupy them? Are their assignments made on the basis of geography, ethnicity or geopolitics? Lots of questions remain; one could wish for a better term to describe these cosmic level spirits. To this reviewer, the functional differences between these purported demon classes seem unclear.

Biblical Evidence for Territorial Spirits

To validate the existence of ruling spirits, SLSW proponents commonly point to five proof texts in the Old Testament. A quick review of these passages demonstrates how dubious these texts are. One of the "key texts" (Wagner 1992, 90) for this theory is Deuteronomy 32:8-9 which speaks of God dividing all the nations and keeping Israel for Himself. Moses writes that the Most High parceled out the other nations to the "sons of Israel." A footnote in the NIV text indicates there is much uncertainty as to the translation of this latter phrase. The Septuagint version gives the alternative reading "angels of God." If this is the correct and original sense, then the idea is that "God has appointed angels to serve as guardians over the nations, while He looks after Israel" (Lowe, 30). At best, this uncertain passage affirms the existence of ruling *angels*, not demons. Whether their jurisdiction is geo-political, geographic or ethnic is unclear.

A second possible text is Psalm 82:1-2 which speaks of God giving "judgment among the 'gods.'" Bible scholars are uncertain as to the identity of these "gods." There are at least three options: they could be human judges, pagan deities, or perhaps angelic powers behind

the national rulers (that is, ruling spirits). If the latter option then the immediate context (82:6-7) seems to suggest a demonic, rather then angelic, tendency. Again, this is tentative.

The third text, Isaiah 24:21-22, also has uncertainties. The prophet predicts "the Lord will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on earth below." It is possible to see here a link between the powers above and the kings below; and the fact that punishment is threatened against "the powers" implies that they are demonic. Thus, it is possible that these demons work through the kings and serve as guardians over the nations they "serve." Again, all this is inferential not definitive. It is also possible Isaiah is referring to all the rulers in heaven and earth *en bloc* without intending any connection between them.

In Ezekiel 28:12-19, the fourth text used as evidence for territorial spirits, God is speaking to the king of Tyre and in verses 14 and 16 there is reference to a "guardian cherub" anointed and later expelled. Because of the symbolism of the text the meaning is obscure. "Perhaps behind the king lurks a ruling demon. Perhaps the imagery alludes to a pagan notion of divine kingship. Perhaps the king is a symbol for the city-state proclaiming its wealth and claiming omnipotence" (Lowe, 32). Any of these are possible interpretations.

The most commonly cited Old Testament text to substantiate ruling spirits is Daniel 10:13, 20. Daniel is praying for God to enable him to interpret a dream. After twenty-one days, God sends an angel to explain both the dreams and the reason for the delay. The angelic messenger states, "The prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me…then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me." This messenger also explains that when he returns the "prince of Greece will come." From this passage, SLSW advocates infer the existence of an entire hierarchy of demons ruling over regions of various sizes. They also must infer defined geographical boundaries for the spirit "princes of Persia and Greece" and other national

spirits. Then SLSW leaders assume by analogy that lower ranking spirits over smaller regions must exist as well. Clearly, their hypothesis is based on a lot of assumptions!

Granted, it is plausible that both of the "princes" in Daniel 10 are demonic guardians over Persia and Greece since they seem to be opposing the archangel Michael, guardian of Israel.[9] Chuck Lowe points out, however, two major problems with the SLSW theory of territorial spirits based on this Daniel text: 1) the princes "rule not over nations or fixed geographical regions, but over imperialistic empires whose boundaries expand and contract;" and 2) if/when one empire went to war against another, these respective spirits would be fighting against each other. This would mean civil war in the kingdom of darkness, unlikely in light of Jesus' statements in Matthew 12:25 and Luke 11:18 (Lowe, 34).

In summary, the Old Testament evidence points to the *possibility* of ruling spirits but we cannot state with certainty from these texts whether they are demonic or good or both. And whether they have assigned national or regional jurisdictions is again uncertain. The most we can infer from these texts is that those city-states, nations and empires which opposed God and Israel, His chosen people, were serving Satan. There seems to be a "relative silence" about ruling spirits in particular and angelology and demonology is general "for the simple reason that it [the Old Testament] is preoccupied with the overpowering majesty of the sovereign God" (Lowe, 37).[10]

The New Testament evidence for ruling spirits is also strikingly brief. We find a few passages which refer generally to celestial spirits ruling the world (Hebrews 2:5; Ephesians 2:2; 3:10; 6:12) but none of them indicate that ruling spirits are linked with particular nations. Four New Testament incidents/ texts are commonly cited by SLSW proponents for proof that these evil spirits have earthly attachments: the Legion of Mark 5, Artemis of Acts 19, the residence of Satan in Revelation 2:3, and the harlot of Revelation 17. But careful exegesis of

these texts does not support their case.[11] Several of the evil spirits in these passages are clearly first or second level spirits (ground-level or occult-level), and in the Revelation passages Satan Himself is in view, not a ruling spirit.

In conclusion, we learn from this survey of commonly cited passages in both testaments, that the Scriptures do not clearly portray demons as geographically specific. If anything, demons seem to have geopolitical and tutelary functions. What all of these scriptures do affirm is that all opposition to the work and people of God is Satanic in origin. Otherwise, the Bible provides little additional information about demon taxonomy or organizational structure.

Aside from the lack of solid scriptural support, there is also a huge practical problem with the notion of so-called territorial spirits: many of them are obviously of human origin.[12] Charles R. A. Hoole of Colombo Theological Seminary tells of the example of the village god *Bandara Deiyo* in Kandy, Sri Lanka and the god *Prabhupada*, worshipped as a deity in Durban, South Africa. The representation of Bandara is clearly modeled after the district governor position, and *Prabhupada* is actually the deceases founder of the Hare Krishnas! Hoole states, "The idea of 'territorial spirits' is pagan. It depicts a world peopled by gods, a world full of chaos and terror, but made safe by the manipulative powers of shamans" (1997, 136). As we shall see, this hardly fits the biblical worldview.

Spiritual Mapping of Spirits

Peter Wagner and other spiritual warfare movement leaders recommend that once territorial spirits are identified that it is crucial to learn their names and the exact nature of their assignment as a part of this first step in SLSW (Wagner 1992:156, 176; 1996:200; Kraft 1994:135; Lea 1991:88).[13] This is where the concept of spiritual mapping comes in.

Mapping is promoted as the discipline of uncovering the spiritual infrastructure of a city or region in an effort to determine its spiritual direction. George Otis, president of the Sentinel Group and a coordinator of the AD 2000 & Beyond Movement's United Prayer Track, first coined the term. He defines mapping as, "superimposing our understanding of forces and events in the spiritual world onto places and circumstances in the material world" (1991, 85). For others, like Wagner, mapping is the process of identifying the precise boundaries of the jurisdiction of a territorial spirit, and then actually *marking them out on a map*. Sometimes these zones are purportedly "discerned" by drawing lines between key points on a map – such as cult centers, crime sites, pornography shops, Masonic lodges, totem poles, etc. (Arnold 1997, 175). At minimum, this kind of mapping is an exercise in imagination and seems to be incredible speculation. One SLSW advocate has even been working with the occultic concept of "ley lines" (Ibid, 175-76). This kind of mapping is highly questionable because it explicitly draws on non-Christian understandings of occultic powers; it seems to be a dangerous form of syncretism.

Is there any biblical justification for the SLSW practice of spiritual mapping? We certainly have no biblical example or scriptural exhortation to do this. If identifying, naming, and mapping the spirits is so essential to effective prayer and evangelism, why do we not find the New Testament Apostles practicing or promoting this strategy?

There is, however, one type of mapping which may be beneficial and within biblical parameters. George Otis seems to define mapping as the creation of a spiritual profile of a city or area *based on careful research* (Arnold, 148, 176). His goal is evidently to enable believers to intercede intelligently and specifically for the spiritual needs and the people of an area. Encouraging people to pray with understanding and specificity is certainly biblically sound. Otis' concept of spiritual mapping amounts to engaging in detailed research on the

religions history and folk beliefs/ practices of a targeted city, nation, or people group. This type of information would be valuable in developing a contextually relevant prayer and evangelism training program for area believers and so holds promise. It could enable and embolden churches and individual intercessors to pray for those in spiritual bondage in line with way the Lord instructed, "deliver us (and them!) from evil/evil one" (Matthew 6:13). It should be noted that Otis does not advocate identifying evil spirits by names and casting them out before one can pray effectively. His approach is more moderate and seems to be what some in the SLSW movement actually follow.

Strategic Level Prayer

In this contemporary missional approach, prayer is often viewed as a tool to "bind" the demonic strongholds which are holding peoples, cities, and nations in spiritual bondage. This contrasts with the way prayer was viewed in earlier mission eras. Formerly, prayer was seen primarily as a way to communicate one's needs to God, as a way to join God in His saving purposes for the world, and as a proving ground for one's faith. Prayer used to be directed *to God*; today, as often as not, it seems to be directed *against demons*. Modern day spiritual warriors are told to *directly* attack the powers of darkness. Warfare prayer has one predominate characteristic: *aggression*. As Lowe puts it, "Passivity is out; pugnacity is in" (23).

Warfare prayer has two steps: first, identify and name the ruling spirit; and second, using the demons' name, directly rebuke it in Jesus' name. Rebuking the spirit by name supposedly conveys power over it and will then bring far more evangelistic effectiveness (Wagner 1992: 63-64, 147-50, 176; 1993: 18; 1997: 85; Dawson 1989: 140). For Wagner, this kind of prayer warfare is possible and very potent because of the power and legitimate

authority Christ has given all of us as believers. For proof, Wagner often cites Luke 10:19, a text we shall examine.

But again the question is: do we have clear biblical teaching for this kind of aggressive prayer? Wagner acknowledges there is not a single indisputable instance of SLSW prayer in the New Testament, but he does seek to offer a few examples as *evidence* not *proof* (1996: 87, 99, 176, 188 – emphasis in the original). Proponents insist that they do not need direct biblical support as long as the doctrine is not anti-biblical (Otis 1993, 35).

A careful examination of the biblical text reveals little evidence for aggressive warfare praying against third-level ruling spirits. This is seen first by review of key Old Testament texts offered by SLSW leaders.

The passage most often used in Daniel 10, where the prophet is seen praying to God and two "princes" are also in view. Wagner feels that this account clearly shows Daniel had only the weapon of prayer to combat the dark rulers. Yet problems remain. Is the prophet really engaging in warfare prayer? Daniel never seeks the names of the demons (or angels, whomever they are) nor does he rebuke them or use them in prayer. It seems their angelic names are inconsequential; in fact, the evil spirits are known only by generic names – "prince of Persia" and "prince of Greece." The end of the account makes it clear why Daniel does not seek the names of either angels or demons – he does not need them because he is merely asking for the explanation of his dream. Significantly, the archangel never suggests he engage in SLSW prayer to weaken the ruling demons or put an end to Israel's oppression. In fact, persecution still comes despite the prophet's prayer, the evident power of God and the intervention of Michael. The lesson: "God's people will not [always] be delivered from suffering, but will be delivered through it" (Lowe, 48).

Possibly a better text teaching spiritual warfare praying is Zechariah 3:1-2:

> Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?"

Two things are noteworthy in this interesting passage: 1) it is the angel who confronts Satan here; the prophet is merely a bystander/observer; and 2) the angel does not directly rebuke the Evil One but appeals to God to do so. Significantly, this last observation will be developed further, as we shall see, in the New Testament.

When we come to the New Testament, we do not find one example of or exhortation to engage in aggressive prayer to directly confront cosmic spirits. Instead, we find two passages which directly warn believers *not* to rebuke demons. The first, found in Jude 8-10, actually applies the Zechariah incident above and uses it to chide New Testament readers who are arrogantly deriding spirits. There seems to be intertestamental evidence that Jewish communities (at Qumran, etc.) often incorporated curses against Satan and his demons alongside of praise in their worship services. They would in fact, address them directly (Lowe, 49). Hence, by the first century the practice of ritualistic cursing was commonplace. Evidently this is what Jude is forbidding. His point is that only Michael the archangel has both the authority and power to be contemptuous of spiritual beings. Yet "even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'" Jude's argument is twofold: 1) if the great archangel is this circumspect with the devil, "how much more prudent should mere mortals be with demons"; and 2) the Lord alone has the power and authority to rebuke Satan and his minions (Lowe, 50). II Peter 2:10-12 gives a similar admonition, explicitly cautioning against aggressively confronting demons in general.

Advocates of warfare prayer sometimes point to Acts 10 and Paul's exorcism in Ephesus as an example of strategic-level spiritual warfare. Wagner, in fact, claims the use of warfare prayer in Ephesus was the key to Paul's "greatest missionary and evangelistic success" – but his neglect of it in Athens was the key to his "greatest evangelistic failure" (Wagner 1996, 202). The problem with this interpretation is that as far as we know from Luke's account, in Ephesus, Paul openly engaged in both ground and occult level warfare but not strategic level. Never are we told, for example, that he had a direct confrontation with Diana, the purported territorial spirit in Ephesus. The full context of Acts 19 in fact reveals that the greatest impetus for the conversion of many Ephesians was not Paul's successful exorcism but the failed one performed by the Jews! The seven sons of Sceva's dramatic inability to cast out a demon, even when employing the name of Jesus – as they had seen Paul do – only demonstrated to the whole community that "the power lies not in the name, but in the person of Jesus" (Lowe, 53). It became obvious that Paul was not employing some form of Christian magic; the failure of sorcery only underscored for the bystanders the real power of Paul's gospel.

In summary, our review of the relevant biblical passages reveals that Scripture never calls us to attack in ruling demons, in prayer or otherwise. In fact, it warns us not to do so. The evidence seems to fly in the face of current SLSW teaching and practice.

Identificational Repentence

There is, however, one form of prayer SLSW leaders teach which may have some merit: "identificational repentance." John Dawson, in particular, has promoted this doctrine. His concern is that corporate and institutional issues of sin must be biblically dealt with – or else, in his words, demons will be attracted like flies to a gaping wound. Dawson teaches that

when an entire community of Christians recognizes their collective transgression – be it racism , or abortion, or pornography, or hidden prejudices, or long-term bitterness – and the community experiences sorrow for it, it is biblically appropriate for a leader to stand up as representative of that group, and confess and repent on behalf of his people. Often this is best done before the offended parties or to someone representing them. In this way, reconciliation can be sought and restored. This sort of identificational repentance seems to be right in line with the intercessory prayers and public repentance modeled by both Nehemiah (1:6-7) and Daniel (9:3-6, 11).[14] Certainly, this sort of public confession can have great impact in purifying the Church for future missional ministry!

What is noteworthy, though, is that neither of these Old Testament leaders of God's people sought to identify with or confess the sins of the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Medes, or the Persians! Yet this is precisely what some SLSW proponents today advocate: that Christians must go before God and confess the sins of their surrounding pagan communities. They even contend that only then will profound community transformation and mass conversion occur. Surprisingly, this was the conviction of the AD 2000 & Beyond Movement's United Prayer Track; their position statement states, "When we corporately confess those sins of our nation through what many are calling 'identificational repentance' *they can be remitted through Jesus' blood shed on the cross, and the strongholds can be removed*" (cited in Wagner 1996, 260; italics mine).

What the spiritual warfare movement seems to be teaching here is that Christians can apply the atoning sacrifice of Christ not only to their own lives, *but to the lives of other people*, the community unsaved. Talbot Seminary's Clinton Arnold, a noted authority on New Testament backgrounds and spiritual warfare, properly calls this idea of the "efficiency of proxy confession" an assumption (1997, 179). This notion is no where taught in Scripture.

Clinton (180-82) points out that this strain of identificational repentance has "two fundamental flaws." First, nowhere does God's Word teach that Christians can remove the curse of sin upon unbelievers by vicariously confessing their sins for them. In the case of Nehemiah and Daniel, they were repenting only on behalf of the covenant people of God, as their corporate representative. In neither testament do we ever find examples of leaders confessing the sins of neighboring pagan cities or nations. Second, the covenant promises to Israel "cannot be directly applied to contemporary nations and cities." It should be clear that America is not Israel nor are we the covenant people of God; sadly many evangelicals incorrectly assume otherwise.

Contact Demonization of Believers

A third new missiological doctrine of the SLSW movement is that dangerous demonic influences are somehow casually transmitted through some sort of contact with certain kinds of physical objects, or from verbal curses from others, or by genealogical inheritance. This, in fact, was the major concern of Priest, Campbell, and Mullen in their "whistle blowing" article back in 1994. Their contention was that this concept of super vulnerability to demons reflected animistic beliefs more then biblically-based principles. SLSW leaders, they feared, were

> telling us that we [even as believers] need to fear Satan's ability to attack based on factors other than our doctrinal, spiritual, or moral response – that is, based on conditions of physical contiguity and symbolic association with words, objects, persons, and places. And they claim that their principles are based on "some law of the universe" (Priest, Campbell, Mullen 1995, 23).

Priest, and his co-writers (14-19), give numerous examples from the writings of prominent missiologists – men like Charles Kraft, Peter Wagner, Ed Murphy, George Otis, and Timothy Warner – that seem to validate their claims.

These three authors also seriously question what they call the "epistemological underpinnings of these doctrines" (25). Aside from the lack of scripture support, they fault modern-day SLSW leaders for basing these "new" doctrines on:

- interviews with demons in demonized persons;

- information about demons gathered from practitioners of occult and animistic folk religions (and assuming it corresponds to reality);

- frequently told and retold anecdotes and missionary testimonies;

- pragmatism: the SLSW method "works";

- their own "spiritual" discernment (they call it "inner geiger counters")

- personal revelations from God (special "words of knowledge")

Each of these six "underpinnings" are well documented by Priest *et al* from the publicized literature of movement leaders (26-55).

This author would like to expand on two of these concerns. First, in regards to the issue of *interviewing demons*, SLSW proponents often turn to Mark 5:9 and Luke 8:30 where Jesus asked a demon to speak and give its name. Priest's response is that whatever Christ's purpose, "it was not to acquire needed information he would not otherwise know. This is the only occasion on which Jesus does elicit a response from a demon. On all other occasions demons are silenced rather than encouraged to speak. Jesus is not intending to establish a pattern for His followers to practice…" (30). Significantly, Scripture warns us that Satan is the father of lies and "there is no truth in him" (John 8:44). Can the testimony of demons then be trusted? Furthermore, God warns us not to listen to those who are in touch with demons (Isaiah 8:19). In the New Testament, Paul the Apostle warns believers to have nothing to do with "doctrines of demons" (I Timothy 4:1). This seems to be a clear reference to doctrines whose source is demonic!

Second, in regard to *accepting anecdotes* and accounts of events as the

epistemological basis for constructing new doctrines about unseen realities, evangelicals

should remember that Paul also addresses this issue. We are warned not to accept "old wives

tales" but to test all doctrinal claims rigorously (I Timothy 4:1, 7; I Thessalonians 5:21). We

are, in fact, told to "test the spirits." All the scriptural passages referring to the testing of

spirits and to the discerning of spirits (evidently the gift of "distinguishing of spirits" – see I

Corinthians 12:10) speak of testing/discerning *based on already revealed biblical doctrine.*[15]

Another problem: most evangelicals today will also properly question the premise that God is

continuing to give special revelation.[16]

Scriptural Support for "Contact Demonization"

Since SLSW advocates argue that the Bible directly teaches that demonic influence is

transmitted through objects, curses and family inheritance, we need to carefully examine the

biblical data they utilize. For example, to support his claim that God invests places and things

with spiritual power, Kraft cites the Ark of the Covenant (I Samuel 4-7), Jesus' garment

(Matthew 9:20), and Paul's handkerchiefs and aprons (Acts 19:11-12). Several observations

are in order, in response. Anthropologist Robert Priest point out,

> The function of contiguity and symbolic association is biblical miracle… is quite
> different from its function in magical or animistic thought. In magic and animism the
> assumption is the contiguity and symbolic association are themselves the key to
> power, its transmission, and its effects… . In Scripture, however, there is no indication
> that God required such means for His power to be operative (1995, 57).

The key difference is that in biblical miracles – such as with the man born blind being

instructed to wash his mud-smeared eyes at the pool of Siloam (John 9:7) – the external acts

(e.g. Jesus using mud or saliva to heal) were only a means for people to respond and

demonstrate their faith. The physical objects or external forms *never* were carriers of power – as is claimed in magic and animism.

Wagner and others point to the frequent biblical prohibitions against all forms idolatry; they feel that the main reason idolatry is categorically condemned is Scripture clearly associates idols with demons, which are purportedly attached to them. SLSW leaders would point to passages like Deuteronomy 7:25-26, 32:17; I Corinthians 10:19-20; etc. Their argument is that evil spirits often can use these idols to come to people who intentionally or even inadvertently bring these items into their home (Wagner 1994, 56; 1992, 78; Warner 1994, 30-31). However, the biblically given and the overriding reason for the condemnation of idolatry, is not "the potential magical contact of demons, but because God alone is to be worshipped. The threat held over idolaters is not that they will 'pick up' a demon, but that God is a jealous God" (Priest 62-63). Furthermore, a careful exegesis of I Corinthians 8 and 10, where Paul is dealing with Christians eating meat previously offered to idols, reveals that the Apostle outright denies that an object offered to an idol transmits any dangerous influence, even when ingested! While Paul does acknowledges that "cultural beliefs about such things as idols, spirits, and meat, even though mistaken, do have a reality which must be addressed," he still rejects the notion that these beliefs held by the surrounding culture – or even by a "weaker brothers" – properly reflect what is true and what actually exists (Priest, 63-64, 76-77).

Now we turn to the issue of verbal curses and demonic vulnerability. Is there scriptural support for verbal curses having power to pass on a demon or to bring demonic oppression? Is there a natural efficacy to curses, whether invoked by occultists or by Christians? It is true that in Scripture we discover God Himself using blessings and cursing. And, even Christ our Lord pronounced curses (on fig trees, etc) which did come to pass. But, Scripture never

teaches the power is in the verbal formula itself – as is believed by animists. The *power is always God's*. Scripture never teaches there is some independent, impersonal source of power that cursers can tap into on their own. SLSW advocates sometimes cite Proverbs 18:21 ("Death and life are in the power of the tongue") but this passage actually speaks of words used in normal ways not magical ways. Furthermore, Proverbs 26:2 explicitly tells us that a curse which is undeserved should not be feared. So like the previous doctrine of demonic vulnerability through physical contact, this one – demonic consequences via verbal pronouncements – seems to be more an animistic concept than a biblical one.

As to the genealogical transmission of demons, SLSW proponents often cite Exodus 20:5, 34:7 and/or Deuteronomy 5:9 where we are told God punishes the third and fourth generations. Their interpretation of those passages is that future generations within the family unit are highly vulnerable if/when demons were attached to their fathers (see Kraft 1994, 88; Murphy 1992, 437-8; Anderson 1991, 227; White 1994, 36). Can demons, then, attach to babies because of some spirit contact the parent or grandparent once had? Are there, in other words, "intergenerational" (or "familial") spirits? This is another "new doctrine" that seems to be more rooted in animism than direct scriptural teaching.[17] The passages above speak of guilt and the consequence of one's sin, which often do pass on – but due to our parental example not our genes. It is a huge inference and a step of eisegesis to make this passage teach the potential of unborn babies picking up demons because of the family's past occult activities. What Scripture *does* clearly demonstrate is the vital role of parents in teaching and modeling. There are strong warnings not to cause our children to stumble or to lead them astray. The key is parental influence. The Old Testament vigorously repudiates any idea that children can be punished for their parent's sins (see Jeremiah 31:29-30 and Ezekiel 2:4, 18:2-4); individual responsibility and accountability is always stressed.

In conclusion, there seems to be insufficient grounds to establish these three doctrines of demonic vulnerability from a direct reading of Scripture. It is noteworthy that these three notions all have in common one assumption – that people, whether believers or unbelievers – can be influenced, oppressed, infested, or inhabited with demons *based on non-moral and non-spiritual grounds*. It seems SLSW leaders are inverting the biblical emphasis. Whereas spiritual warfare advocates teach us to *fear* Satan's ability to attack us, the Bible stresses the sovereign control of God over all things – even the unseen world – and his loving protection of his people. To establish that premise, we now turn to a brief summary of the biblical worldview, particularly as it pertains to spiritual warfare.

Toward a Biblical View of Spiritual Warfare

Because the Old Testament was addressed to a world alive with spiritism and the occult, we need to turn to it first in order to determine a biblical perspective on the spiritual realm. In the Near East occult beliefs and practices were very dominant and pervasive. In Old Testament times whole societies lived in darkness under the power of Satan. They often worshiped idols, believed lies, and lived in bondage. David Powlison explains,

> God planted Israel in the midst of three cultures: Canaanite, Egyptian and Babylonian.. All three teemed with demonic agents and activities, with beliefs in demons and demon worship, with possession phenomena, exorcism, spiritism and other sordid practices . . . . God's people were repeatedly corrupted by spiritual evil (1995, 50).

Three features of this prevailing occult worldview are noteworthy. First, according to Powlison, in the Old Testament Near Eastern world, people gave "demonological explanations for all events and actions—good and bad . . . ." Local demons, spirits and gods had to be appeased in order for people to receive blessings or not face ill fortune. Second, "occult idolatry and practices were the norm. Astrologers, pagan priests, diviners, mediums, sorcerers, ecstatics, and soothsayers abounded." Child sacrifices and ritual prostitution were

common. Third, Israel's neighbor nations also pursued other "generic human addictions, such as gluttony, drunkenness, varied forms of immorality, greed, blood, thirst, and power" (Powlison, 50). Moral degradation and temptation were on every side; often God's people succumbed and so suffered both the moral and situational consequences.

Interestingly, all the "grounds" for Satan and his helpers to come into people's lives, gain a "foothold" and "demonize" them—according to contemporary SLSW standards—were present: ancestral iniquity, abuse, occult practices, and habitual sin. Yet, never in the Old Testament record do we see demonic spirits identified or addressed as the problem. Nor is the eviction of spirits presented as the solution. Instead, we see God's prophets calling upon God's people—and the surrounding pagans like the Ninevites—to repent, believe and change their ways. Deliverance from evil spirits is not the focus.

Rather, two striking features characterize the Old Testament record. The Old Testament scriptures seem to minimize Satan and maximize human responsibility. The testimony of the nations to an occult worldview is not endorsed; the demonological explanations for human sin and suffering are not accepted as reality. Rather the occult worldview is unmasked as mythical. The Old Testament record reveals the human heart, not inhabiting evil spirits, as the root cause of earth's degraded conditions and activities (see Genesis 6:5; Jeremiah 17:9; Ecclesiastic 9:3; Judges 21:25). The Old Testament testimony then is twofold: human depravity is stressed and the role of demons is reduced.

The Old Testament Theme of the Sovereignty of God

Sidney Page reminds us that Satan is only mentioned by name three times in the entire Old Testament record (Job, Zechariah 3:1-12; I Chronicles 21:1) and he states that "even in these he plays a secondary, not a major role" (1995, 11). Powlison suggests that six key Old

Testament passages be studied to view spirit realities at work behind the scenes in the Old Testament world. Genesis 3:1-15; I Samuel 16:13-23; I Samuel 28:3-25; I Kings 22:6-28; Job 1:6-2:10; Zechariah 3. From these important texts we learn who Satan is, the nature of our warfare, and the consequences of spiritual defeat. The parameters of this paper do not allow us to exegete these texts in detail. Instead we will summarize the important lessons and familiar themes which emerge from these and other important Old Testament passages.

The Old Testament paints a remarkably consistent picture. It teaches a worldview and method of fighting spiritual evil that is essentially different from SLSW. First, God is seen always at center stage, absolutely and sovereignly in control of all the affairs of people and spirits. This is particularly seen in the story of Job, where Satan cannot act until God gives permission. In Job we discover that always the malice of the Evil One is channeled to God's glory. Satan's evil intent is strictly limited and boxed in by God's permissive will. In the Old Testament record even when the people of God are corrupted by the influence of the demonic cultures around them—sacrificing children, worshipping idols, becoming involved in mediumship—the LORD alone remains at center stage. In the end, He always uses the wrath and wickedness of rebellious men, of Satan and his evil spirits, of false prophets, of foreign oppressors, to ultimately bring glory to Himself. This theme of God's sovereignty in the midst of evil seems to be missing in much of the modern spiritual warfare literature. As a result, demons are presented as becoming increasingly autonomous and sin is often demonized. The SLSW world seems to be increasing a fearful one where superstition abounds and the world is teeming with demons acting independently of God's providential rule. The Bible gives an opposite, theocentric explanation.

Scripture does not teach that Satan's grip on the control of the world increased when Adam and Eve sinned. In a critique of Neil Anderson who has indicated this occurred, Sidney Page states that

> there is no indication in Genesis 3 that the serpent won any new powers or authority because he enticed Eve to sin. On the contrary, the serpent was cursed. Speculation about a supposed transfer of power has no basis in the text and runs the risk of compromising divine sovereignty and human responsibility by ascribing too much power to Satan" (1995, 23).

Sadly, many in the spiritual warfare camp seem to overemphasize Satan's power and underestimate God's control and mighty power.

Second, in the Old Testament record of spiritual warfare the human drama is predominately a moral drama, not a demonological drama. Again, this is seen in key passages such as the Genesis 3 account of the fall of man and the story of Job. In these historical accounts though evil spirits are seen working backstage in the human drama, the focus is upon man's response to the Creator God. Scripture never demonizes sin, turning people into Satan's puppets. Job, for example, is not seen as inhabited by a cluster of demons named Pride, Anger, Despair or Self-Pity. Rather he is presented as a righteous man who was sorely tempted. In Scripture human beings are always responsible moral agents and share center stage with God. People are held responsible for their own evil—including occult involvement and idolatry. The Old Testament does not point to the demonic to account for human evil, for bondage or darkness. Satan can deceive, lie, murder and destroy lives but he cannot make people something less than human.

A third lesson emerges from the Old Testament revelation. The predominate mode of spiritual warfare—even in the midst of an occult-filled world, where there is multifaceted evil on every side, as we have seen—is surprisingly different from what we might expect. The

mode of warfare God teaches—by prophetic exhortations and godly examples—is that of repentance and faith. This is seen, for example, in Jonah's dealing with the Ninevites—members of an occult culture. The prophet never defines their problem as inhabiting spirits needing his deliverance ministry. He calls them to repent, turn from their idols and occult lifestyle, and to trust/obey the true God of heaven. This is a reoccurring theme in the Old Testament. Whenever the prophets speak to idolaters and those involved deeply in the occult, they preach repentance and faith, not demonic deliverance. Hosea, for example, simply calls idolatrous Israel to turn back to God and obey Him. We learn, then, that this is the Old Testament way of dealing with astrology, mediumship, anger, sexual immorality and idolatry. People need repentance, trust in the true God and His Word, truth, prayer, fidelity. There is an occasional "power encounter"—as with Elijah confronting the false prophets on Mount Carmel—but this is normally balanced with a "truth encounter." People need both.

David Powlison feels that the Psalms and Proverbs may be "the supreme manual for spiritual warfare" in the Old Testament because they show us how godly men like David fought "both flesh-and-blood and spiritual enemies" (59). These books show us the way of wisdom, of fearing God above all else, of avoiding youthful temptations, of leaning hard on the promises of God's Word. The people of God are exhorted to take refuge in their shepherd's care, learn vigilance, watch their heart, put on Jehovah's armor—like David did with Goliath—and strengthen their arms in the strength of His might in the midst of their trials and battles. God's people are encouraged to trust in the wisdom and love of their God. And in the end, it is God's love for His own glory and His peoples' welfare which strikes the deciding blow in the battle. Jehovah's cause will prevail. And knowing that God is sovereign and that the devil is God's devil brings God's people great joy and confidence in the midst of

battle with their Adversary and adversaries. It should be no different with the New Testament people of God!

This overriding confidence of God's people in the sovereignty, protection, and grace of Jehovah God is the focus of the Old Testament. Humans are not merely pawns that are being pushed around and threatened by evil powers. Rather the Triune God is actively involved in their lives and in spiritual warfare. He is graciously working out His plan of redemption. Paul Hiebert suggests a "trinitarian theology" is essential to understand the biblical view of spiritual warfare (1994, 228-33). He explains that a trinitarian theology emphasizes the providence of the Father, the presence of the Son and the power of the Spirit. This kind of biblical perspective reveals the all-sufficiency of our Triune God. God must be viewed as at work in cosmic history, human history and natural history to redeem humanity, delivering us from all satanic and demonic bondage. God's providence, presence and power are working out His salvific plan for His glory and His peoples' good. He is the Supreme One far above Satan and his demons. Nothing can thwart his purposes. The LORD God *will* accomplish his global plan for the nations!

The New Testament Theme: The Victory of Christ

The consistent theme of the New Testament is that Christ has already decisively defeated Satan and his powerful forces. Though believers may lack the power and authority to directly challenge ruling demons – as we have seen in Jude and II Peter – we are not at their mercy. There are many New Testament texts to which we could go to establish this theme of our victory in Christ, but we will focus on one. The Apostle Paul provides the fullest exposition of this theme in his epistle to the Ephesians. Significantly, Ephesians

contains proportionately more references to demons and to power then any New Testament book (Arnold 1992, 1).

To properly understand Paul's teaching in Ephesians, one must view it in the light of his earlier ministry in the city of Ephesus, recorded in Acts 19. As we have already seen, Ephesus was the scene of a powerful confrontation with demonic powers. Paul spent two years in the city, teaching, healing, and casting out demons, though sometimes at a distance (Acts 19:1-12). But evidently the greatest impetus for the conversion of many Ephesian citizens did not come from any of this but rather from a failed exorcism by Jewish exorcists (the seven sons of Sceva). Though they employed the name of Jesus – as they had seen Paul do – they quickly learned that the power lay not in the name (as in sorcery and magic) but in the person of Christ. Seeing the failure of sorcery and the power of Paul's gospel, many renounced magic, trusted Christ, and in their initial zeal, burned their magic books.

This background is vital in understanding Paul's letter. The citizens of Ephesus had all their lives lived in fear of demons; this is why they had formerly relied on magic for protection. But now all their charms, incantations and protecting amulets are gone. Their conversion had no doubt angered the spirits they once served; many of these new believers were rightly anxious that the demons might seek vengeance. To make matters worse Paul was gone. Some of the new converts were evidently returning to demon worship and going up their new faith. So Paul writes this letter to quell their fear. Significantly he does not give them a "sure-fire technique for conquering spirits" or a formula for self-deliverance; instead he "draws their attention to the victory which God has already won over the powers of darkness' (Lowe, 51-54).

Most discussions of spiritual warfare focus on the classic passage at the end of the book: Ephesians 6:10-20. This is unfortunate, because as Clinton Arnold and Chuck Lowe

point out, the later exhortations to put on our spiritual amour and stand firm, rely on the foundation Paul laid in the first three chapters. Lowe (54-56) shows that Paul identifies three arenas in which God has already decisively defeated the demons.

> The first consists of the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus (1:18-21). The second comes in the conversion of individuals (2:1-6). The third comprises the incorporation of Gentiles into the people of God (3:8-11). Through Christ, God has demonstrated his power over all the machinations of the evil one, including death, rebellion, and deception (54).

To understand the complete victory which is ones in Christ – and why it is unnecessary for New Testament believers to seek to directly attack Satan or ruling demons – we need to examine these three preliminary passages.

In Ephesians 1:20-21 Paul pictures the resurrected and exalted Jesus as now seated, at the right hand of God, in the heavenly realms, far above all spirits. "All four descriptions emphasize his authority… ." (Lowe, 54). Christ is seen in "the position of greatest power and highest honor" reigning as king with evil spirits "included among his subjects" (55). Thus his kingdom is cosmic in scope. And significantly Paul proclaims Christ to be superior to "every name which can be named" (1:21 or "every title that can be given")[18] and his authority includes every realm where demons might possibly be found. Lowe comments, "Christ rules over every conceivable demon, named or unnamed, in heaven or on earth, in this age or the one to come" (Ibid). And the practical ramification of this is that the same power of Christ is at work in us as believers (1:19 cf. v.22) to free us from any bondage or fear![19]

In Ephesians 2:1-6 Paul demonstrates that God has defeated demons in a second battlefield arena – the salvation of each convert to Christ. Looking back on the Ephesians' pre-Christian experience, Paul reveals they were all controlled by three forces: the world, the flesh, and the devil – and so were all dead in sin. But Christ saved them/us and exalted us together with Christ to sit with Him in the heavenlies – where they/we are now above all

demons (cf. 1:21). This same theme is found in Colossians 1:13 and 2:15. There Paul teaches the Colossians were once subject to the evil spirits and were thus prisoners of the kingdom of darkness. But on the cross Christ disarmed the "rulers and authorities" and God publicly exposed them, leading them in his triumphal procession in Christ (like a conquering general). The picture in Colossians is that of the evil forces not being merely defeated but humiliated and mocked[20]. God has liberated his people from demonic tyranny and brought us into the kingdom ruled by His Son (Col. 1:13). According to New Testament scholar N. T. Wright, "Because of what Jesus did on the cross, the powers and authorities are a beaten, defeated lot, so that (by implication) neither the Colossians nor anyone else who belongs to Jesus need be overawed by then again" (1986, 114).

In Ephesians 3:8-11 the Apostle shows how God's triumph over Satan also brings believers together into one body, whether Jew or Gentile. How does the truth of the universal Church relate to spiritual warfare? Lowe (56) points out that "by means of this reconstituted people of God, the wisdom of God is now revealed to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms." Christ is now building His church across all boundaries and includes all peoples. "Entire ethnic groups and nations which were previously consigned to the darkness have now entered the light" (*Ibid*). Thus, by its very existence as one people, the church proclaims the wisdom of God to the demonic forces in the cosmic realms, providing them "with a tangible reminder that their authority has been decisively broken and that all things are subject to Christ" (Lincoln 1990, 194).

Having proclaimed the victory that is ours as believers because of the defeat of the demonic powers (Ephesians 1-3), Paul then moves on to apply all this: he instructs the believers how to hold their ground in the strength God has provided (Ephesians 6). Paul first warns against Satan's stratagems and assaults (6:11, 16). Though Satan has been defeated, he

is engaged in a desperate counterattack. Yet, significantly, Paul's focus in this classic warfare

passage, is on simply standing firm against the devil. This is the clear emphasis of Ephesians

6:10-18. Though God has already won the conclusive battle and secured our deliverance,

imparting the power of His Spirit to us, He is now calling on us to engage in spiritual warfare.

Since detailed exegesis of this classic passage is not possible in this paper, we will

seek to sum up the main lessons gleaned from Ephesians 6:

1. The believer is not to aggressively launch an all-out, offensive attack on Satan and his

forces. Our role is primarily defensive. Four times in this passage we are told to simply

hold our ground (6:11, 13 - 2x, 14). This is the reason we are to be strong in the Lord and

to put on the full armor of God – *so that* we can stand firm.[21] The ideas is to hold the

ground taken in the face of an enemy encounter attack. Christ has already won the battle

– now we simply stand firm[22] in the face of the Enemy counterattack.

2. What enables believers to stand is putting on the classic spiritual disciplines. To take

up the armor is to "*put on* the Lord Jesus Christ" – it is simply to live *in Christ*. To put on

the armor is to live by faith and love on the battlefield of life. The armor is consistently

defensive – belts, breastplates, sandals, shields, and helmets protect the soldier; they do

not enable him to inflict wounds on his oppenent. The sword is the only possible

offensive weapon but even it can be used for self-protection. Since Jesus, our model, used

the sword (the Word of God) to defend Himself against Satan's temptations (Matthew 4:1-

11, Luke 4:1-12), we have reason to believe it too is to be used primarily for defensive.

3. Ephesians 6 presupposes human impotence in the face of demonic attack. The only

way Christians can stand up and win the battle is to utilize God's provided power, might,

and strength. We need the *full* armor but it has to be the armor *of God*. We receive our

armor from God and actually wear *His* armor – the armor by which He won the victory

over Satan.[23] The battle is so serious, believers will prevail only through the protection

and power of God.

4. Our opponents are formidable, supernatural, and fierce rulers, authorities, world rulers

of darkness and spirits of evil in the heavenlies.[24] The implication: against them we do

not have a fighting chance; we are out or our league! *They* are on the offensive against

believers, rather then vice versa. It is Satan who schemes, and takes the initiative (6:11)

and shoots fiery arrows at believers.

5. Prayer has an important role to play (6:18-20) but what Paul calls for is not "warfare

    prayer" but more traditional prayer – pray for other Christians and for boldness in

    evangelism. Prayer here is not related to any piece of the armor but stands separate.

    Prayer is the way we put on all the armor – in total reliance on the Lord. Significantly,

    Paul does not ask the Ephesians to pray against the ruling spirit over Rome or against

    Artemis, the alleged territorial spirit of Ephesus.[25]

Implications from Ephesians for SLSW

From this survey of Paul's warfare teaching in Ephesians, we see how markedly

different the overall thrust of SLSW is. Whereas SLSW proponents tell us Satan and his

spirits have never been stronger, Paul portrays them as vanquished and captive. The SLSW

movement views Satan as powerfully holding most of the world in darkness and so liberation

depends on our use of aggressive warfare prayer. Paul insists the power of Satan and his evil

forces has already been decisively broken. The proof of this is found in the resurrection of

Jesus, our own salvation, and the existence of a universal church. We need not fear Satan's power because Christ has much greater power, and far higher authority. And all this was done without our help or involvement. It was all accomplished by God in Christ. The war has been won without us!

Concluding Observations on Spiritual Warfare

Our examination of the main tenets of the strategic level spiritual warfare component of the larger warfare movement and our comparison with the major themes of a biblical perspective on spiritual warfare, lead us to the following fifteen summary observations:

1. There **is** a continuing struggle and cosmic warfare between the angels of God and those of Satan in the supernatural realm that does impact events on earth.

2. God has given us sufficient biblical revelation on demons and the angelic realm to keep us from two equal/opposite errors: denying their existence/power; being obsessed with/fearful of them.

3. There seems to be some biblical support for the concept of "territorial spirits" but their exact ranking, function and assignments is not clear from Scripture.

4. God *has* given us as believers the responsibility of exercising our authority in Christ over unclean spirits that may afflict *individuals*.

5. There is *no* biblical evidence God has given us the authority or the responsibility to discern, name, bind, pray down, or expel territorial spirits afflicting *regions/cities*. In fact, Scripture warns us not to seek to attack ruling demons.

6. We certainly can and should pray directly *to God* and ask Him to hinder and thwart Satan's hold over a city/area, so that the gospel can be proclaimed freely (I Pet. 5:6-9).

7. "Spiritual mapping," as popularly taught has no biblical (or historical) support and seems at times to be drawing on an non-Christian understanding of occultic power. George Otis' concept of mapping (as the creation of a spiritual profile of a city/area based upon careful research) seems to be a much more useful way to help believers pray more specifically.

8. "Identificational repentance" (as modeled by Nehemiah and Daniel) seems to be an appropriate way for Christians to deal with issues of corporate sin; it does **not**, however, enable us to "remit" the sins of the nonbelieving population of a city, or remove the curse of God's judgment (if residents chose to persist in their sin/rebellion).

9. Christians can evidently be deceived, oppressed, or highly influenced and partially controlled by demons, but only if they yield control to their spirits or hold on to habitual sin (this is parallel to allowing sin to "reign" over one's body – cf. Rom. 6; cf. also the danger of giving Satan a "foothold" = opportunity/ place, as in Eph. 4:27).

10. A biblical worldview tells us that the decisive battle has been won by Christ and that the final victory is known and secured. Satan has been already decisively defeated at the cross. Though on the cosmic level of the heavenlies, the war has been won, yet the battle does continue *on earth*. The real issue is not who will win but whether God's people will appropriate the victory won for us by the cross and resurrection of Christ! Our position in Christ provides the only viable position for our victory today.

11. Our main role as believers is to hold our ground in the strength provided through the use of traditional spiritual disciples. We conquer Satan not by going on the offense and

overwhelming all opposition to the gospel but by remaining firm in the face of opposition.

12. The biblical emphasis for dealing with the devil is not so much seeking a special or self-deliverance from him as much as repentance, resisting temptation, denying self, exercising faith, putting off the old self with its evil desires and putting on the new self by God's enabling power. Seeking outside counsel for deliverance from satanic oppression (a power encounter) may at times be needed; but the more normal mode is knowing and applying the truth of Scripture to our lives (a truth encounter).

13. Christian servants go into spiritual battle with a twofold confidence: the sovereignty of their God over all things (a dominate Old Testament theme) and the ultimate victory already secured by their Savior and Lord (a major New Testament theme). Thus there is no need to live in fear of the enemy.

14. Ultimately, prayer may be the most important weapon in the Christian's arsenal against the enemy Prayer remains a critical element in world evangelization. Yet God can and does honor imperfect intercessory prayers.

15. Contrary to much of the spiritual warfare movement's depiction of a God who is unwilling or unable to work without specific, targeted prayers to first neutralize the satanic hosts pervading the planet, the biblical God is not dependent on us to accomplish his work. Thus we can be very confident that in the end his mission in the world will indeed be victorious!

Two further observations can be made, though not based upon our brief study in this paper. First, a biblically balanced understanding of spiritual warfare must recognize that *the believer's enemy is actually threefold*: we face the world-system (*kosmos*), the flesh (*sarx* =

our sinful nature), *and* the devil. The Bible takes all three seriously. So should we. Our inner inclination to think and do evil (the flesh), and the external pressure to conform to ungodly cultural standards (the world) are viewed in the Scriptures just as much a threat as the supernaturally powerful beings who are hostile to God and his people. These three influences are real and they work in concert. Therefore to make sharp distinctions among the three is extraordinarily difficult as we seek to understand our own personal struggles.

Second, we need to be thinking of spiritual warfare in a broader way; a more biblically holistic understanding of spiritual warfare is needed in evangelical mission circles. Clinton Arnold offers this helpful insight:

> Spiritual warfare is all-encompassing. It touches every area of our lives–our families, our relationships, our church, our neighborhoods, our communities, our places of employment. There is virtually no part of our existence over which the Evil One does not want to maintain or reassert his unhealthy and perverse influence. Conversely, Jesus longs to reign over every area of our lives. This is the locus of intense struggle for all believers. And it is a power struggle. To which kingdom–and source of power– do we yield? (27).

As evidenced by Arnold, a biblically based definition of spiritual warfare will not merely focus on Satan and demons, but how the Christian seeks to live out a godly life. This will at least partially involve resisting Satan. Popularized SLSW teaching today seems at times to overlook this more holistic understanding.

This author would therefore propose that the main elements of a holistic, biblically balanced understanding of spiritual warfare should include:

- *submission to the kingship reign of Christ* (yielding to Him, affirming our allegiance to Him daily, and trusting/obeying His Word, etc);

- *drawing on His power* (through fervent and focused prayer, daily dependence, walking in the Spirit, etc);

- *winning the battle in our hearts* (by fearing God, examining our heart affections and motivations, setting our minds on things above, taking every thought captive for Christ, meditating on His Word, daily repenting of known sin, etc); and

- *maintaining our spiritual walk* (by daily putting on the armor of God, fleeing Satan, avoiding all sinful practices, growing in grace, fellowshipping with other believers, proclaiming the good news, etc).

A major weakness of the SLSW movement is its weak connection with Scripture. To claim the veracity of its doctrines based upon recent testimonies or fresh revelations is problematic. The grave danger of SLSW may be to end up with "an overextended middle" (rather than an excluded middle, as Paul Hiebert has warned!). That is, the evangelical mission movement and church could be accepting a form of spiritistic Christianity rather than a rationalistic Christianity! The call in missions is for a rigorous biblical faith which both acknowledges and deals with the spirit world (both good and evil) in a balanced fully biblical fashion.

Despite its flaws, it would be a mistake to dismiss the spiritual warfare movement as out of hand. The Western church needs to be reminded that our struggle is not about flesh and blood (Eph. 6:12). The spiritual warfare movement rightly reminds us that we battle not only the world and the flesh, but the devil as well. We should praise God that this movement has brought many thousands into the larger missions movement "praying through the Window." As the movement matures it may perhaps lead to a globally significant missiological breakthrough. The current excessive and unhealthy obsession with the demonic will not in the end further the global cause of Christ.

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[1] That this new methodology has captured the popular evangelical imagination and has made great inroads into missionary thinking and strategy is obvious from the sheer number of organizations and events focused on SLSW in recent years. Massive events such as Praying Through the Window I (1993), II (1995), III (1997), and IV (1999), prayer journeys to the 100 Gateway Cities of the 10/40 Window, the launch of Global Harvest Ministries, and cooperative ventures such as the International Spiritual Warfare Network have involved and immersed millions of believers worldwide in this movement. The United Prayer Track of the AD 2000 and Beyond Movement was dominated by this outlook. Millions of missions dollars have been spent promoting and implementing this new strategy

[2] SLSW advocates are in fact promising "unprecedented forward advances of the Kingdom of God" (Wagner 1993a, 25). Leading practitioners claim that this is "one of the most important things the Spirit is saying to the churches in the 1990's" (*Ibid*, 17). SLSW supposedly offers missions "the greatest power boost it has had since the time that William Carey went to India in 1793" (Wagner 1996, 46).

[3] Robert J. Priest, the key writer of this lengthy treatise, first delivered as a paper read during the EMS annual meeting in November 1994, grew up in an animistic culture in the Bolivian Amazon where his parents were missionaries. He is an anthropologist, who formerly taught at Columbia Biblical Seminary and now teaches at TEDS. Priest cites four areas which he feels demonstrate a syncretism of Christian and animistic world views: the notion that dangerous demonic influences are transmitted (1) through contact with certain kinds of physical objects; (2) or through verbal curses placed on an individual; (3) through genealogical inheritance; and (4) in geographical regions dominated by evil territorial spirits. More on these doctrines later.

[4] Other evangelicals expressing concern with SLSW are Paul Hiebert (1989: 117ff; 1992: 41ff), Scott Moreau (1995), Millard Erickson (1993: 168, 171), David Powlison (1995), Chuck Lowe (1998), and Clinton Arnold (1997).

[5] For example, Reddin (1989: 211-212), Wimber (1990: 183-192), Pawson (1992: 68-70), Robb (1993: 173-184), Hagin (1993: 171-249), and Kopfermann (1994).

[6] In attempt to reclaim spiritual warfare some evangelicals have resorted to "deliverance" ministries which seek to identify and then cast demons out of believers (whom they call "demonized") and non-believers. But, as David Powlison (27-30) rightly points out all Bible-believing Christians believe in deliverance (see Col. 1:13; Acts 26:18) and in spiritual warfare of some sort; and many evangelicals disagree with the distinctives of modern-day "deliverance" ministries. Powlison therefore suggests an alternate term to better describe this particular version of spiritual warfare that has recently been developed: "ekballistic mode of ministry" (or EMM for short – from *ekballo* = to cast out). Though I believe EMM is an accurate way to describe those ministries, I prefer, and will use in this paper, the term "demon-deliverance ministries" or "deliverance mode of ministry" to describe this form of spiritual warfare. Like Powlison, I would prefer to reserve the term "spiritual warfare" for what I believe to be the classic biblical understanding. I hope to show that biblical spiritual warfare goes far beyond only delivering people from demons!

[7] Surprisingly chief advocate Peter Wagner now acknowledges that the Bible does not provide a single definite example of a specifically strategic-level spirit (1996: 163, 171, 175, 177, 191, 196, 203). He admits that the lines of demarcation between these three classes of spirits are "somewhat artificial" (1996: 135, 171, 216). If so, why draw them at all!

[8] Chuck Lowe's footnotes give many specific examples from the writing of SLSW authors for each of these listed.

[9] However, the identity of the "prince of Persia" and prince of Greece" is not at all certain. Commentators Calvin, Haevernick and William Shea all identify these two as *human* princes – in line with the more common usage in the Book of Daniel. Historical and cuneiform evidence seems to point to Cyrus' appointed son, Cambyses, made King of Babylon, as the "prince of Persia" who also had jurisdiction over the region of Israel. Thus, the angel of Daniel 10 was probably having to contend with Cambyses. For a fuller discussion of the prince identity question and of other hermeneutical problems with the SLSW interpretation of Daniel 10, see Priest
et al, 73ff.

[10] For an excellent overview of what the OT *does* definitively teach about angels and demons, see David Powlison, 49-61. Powlison's summary is helpful because it interacts with the occult worldview and idolatry so prevalent in OT times. He shows that the OT never identifies or addresses spirit inhabitants as the cause of men's sins or traumas nor seeks to cast then out as a solution.

[11] For a solid exegetical review of the problems with these four New Testament proof texts, see Powlison 38-42.

[12] Related to the obvious human origination of many ruling spirits is the issue of whether these human gods are actually demons. Proponents of SLSW believe that the biblical and historical accounts of territorial deities are another "evidence" of territorial spirits. But, as Chuck Lowe (35-36) points out, they are often confusing *phenomenology with ontology*. The fact that the ancients *regarded* gods as having territorial jurisdiction does not make it a reality. Just because people *thought* this way (phenomenology) does not affirm the legitimacy of such beliefs (ontology). Lowe insightfully asks, "Does the Old Testament merely depict – or does it actually endorse – the perception of territoriality?" (35). Wagner and others seem to assume that since the Old Testament records, for example, the existence of Canaanite deities and gods, they must be real, i.e. demonic beings. The problem: they have never demonstrated it as factual! On this issue, Priest also, takes exception with SLSW doctrine: "There is no simple congruence between what pagans underline believe about supernatural powers and what is actually true about demons (Priest *et al*, 35; underline in the original).

[13] Other demon-deliverance leaders like Dawson contend that "getting the exact name of demons at any level is not necessary, but it is important to be aware of the specific nature or type of oppression (1991, xi – In the forward to Wagner, ed. 1991, xi).

[14] Both Nehemiah and Daniel humbled themselves before God and prayed earnestly for their people, identifying themselves with their sin, in spite of the fact they did not personally participate in the sinful behaviors. And, in both passages it is apparent that God was pleased. There is no intimation that He disapproved of their identificational repentance.

[15] A close look at I Corinthians 14:29-33, a parallel passage, indicates the basis for determining/discerning whether a spoken word or "revelation" is truly from the Spirit of God. We are to look at what people *say* about Jesus Christ (cf. also I Corinthians 12:1-3). The gift of discernment is not therefore on ability to emotionally *sense* the presence of invisible demonic spirits. All extra-biblical information is to be tested by apostolic testimony (cf. II Timothy 2:2-5). It is God's Word alone that can expose the lies of the Evil One (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:3-6, 11:3-4).

[16] Even if one accepts the claim by SLSW leaders that God is giving fresh revelation or doctrinal understandings today, we should insist that these modern-day "prophets" meet the scripturally mandated tests for true prophets. According to Deuteronomy 13:1ff, genuine prophets must not make mistakes in any of their claimed revelations,

and their claim to revelation must be validated by miraculous signs. Significantly, men like Kraft and Wagner who are claiming special "words of knowledge" (Kraft 1989, 158; Wagner 1988, 230ff), never claim their words of revelation are without error.

[17] Clinton Arnold, who is not in the SLSW camp but is sympathetic (having been invited by Wagner to be an observer/ critic at their warfare prayer consultations), feels two passages may give some *indirect* support for the concept of "residual demonic influence" from the past: Mark 9:31 and I Kings 15:3. He suggests that when the OT asserts in the narrative line of kings of Israel that a king "committed all the sins his fathers had done before him," it is recognizing that "these tendencies may not only be genetic and environmental, but may also have a spiritual root" (119). This may also be a case of reading into the text what it does not directly say.

[18] In Ephesians, Paul actually offers two reasons why believers need not identify the names of the spirits in an effort to gain power over them. First, Christ has been exalted above all names (1:21); and second, the Father originally assigned all names (3:15). In this latter passage Paul describes God as the "Father from whom every family, both in heaven and on earth, derives its name." In first-century parlance, "families in heaven" would include all spirits, both good and bad. So Paul is saying 1) God has always had power over the spirits (he named them!); and 2) in Christ He has demonstrated His superiority over them!

[19] Four Greek words are used for power in the New Testament: *dunamis, energia, kratos, isxus*. Arnold points out that all are used in the ancient magical papyri to describe the power of the spirits and magicians who call upon them (1992, 73-75). Paul is insisting that such power belongs only to Christ – not to spirits or to their mediums! Christ will use the same power to protect and benefit His followers.

[20] For more on the irony of the cross as the defeat of demons, see Wright 1986, 116f.

[21] The metaphor of Ephesians 6 pictures soldiers threatened by the enemy and engaged in close combat. The commander does not order them to launch as offensive, but to hold their ground. It involves standing firm, holding one's position, resisting, not surrendering to the opposition but prevailing against it. Though this is a defensive posture – not an offensive one – the image is not one of "standing around with your hands in your pockets." Standing firm is not quietism or non-resistance – we're to be *active* in battle.

[22] "Stand" is a common exhortation in Paul's writings and *always* carries a defensive connotation. See I Thessalonians 3:8; II Thessalonians 2:15; Philippians 1:27-28, 41; Colossians 4:12; etc. The exhortation to "stand" presupposes that Christians are under attack! Another New Testament command carries a similar theme: "resist Satan" (not attack him) see I Peter 5:5-11 and James 3:13-4:12. Again, it is seen, Christians are not called to launch a pre-emptive strike against Satan – but to resist and withstand him. A careful exegesis of these passages shows that they teach classic-mode spiritual warfare – dependence on the Lord and practical obedience to Him. For a good exposition of these above two passages as well as of Ephesians 6 and their common theme of resistance to Satan, see Powlison, 112-119.

[23] The armor described in Eph. 6:10-20 is the armor that God himself wears, just as the power is God's power. David Powlison (113-114) has noted that New Testament spiritual warfare *deepens* Old Testament warfare. "In Ephesians spiritual warfare occurs in the Isaiah mode. Each of the pieces of armor is rooted in the Old Testament, mainly in Isaiah." Each piece is described in Isaiah as put on by Messiah or the Lord himself (See Isaiah 11:5, 49:2, 52:7, 59:17).

[24] Rather than saying simply "demons," Paul uses a series of four terms to characterize our opponents: principalities (*archai*), authorities (*exousiai*), world rulers (*kosmokratores*), and spiritual forces (*pneumatika*). Generally, these all refer to demonic spirits of various sorts. There has been much speculation about what Paul intended by those four terms. This much is certain: 1) they probably do not represent the so called territorial spirits, 2) while the terms may imply a hierarchy within the demonic realm, the terms themselves don't help us determine their ranks; and 3) there is no special meaning to each term which would give us further insight into the demonic realm. In summary, Paul seems to simply line up these terms for persuasive effect to awaken believers to the seriousness of the struggle they face.

[25] Ephesians 6:18-20 is also significant in that it raises questions about any supposed advantage to praying on location, as recommended by many SLSW advocates. The very fact that Paul regularly prays for people several months journey away, and requests prayers for himself, seems to tell us one need not be "on site" to engage in prevailing prayer. SLSW seems to territorialize not only the demons, but also the power of God!