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The Private War of a Saint

by David Wilkerson

The book of Revelation tells us that in the last days, Satan will rise up in anger and make war "with the remnant." This remnant, of course, is the body of Christ, comprised of all "(who) keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 12:17).

We in the church of Christ talk often about spiritual warfare. The war that is described in Revelation is a worldwide attack Satan has launched against the body of Christ: "It was given unto him to make war with the saints" (13:7).

Every believer is enlisted in the great army of the Lord. And Satan is waging his demonic war against this army. Hellish principalities and powers are fronting an all-out assault against God's holy remnant. The apostle Paul states that on every battlefield, "We do not war after the flesh...the weapons of our warfare are not carnal" (2 Corinthians 10:3-4).

Consider these "war zones" around the globe:

- * In Muslim nations, the spiritual war taking place is a demonic assault on the testimony of Jesus Christ.
- * In Europe, the conflict being waged against the church is a war of secularism. One by one, European nations are becoming totally secular states.
- * In Sweden, the war taking place involves unbelief. One survey says only 20 percent of the Swedish population believes in God.
- * In England, the war is one of apostasy. A nation that once was a light to the world, sending missionaries all over the globe, is rapidly closing many of its churches.
- * In America, Satan's war against the church is in the continual flood of sensuality and materialism. His weapons in this war are love of money and addiction to pleasure.

Right now, Satan's powers of darkness throughout the world are rejoicing. They're convinced they are so powerful, so high and mighty, that they can't be brought down. These demonic forces have infiltrated high places of human power: the media, political offices, high courts. It's happening even in compromised religious denominations, as leaders move aggressively to marry gay couples and ordain homosexuals.

All of these demonic principalities have an agenda. They work to reeducate young schoolchildren about the "rightness" of homosexuality. They seek to erode moral values. They work to pull down the saving power of the gospel. Already the storm clouds can be seen gathering in Washington D.C., as more and more elected leaders try to legalize gay marriages.

It seems every institution, every agency, is now infiltrated and dominated by these ungodly spiritual powers. You can actually hear the gloating and boasting of these demonic principalities: "We're moving into power. We're going to win the war." And they seem to be winning.

Yet we know how this war ends: at the cross, in the victory of Jesus Christ. Paul tells us, "The weapons of our warfare are...mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalting itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (10:4-5).

1. There is another battlefield in this war: the private war of individual children of God.

Every believer on earth faces his or her own private war. The Bible states, "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven... A time of war, and a time of peace" (Ecclesiastes 3:8).

Right now, you may be enjoying a time of peace. I thank God for such seasons in life, when joy springs up. My hope is that a majority of readers are enjoying a period of rest and rejoicing.

But there will come a time of war. And that war won't involve the vast body of Christ worldwide, but will be a private war. It will involve battles and struggles known only to you.

These are wars of the flesh — I call them "soul wars" — and they bring a burden you can't share with anyone. Even your spouse or best friend can't help you carry them. They simply aren't able to understand your battle.

Such private wars and battles overwhelm the body and soul. And they are lonely wars. They are just about Jesus and you.

My wife calls her private battle "my silent war." As I see the pain etched on her face, I say to her, "Please, Gwen, tell me what you're going through." I want to help, to offer encouragement, to pray. But she answers, "It's just so deep, I can't explain it. Only God knows."

My son Greg spent two-and-a-half years in unimaginable pain, the result of an accident. Even the strongest drugs couldn't help Greg's physical agony. He was in a private war he simply couldn't explain.

No one in the family could help him, not his wife or his parents. I would say to him, "Son, I can only imagine what you're going through." He would answer, "No, Dad, you can't imagine it. You simply don't know."

His pain was so deep and painful, he couldn't put it into words. At one point he told me, "I don't even ask God why anymore. I just want one hour free of pain. The war I'm in is to get the smallest bit of relief from what I'm going through." It was a battle he faced alone.

Beloved, these are all war zones, bloody battlefields. And when we're in them, there is no dancing, no shouting, no laughing or smiling. I know something about private wars.

I have had my share of such wars. When my daughter Bonnie was stricken with cancer, my wife and I entered into hand-to-hand combat with the powers of hell. For three days, Bonnie had to be shut in isolation, as cobalt beamed into her body. She couldn't eat or have visitors.

Outside in the hall, my wife, Gwen, was at the end of her rope as a mother. She wept as she pounded the wall with her fist, crying, "Why, God?" It was all too much for me.

I also was completely overwhelmed by the agony of our daughter's ordeal. I got into the car and drove to the countryside, where I parked and began walking along a country road. I soon found myself screaming at God:

"Oh, Lord, first Gwen has had to face all her battles with cancer. Then our daughter Debbie has had to battle it. Now it has come upon Bonnie, too. Tell me, what did I do? How did I sin against you to bring about all this suffering?"

No one on earth could have helped me in that dark hour. No preacher or Christian counselor could have reached me. A thousand saints could have stood by me, exhorting, "You can make it, David. Don't weep, don't scream at God. Just believe."

But none of their words would have touched me. I could never explain to anyone the depth of grief and pain I endured at that time. I needed something supernatural, something only God could provide. I needed a word of love from my heavenly Father. I had to win this war with no other help than from the Spirit of God.

And God did come. The Holy Spirit whispered to me, "Your daughter has two fathers. Tell me, which one can hold her now in that room?"

I answered, "You can, Lord."

It was as if the Lord said to me: "You have put your family in my hands. Go ahead, cry it out, get it out of your system. I know everything that you're feeling; I felt it for my own Son. Now trust that I am a Father to your daughter, to you, to you

ur family.”

In that hour of our desperate cries, Jesus entered into Bonnie’s room and held her for three long days. Praise God, he healed her.

Often we Christians convince ourselves that the right thing to do is to grit our teeth through our battles. We tell others, “Everything is all right,” but it is not all right. God doesn’t want us to put on any false front. He knows what we’re going through, and he knows it is something shared just with him.

2. Some face a private war caused by what the Bible terms “a season of heaviness.”

The apostle Peter writes, “(We) are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations” (1 Peter 1:5–6, my italics).

The Greek word for heaviness here suggests dejection. If you were to ask any godly saint about his private war, he would probably mention the heaviness Peter describes.

Everyone who walks closely with Jesus has known awful seasons of having a heavy heart. Throughout history, God’s precious ones have walked through long days of one adversity after another. They have awakened day after day with another heavy report and yet another battle to face. They have endured family problems, crises of health, financial hardships, troubles with children or grandchildren, loved ones facing terrible adversities.

Even King David, a man of great faith, testified, “My soul melteth for heaviness” (Psalm 119:28). This is straight talk coming from a man after God’s own heart. David is saying, in simple terms, “I am worn out. I’m getting weary under all these burdens. My life is in utter distress.”

Yet, through it all, Peter says, we are to “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8). Why? We are told these tests come most intensely to the godly.

I offered comfort to a pastor whose story was heartbreaking.

A minister was grieving over his son, who had been charged with killing two people. Talk about a season of heaviness; this pastor endured one long day of agony after another. As I spoke with him, he mentioned other awful adversities in his family that caused my heart to break.

I offered him Scriptures of comfort, reminding him, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous. This trial will result in greater faith.”

He answered me, “Brother David, I am not there yet. My pain is too heavy to bear. I’m focused on my son’s pain right now.”

I know what it is like to endure such a season of heaviness over a loved one. It weighs on me like a burden as I sit in church alongside our pastoral staff, listening to their messages of hope and encouragement, uplifting calls to faith. All the while my heart is breaking in pain.

The congregation sings, “Shake off those heavy bands, lay down your heavy burdens.” But it takes more than a song, more than a sermon, more than a Holy Ghost meeting to lift you up when you’re gripped by deep sorrow and a heavy heart. It doesn’t matter how powerful the sermon or how glorious the worship is. I leave the service not uplifted but still weighed down with grief.

In such seasons of heaviness, nobody—no service, no message, no counselor—can lift your heaviness. It is your private war, and it’s something you have to battle through to victory. Prayer helps—indeed, all spiritual things help—but God wants it to be your victory.

3. Some private wars are the result of “lusts that war in your members” (James 4:1).

Recently, I read a few chapters from a famous book written years ago. The book was about the private war of a godly saint.

This man was greatly admired as an upright, charitable man of God. He had served the Lord faithfully for years. He was

a prayer warrior, a worshiper, a man of integrity and honesty, and he loved God's Word. Even this man's enemies acknowledged his righteousness.

Then one day his world came crashing down. In one night of lust, he impregnated another man's wife. In a panic to cover up his awful sin, he arranged a hit man to kill the woman's husband.

The man's sins caught up with him, and he was exposed. In two chapters especially, he describes in vivid detail the horrible private war that followed. He was stricken with a crippling disease. All his friends forsook him, and his sons turned on him. He came under the chastening rod of God and cried out because his burden became intolerable.

The man was overcome with shame for having reproached God's name. The guilt he bore was simply unbearable. His soul was flooded with grief and bitter tears, and he wept aloud, "I've been a fool, a hypocrite. How can I ever be forgiven?"

His mental anguish caused him to mourn from morning till night. His days were restless and he couldn't sleep. He descended into a deep depression, thinking God had forsaken him.

Moreover, his body became wracked with pain. His bones ached and a terrible pain developed in his back. Eventually, he felt tormented in every part of his body. He wrote of that time, "All I do now is groan."

This man's private war became so overwhelming, he felt totally abandoned. Day after day he cried out, "My God, why have you forsaken me? My sins have overwhelmed me."

By now you probably have realized this famous old story is in the Bible. The saintly man who fell was King David. You can read his confession in Psalm 38 and especially in Psalm 69. Why have I brought up David's "private war" confession?

I refer to David's example because it is the same private war that many believers face today. I'm talking about believers who have fallen into sin. David's war didn't come from weariness or heaviness. It came from an all-out attack by the enemy.

Paul wrote that a spirit of lust was to come upon the world. Enticement would come out of the very pits of hell against God's holiest people. Therefore, we can't think for a minute that saintly, righteous people are immune to falling into the lusts of the flesh.

Many Christians believe if they are faithful to pray and study God's Word they won't be tempted. But David was a true intercessor, a man after God's own heart; no one loved the Lord more than he did. This holy man was tempted fiercely, and he succumbed to his lust.

You see, the godliest saints are the prime targets of this kind of warfare. James addresses faithful believers when he warns, "From where come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?" (James 4:1).

These private "lust wars" and fights of the flesh are not limited to singles. They include married men and women—godly, praying, faithful believers. Paul warns every follower of Christ when he writes, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). Jesus gave a similar warning to his disciples: "Pray that you enter not into temptation" (Luke 22:40).

My heart goes out to all who, like David, have lost a battle against lust. Perhaps this describes you. You may be in the midst of such a terrible private war. And, like David, you know something of the consequences. Day after day, you face guilt, fear and confusion. Yet I remind you, you are in the midst of war. And we know who the Victor is. David learned how to win his private wars.

How do we fight a good fight? David writes, "He teaches my hands to war" (Psalm 18:34, my italics). There is no formula, no war plan to be developed against Satan's wiles. The heavenly Father works in mysterious ways, his wonders to perform in our lives. We can learn something of how his Spirit works through David's example:

1. First of all, David cried out to the Lord.

“Oh, Lord, make haste! Help me quickly. I’m about to fall. Please, hurry and deliver me. Cause me to escape. Your Word promises you’ll deliver me, so do it now” (see Psalm 70).

I ask you, how often have you cried out a similar prayer? “Oh, Lord, how long will it take for you to deliver me from this? Please, do something now. This is dragging out too long. Where is my way of escape that’s promised in your Word?”

The truth is, we all want out of the war we’re in. We are tired of fighting, weary of the struggle. We think, “I’ve fought long enough. I’m so weary now I’m about to fall.” Even Jesus said on the cross, “Father, why have you forsaken me?”

But God won’t take some out of their war. Why? First of all, war is how the Lord strengthens and teaches us wisdom as soldiers in his army.

Second, he needs us in this war. You see, you are at the very center of the conflict, and others close to you depend on your example. If God pulls you out, it’s possible many of your friends and family will suffer and fall away, because they never saw you fight through your battle.

Do you get the picture? You are the one whom God uses to drive back the enemy. You are the one he wants to teach how to war. You are the warrior whom God works through. And he is using your example to strengthen weaker brethren.

2. David made a decision: “Live or die, I will magnify the Lord in this battle.”

This godly man said, in essence: “I have prayed for a quick escape from my battle. But until God delivers me, I’m going to glorify him in my warfare. I will praise him, despite what I’m going through.”

Consider what David wrote in these Psalms: “Let God be magnified” (Psalm 70:4). “Magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together” (34:3). “Let all those that seek thee... say continually, The Lord be magnified” (40:16).

This ought to be our cry as well. Like David, we are to set our hearts to magnify the Lord in the midst of our war. This doesn’t mean we force ourselves to put on a happy face. Rather, it means our worship of God is simply unspoken; we glorify him quietly through our battle, hour by hour. It means standing still in the midst of our raging storm and firmly declaring in our hearts, “Lord, I believe!”

3. David cast himself fully on the mercy of God.

Consider David’s incredible testimony: “When I said, My foot slippeth; thy mercy, O Lord, held me up” (Psalm 94:18). David had learned, “The Lord will never allow my distress to overcome me. By his grace, my problems won’t take me down.”

Here was a revelation to David of the merciful, tender kindness of the Lord. In every struggle against our lusts, God is always full of tender mercy to the repentant. David wrote: “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger forever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

“For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust” (Psalm 103:8–14).

Dear saint, will you make this your testimony? Can you look at all your distresses and adversities, anxieties and temptations, and say in faith: “By God’s grace, I am not going down. I will not be overcome by these things”? He will answer you: “I won’t allow you to be overwhelmed. I have enough grace for you.” “My grace is sufficient for thee” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Here is the final word on the subject from David himself: “He maketh wars to cease” (Psalm 46:9). In every private conflict you face, keep your eyes and your thoughts fixed on this: God’s mercy and loving kindness are never failing. Amen

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