

Chapter 10

True Warfare

Do not give the devil a foothold

I shouldn't have done it! Looking back it was a very dangerous thing to do but when you are young you think you are invincible. Nothing will happen to me! I don't know whether I have an adventurous spirit or whether I cannot resist a challenge, but I have often found myself in situations that others would avoid. I don't like danger but I must confess that I do like excitement; especially if there is a challenge attached.

I was challenged. "Let's see if we can reach the top of the cliff". I was in my early twenties and living in Sheringham on the North Norfolk coast. Above me rose the soft, sandy crumbling cliff. It is like climbing a tree. Somehow the climb up always seems easier than the way back down unless you let gravity take you! Now I was over a hundred feet up and it was impossible to climb up further. There was a solid wall of soft sand between us and the top and it was impossible to climb higher. No way up and gravity seemed the most likely way down! The footholds in that loose sand seemed to have vanished. Thankfully, my 'grass-sliding' experience as a boy showed us the way down. An adaptation of that experience and 'sand-sliding' and gravity took me safely to the bottom. The only thing that suffered was my pride and the seat of my trousers!

From ground level the way to the top looked safe enough, but when we got higher we found that there were no footholds and we could only slide our way to safety. The bible tells us 'Not to give the devil a foothold'. (Ephesians 4:27). Do not give him a place to hold on in your life, or church or ministry. If we stay close to Jesus and His word and put it into practice the devil will slide out of our life as he will have no hold on us. It is the same in our churches. Our example is Jesus who spoke and acted only according to the will of the Father and when Satan came against Him he was able to say, "*The ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me*". Jesus lived a life free from sin and therefore the devil had no foothold in His life.

Let us go back to heavenly places. We have a picture of a whole man in heavenly places. The church is there. It is part of this man. We can see him as having three distinct parts. The head is Jesus (Ephesians 4:22b); the body is the church (verse 23) and the feet are the feet of Jesus (verse 22a). There has been much good teaching about the church as the body of Christ. Romans 12:5 clearly teaches that we, the church, being many individuals are one body *in Christ*. As we have seen, 1 Corinthians 10:17 confirms this. If we are in Christ we are in heavenly places and we are in a battle. Satan is waging war against the Lord and against His church.

Satan may act foolishly but he is not a fool. He may not act wisely but he has intelligence. If I was in his position, and thankfully I am not, and I wanted to wage war against this heavenly man I would be very wary of my enemy. I would not attack the head! The head is Jesus Christ and remembering the defeat I suffered on the cross would keep me from attacking the head. Out of His mouth comes a sharp two-edged sword! Likewise I would know that God has put all things under the feet of Jesus.

Satan knows the bible (probably better than most Christians and probably goes to church more often!) and the prophecies that Jesus would crush his head. I would keep well away from the head and the feet!

Therefore, the best point of attack would be against the body, the church. That is you and me. Satan is waging war in heavenly places and the point of attack is the church. That is why I said that whether you like it or not you are in a battle. We have seen that our enemy is not flesh and blood but spiritual.

The strategy of Satan in this warfare is to attack the body of Christ, the church. He is constantly shooting fiery darts at us. They come in the form of temptations. He knows our weaknesses and it is at these points that we will come under attack. An alcoholic is constantly tempted by the thought of another drink. Every day is a battle for a recovering addict. The enemy places in him the thought that it would do no harm. He needs it. No-one would know. That is why at the end of the passage about the armour of God we are urged to pray always with all kinds of prayer and supplication in the Spirit and to be watchful.

The strategy of Satan is to cause us to sin. When we sin we are giving the devil a foothold. The disunity in the church is a sin and we are giving him a hold. We cause disunity in so many ways. The jealousy that we have for another ministry is a sin and it puts a hole in the body of Christ and the devil has a foothold. So many times I have heard a pastor gossip about another pastor.

I recently heard rumours about a pastor that I know and work with. They were serious accusations that, if true, would ruin him and possibly damage my own reputation because I work closely with him from time to time. The accusations concerned issues of immorality. When I heard them I was shocked. I did not act on the rumours or speak them out to another. I knew I would be seeing him in a few days and so I held my peace until I was able to talk with him. He too had heard the rumours but they were without foundation. He told me the truth of the situation which another brother who is greatly respected and is over him in the Lord confirmed. I am thankful that there was no truth in these rumours and that we are able to continue to work and build the kingdom of God together.

Even now, however, when I mention his name, there are some pastors who are quick to tell me of the rumours. They speak as if they are fact, but when I ask them if they have spoken to the brother direct they always tell me no. This is sin. They are quick to pass on rumours and gossip but slow to establish the truth. They are damaging the reputation of a good servant of God. Frankly, they are doing the devil's work. In the church, they are giving the devil a foothold.

On another occasion a pastor told me that he had had an assistant pastor who had become jealous of his ministry and had, as a result, taken a large percentage of his congregation and started a fresh ministry. He was very angry and bitter about this. It was obvious that he did not want this new church to succeed and he held unforgiveness in his heart. He told me he could not forgive him for the pain he had caused. I tried to counsel him, that even though his assistant had sinned against him, he must forgive him. Unforgiveness is a sin and it gives the devil a hold in the church.

Some people find the story of Achan in Joshua chapter 7 difficult. The people of Israel were fresh from the battle and victory at Jericho. The walls had fallen down. They had seen the hand of God who had given them an impossible victory. Now they were ready for the next battle at Ai. Joshua did not consult the Lord as to how he should fight and sent three thousand men to take the city. They failed and thirty six of their number were killed. What brought the defeat? They had been told to utterly destroy everything in Jericho and put the gold and silver and bronze and iron into the treasury of the Lord. Achan held back some for himself and hid them in his tent. His disobedience brought about defeat for the whole nation. Taking Israel as a type of the church, Achan gave the devil a hold and as a result Israel did not overthrow the city of Ai. Once the sin was exposed and dealt with victory was theirs.

It is rightly taught that if we do not confess our sin, we will not live a victorious life. It is harder to understand that if one person in the church is in sin then the whole church could be defeated. The church is, however, the body of Christ. As I am writing there is a boy in the house lying in bed sick. He has been complaining of a severe headache. As a result he does not want to eat (or even watch football on the television!) and only lie down in his bed with the covers over his head. It is only his head which is causing him pain, but it has caused his whole body to become weak. He is not functioning as a ten year old boy would function. One member of his body has caused his whole body to become defeated.

We are the body of Christ. In much spiritual warfare Christians shout, jump up and down and feel good because we are giving the devil a good bashing! If there is sin in our church then the effect of our warfare will be at best limited and probably ineffective. Our leaders may tell us that we have defeated the principalities and powers and rulers in heavenly places but on most occasions we have done nothing but make a noise. Why? Because in so many ways we give the devil a hold.

A lot of my ministry involves bringing leaders from any and all denominations together to teach unity. It is good for us to have unity within our own congregation and we should do all that we can to bring it into our own church. However, I am concerned that within a town or city or rural area there is so much division between the churches and ministries and congregations. When the apostle Paul wrote his letters he did not address them to several different churches in the same town. He did not write a different letter to the Baptists and Anglicans because they viewed things differently. To Rome he wrote, *'To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints'* To Corinth he wrote, *'To the church (singular) of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.'* To Ephesus he wrote, *'To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus.'* He did not see division, denominations and ministries, he wrote to the church and to the saints. To him, the saints were in the church whether the church met in different congregations in the north, south, east or west of the town. To Paul the important thing was that the church was established in the city.

Now, there are many 'churches' in every town. If we are building the kingdom of God it should be a reason for rejoicing. I wrote earlier that denominations are not a problem to God but to us. God likes variety. For the most part we are possessive about our own church. We prefer our denomination above others. Jesus said we should prefer others above ourselves. Yes, that goes for churches and congregations and

denominations and not just individuals. A pastor from a particular denomination recently attended our unity seminars and invited us to his town so we could teach leaders there. However, when his overseer heard of his plan, even though he made it possible for us to conduct the seminars, the pastor was prevented by his overseer from attending. If it was not for his denomination alone, he did not want his leaders attending! The overseer is obviously building his denomination and not the kingdom of God.

This is becoming a great problem in the body of Christ. Pastors will only allow another minister into his pulpit if he comes from the same denomination. I have sometimes seen joy on the face of a pastor as he tells me of the failure of another pastor in town. Some feel good when they see another church struggling. We should weep for such a church. We boast about the numbers of people attending our church on a Sunday morning – but where have they come from? Too many times they come from other churches. We have not preached but poached! None of them have been born again into the kingdom through our own outreach and evangelism.

All of these attitudes are sin. They are holes in the body of Christ that give the devil a foothold.

It is time for the church to recognise that there is only one church. If a man is born again he is a brother. We need to stop seeing denominations and seeing saints. If I do not recognise my brother because he goes to a different denomination I am sinning. Many Protestants automatically assume that because a man goes to the Catholic church he cannot be born again. I accept that Protestants have difficulty with many fundamentals of doctrine in the Catholic church. However, I know there are many in the Catholic church who are born again and I thank God for them as they are able to be salt and light for the Gospel. Many Catholics do not believe that Protestants have the full truth. They believe that the Catholic Church is the true church (although Jesus is building the true church!). It is what they are taught, but if they are trusting Jesus alone for their salvation then they are saved in the same way as Protestants and are our brothers and sisters.

If I separate myself from a brother because of doctrine, how will he come to know the truth – and how do I know that perhaps he is right and I am wrong. None of us is complete and perfect (yet!).

Jesus said “I will build My church.” Too many of us are building our own churches. There is a danger that in building ‘ours’ we are not building ‘His’! I do not say it as a boast, but I founded my home church in London. For about five years I pastored it. As I began to travel more and more I ‘resigned’ as pastor. I believe a pastor should be with his sheep. I get concerned when I see a pastor with a travelling ministry. If he is truly pastor of the church then he should either stay at home or take the congregation with him! I acknowledge that some have pastoral teams that enable such travel. A few years later I withdrew from the eldership of the church. Now I am just a member. It is not ‘my’ church – it is His! I am not building ‘my’ ministry – I am building His. I do not have to hold on to it. It is established and the leadership is taking it on in a way that I could not. I am an evangelist and teacher. The pastor is a pastor! I thank God for the experience I gained in leading the church, but I have moved on because it is a work of the kingdom of God and not my own.

Whenever we are building our church to the exclusion of the rest of the body of Christ, every time we believe our church to be the only one with the truth, when we talk, whisper, gossip, backbite and discourage a fellow leader;, when we do not share our resources, premises and even people with a church in need, when we exclude another because he has not had the same training (even though he may well have a greater anointing!), when we separate over points of doctrine which are not fundamental to salvation we are giving the devil a foothold and our spiritual warfare is substantially made ineffective.

I am sometimes told, “As a church we are not interested in spiritual warfare!” Another battle lost! We are in a battle because we are the body of Christ and Satan is attacking us whether or not we are fighting back. Many do not even understand spiritual warfare. They think it is undignified to stand against what we cannot see (and often do not understand). It does not quite fit our dignity and standing as serious men of God. I was even told by one pastor, “I have enough problems in my church without adding to them by upsetting the devil!” I suggested to him that if he started ‘upsetting the devil’ many of his problems will disappear.

If we are giving the devil a foothold then it does not matter how much we come against him. He has a right to be there because we have given him the place. Our disunity will prevent us from dislodging a ruling spirit of disunity however much we may shout. A Jezebel spirit will not budge if we accept immorality, wrong sexuality or feminism (in its worst forms!) or political correctness. If in our congregations we follow these things then we are giving him a place. We may shout all night “I bind you, you spirit of lust”, but if we have those in our midst who are caught up in pornography, our shouting will result in nothing more than a sore throat.

When talking about building His church Jesus said:

*“Whatever you **bind on earth** will be bound in heaven and whatever you **loose on earth** will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19)*

Note the order in which Jesus placed things. He did not say that we bind things in heaven for them to be bound on earth. He did not say that we put things right in the heavenly places to put right on earth.

We bind things on earth first to enable them to be bound in heaven. How?

Not by shouting at the heavens, but by making sure that we give him no place. If there is disunity in the church we will not heal the disunity by shouting. We must put things right on earth. If we have been divided as a church we must heal those divisions **on earth**. We must stop talking about one another, being jealous and envying one another. It is time to stop backbiting and gossiping. We need to do away with our superior attitudes, which are pride and arrogance. We should begin to invite people from other denominations to minister in our church. If you see a brother struggling in building his congregation, then give him some of your people. Let your worship team help another church build their team.

If we deal with disunity on earth we take away the foothold that we have been giving to Satan. We will not have to shout at him, he will not have a hold. In the same way that I had no hold on that sandy cliff in Sheringham and could not stay on that cliff face, but slid to the bottom, so the devil will have no hold. We will not need to shout at him, he will slide away; he will be gone!

We need to deal with the sin in our lives, our churches, our ministries, denominations and in our relationships with other churches. In Psalm 133 the Lord commands blessing when we dwell together in unity. I have seen areas change as church leaders begin to recognise one another and gain a heart for unity. I was in Kapenguria in Pokot, Kenya having taught this message of unity. The pastors got hold of the teaching and were serious in putting it into practice. We began to see people in authority in the town being saved.

Grace, (name changed) was a councillor whose name I had seen in the national newspaper one Monday. It caught my eye because we were holding a crusade in that town. It was reported that the local Catholic priest had spoken about a morality issue that had upset the authorities and Councillor Grace led a group to attack him and his property. Now, two days later she was on our crusade platform and speaking passionately. As I do not speak the language, I asked what she was saying. She had received Jesus and was now telling people how things would change. "Instead of beer when you visit my house in future," she proclaimed, "You will be given tea!" She has been true to her commitment to Jesus. I visit her town often, and whenever she knows I am coming she comes to greet me, or sends her apologies for not doing so.

The profile of the church has been raised in the area. I was really blessed when in an open air meeting to see about forty pastors take to the platform and began to praise and worship God together. As each introduced themselves not one of them mentioned his own congregation or denomination but said he was a pastor in 'the church of Jesus Christ'.

I was teaching pastors in Alale, also in Pokot. There are often clashes between the Pokot, Turkana, Marakwet and Karamoja people. We were able to bring church leaders from Pokot and Karamoja together and teach unity. We believe that as the churches unite, the blessings of unity will flow out into the community. We did not know at the time that as we were teaching, in the same village, even the same hostel, the District Officers with other government officials from the two tribal areas were meeting to discuss peace. When they learned of our meeting they insisted that in all future peace talks, church leaders should be involved.

The blessings of unity will change your town or area if you begin to recognise that there is only one church. Your congregation or ministry or denomination is not that church, but only a small part of a very large whole.

Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven.