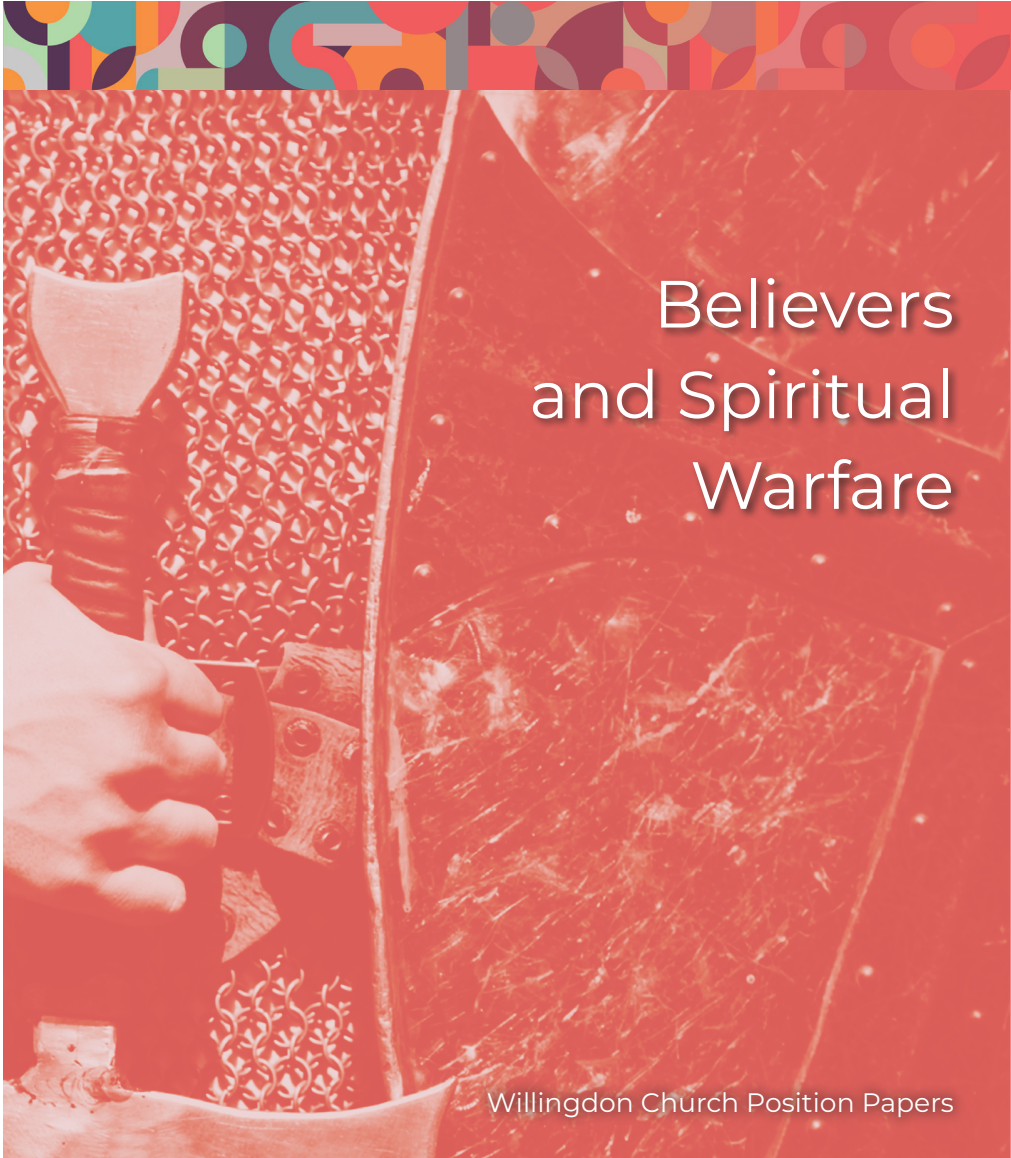




WILLINGDON  
CHURCH



# Believers and Spiritual Warfare

Willingdon Church Position Papers



# Believers and Spiritual Warfare

Willingdon Church Elders  
(Reaffirmed February 15, 2012)

## A. THE REALITY OF SATAN AND SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Every human being is affected by the reality of spiritual warfare. The Bible teaches us there is a fallen angel whose name is Satan. Job 1:7 warns he roams through the earth going back and forth in it. 1 Peter 5:8 says he prowls like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Jesus warned us he comes to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10). We have every reason for believing his handiwork inspires wars and great human conflict. Indeed, Revelation 12:9 teaches us Satan leads the whole world astray. 2 Corinthians 11:14 even tells us he masquerades as an angel of light.

For many who are unaware of his schemes, he easily deceives them into thinking his intentions are good, and so they become victims of his insidious designs. He is at work to blind the minds of unbelievers, causing them to discount the message of Jesus (2 Corinthians 4:4). Satan is called the ruler of the kingdom of the air and the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient to God (Ephesians 2:2). His impact is felt widely, and many are affected by his destructive

designs on the human race and his hatred toward God. He is ultimately the leader of everyone who has failed to submit to God.

Satan has a host of angels called demons who have great effect in this world. We are not told their number, but we know they have spread out throughout the earth to bring chaos and destruction to people. According to Revelation 9:20 and 16:14, they are able to perform miracles and bring about false religions. They deceive people and inspire false doctrines (1 Timothy 4:1). They are able to torment people and even bring sickness into their lives (Luke 6:18). The ultimate effect of their work is known when an individual becomes possessed either by a demon or a group of demons. This can be referred to as being demonized, in which an individual has lost all power to control himself and whose will is ruled by demons. Jesus spent much of his ministry driving out demons from people who were so afflicted. The spiritual reality of wickedness in the heavenly realms has affected everyone. The apostle Paul states it this way: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the

rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” (Ephesians 6:12)

## **B. THE MIRACLE OF NEW BIRTH**

God is concerned over the spiritual dilemma facing human beings. The Bible tells us that “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Everyone who has surrendered his or her life into the hands of Jesus has witnessed an astounding miracle. Something new has been born. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” The new birth has not only assured us of heaven when we die, it has changed everything here and now. This is especially felt in the realm of spiritual warfare.

Colossians 1:13 tells us, “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.” This rescue from the dominion of darkness is a rescue from Satan and his dark kingdom of demons and their effects. Satan is no longer able to do to followers of Jesus what he is able to do to those who do not know Christ. The most explicit description of this new relationship is found in Ephesians 2:1-7: “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up

with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”

We conclude conversion is a transfer from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of Christ. Christians now live in a different realm. They are not dead in Satan’s grasp but alive in Christ’s care. They are no longer the property of the evil one, for they have been purchased with the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:19). Therefore Christians cannot be demonized. They cannot have demons living in their bodies, since even their very bodies are now “temples of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:19). Every person who is in Christ should reflect on the great love of God, who has made this possible.

## **C. THE REALITY OF SPIRITUAL WARFARE AFTER CONVERSION**

Many Christians are confused about what to make of spiritual warfare after conversion. Many testify they still sense a great warfare around their lives. Some have even wondered whether a demon is living inside them, especially when they find themselves struggling with sin that doesn’t immediately disappear when they come to Christ. Some Christians have sensed demonic attack, and even a few have experienced bizarre behaviour. What are they to make of this? A great deal of confusion reigns.

We must begin by making two very important observations. The first is that it is necessary to affirm the genuineness of the experience of spiritual warfare after conversion. We take very seriously the reports of Christians in their warfare with demons. The second observation surrounds itself around the value of these experiences. We believe experiences with demons to be an unreliable guide to

truth. Demons frequently lie and attempt to deceive. Any theology of spiritual warfare cannot take as its starting point the experience itself. Any experience with demons can be interpreted in many different ways. We believe the only reliable interpreter of experience is the Scriptures. The Bible is the Word of God, which accurately teaches us how to interpret our experiences with demons. We must learn to trust what it teaches and not what demons want us to believe.

#### **D. WHAT SCRIPTURES TEACH US ABOUT CHRISTIANS AND SPIRITUAL WARFARE**

We would make the following three observations about spiritual warfare and Christians.

##### **1) The Bible teaches us believers in Christ cannot be possessed by demons, nor can they have demons living in their bodies.**

We base this conclusion upon numerous scriptures; especially those already cited which point out conversion is a transfer from darkness into light. We add to these, the following three important passages of scripture.

- a. "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own." (1 Corinthians 6:19)
- b. "...For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As

God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." (2 Corinthians 6:14-16)

- c. "We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him." (1 John 5:18)

We must therefore conclude whenever anyone is truly converted to Christ, Christ has also provided for him or her a special protection not afforded to them prior to their coming to Christ. Christians should therefore rest secure in the knowledge that Christ will never fail them, and they will never be handed over to demons inhabiting their bodies or souls.

##### **2) Scripture warns believers are locked in genuine spiritual warfare.**

Although believers are protected from possession and defeat at the hand of Satan, we readily acknowledge a real and genuine warfare with the forces of evil all of our lives. The Bible teaches all temptation comes to us from one of three sources. The first is called the world. This is the influence of culture, which is at variance to the commands of Christ. The second source of temptation comes from our own flesh. This refers to the lower nature or the tendency toward sin found within each of us. The third source of temptation comes from Satan and the demonic realm. It is the task of Satan and his demons to influence and seduce believers into evil behaviour.

The apostle Paul acknowledged this reality when he wrote telling believers their ultimate fight was not against flesh and blood, but against forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:12). Scripture acknowledges a number of ways in which this warfare is fought. The

first and most obvious avenue of this warfare is in temptation to sin. Satan is referred to as the 'tempter,' and indeed, he is involved in tempting believers (1 Thessalonians 3:5). We also know Satan schemes and persuades believers to stray from Christ. The apostle Paul, writing to the Corinthian believers, sounds the following warning: "But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ." (2 Corinthians 11:3) Revelation 12:10 calls Satan the 'accuser of the brethren' who accuses them before God.

Clearly Satan is involved in taking every opportunity for slandering believers for any shortcoming in their behaviour. We learn from Acts 5:3, that Satan can even so affect believers that their hearts become filled with thoughts, intentions and actions that are in disobedience to God. Finally, 1 Thessalonians 2:18 even informs us Satan can hinder believers from being effective in their ministry and in their service to Christ.

Most troubling of all of Satan's activity is that he can even ensnare or trap believers into given forms of behaviour (1 Timothy 3: 7; 2 Timothy 2: 24-26). Ephesians 4:27 teaches us how he does this: "In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold." Evidently some believers in the church in Ephesus had allowed their anger against other believers to spill over and remain unchecked. Satan had used this sin to gain a foothold into their behavioral patterns, so his activity was felt throughout the church. Having sensed his advantage, Satan continued to fan the flame. His activity was allowed to become rampant so as to bring great harm into the lives of believers.

We should be careful to note we must never blame our evil behaviour on the devil. James 1:14 reminds us that "each

one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed." We must come to terms with our part in our own sin. Satan uses our own evil behaviour and exploits this situation to full effect.

Ephesians 4 cites a number of sins which we are warned to avoid. These include theft, unwholesome talk, bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander and malice. The next chapter warns specifically against sexual immorality and impurity. In a culture fascinated with sexual sins, believers are warned to avoid pornography and any other form of sexual expression divorced from God's plan in marriage. Ephesians also warns against obscenity, foolish talk and coarse joking. All of these things are out of place with God's people. These forms of sin do indeed give Satan a foothold into the behavioural patterns of believers.

We conclude while Satan is unable to gain entrance into the bodies and souls of Christians, he is still able to bring great disruption to their lives. If left to get out of control, he gains advantage against them and all relationships become effected by his damaging influence. Christians can then become confused by his assaults, so much so they are unable to resist him effectively and hence become ineffective in their lives. We know of numerous believers who have become obsessed with Satan's devices. Satan uses this to great advantage. They become focussed on the power of the evil one to the point they are insecure of their position in Christ. Some have even become so confused they have imagined the relentlessness of Satan's attacks to be evidence of their own possession by demons, and so have lurched into hopeless and bizarre personal behaviour. Consequently they find themselves out of step with the Holy Spirit and unable to live the victorious Christian life Christ had planned for them.

### **3) Scripture promises believers they can be victorious in their struggle with Satan.**

In 2 Corinthians 2:11-12, the apostle Paul warns us Satan is attempting to outwit us. But, lest we find that too disconcerting he adds, "we are not ignorant of his schemes." We are most effective in this when we are aware of what Christ intends for us. The nature of temptation becomes apparent not when we become focused on Satan, but rather when we are focused on the truths of Scripture. The New Testament more frequently reminds us of the desires of Christ than the wiles of Satan. By focusing on Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, we have authority to resist Satan.

But even in our assaults by Satan, we are given an impressive promise. James 4:7 assures us of the following: "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." The promise comes to us in the proper order. First we submit to God. After that, resistance to the devil becomes possible. Finally comes the promise. Once Satan becomes aware of our ability to resist him he loses his confidence and hastily bids his retreat.

How then can we be effective in our resistance of Satan? Again, the Scriptures show us the way. Believers should study Ephesians 6:10-18 in order to gain confidence they will be victorious in spiritual warfare. We are told to concentrate on truth, righteousness and

to have a readiness to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are reminded of the effectiveness of faith, of the assurance of our salvation, of the power of the Spirit and the effectiveness of the Word of God. All of these virtues are to be worn in the way an ancient soldier wore his armour on the day of battle.

Here is how the Apostle Paul describes it: "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."

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