



BROADCAST TALKS

# Spiritual Warfare in a Material World

by Jerry Root



C·S· LEWIS INSTITUTE

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BROADCAST TALKS presents ideas to cultivate Christ-like thinking and living. Each issue features a transcription of a talk presented at an event of the C.S. Lewis Institute.



# I've

been invited by the C.S. Lewis Institute to speak on spiritual warfare. And the topic among humans has been at play since the Garden of Eden to this present day, as Joel mentioned. So that means there's boatloads of information

that we could select from. So please bear with me, as I have just picked out of that vast amount of area and have brought something to you this evening, and there's some selectivity on my part. We can't cover the whole topic.

I must say up front I believe Satan is real, and I have had experiences. I've been involved in about eight different exorcisms in the past.

The first time, I was a pastor of a church, and I got a phone call. It was a Saturday. Nobody else was there. I picked up the phone, and this woman said, "I am going to take my life. I've been calling churches in the phone book, and you're the first one that's answered." I said, "Do you know Christ. Are you a person of faith?" She said, "No, I'm not." And I said, "I don't think you should take your life, because whatever circumstances have led you to this point, they're going to be far worse if you take your life. How about if we talk?" So I told her how to get to the church, and I

told her how I'd leave the office door open. About 20 minutes later, this woman came in. She looked very disheveled. And she went and stood in the corner of my office. I said, "Sit down. What's your name?" She didn't say a word. She stood there for 20 minutes. Then she said, "I'm going to kill you." Well, I didn't know what she had. She said she was going to take her life. Did she have a gun, a knife, something like that? And I said, "Well, okay, but you called because you apparently wanted help. If you kill me, then that will take away your opportunity to get some help. I think you should probably sit down, and we should talk."

She sat down. And we started talking. Her name was Pam. I got the idea that there was something spiritually troubling about this set of circumstances. I talked with her for a couple of hours, and I said to her, "I've got to go home because I told my wife I'd be home for dinner. I'm going to come back in one hour, and I want you to come back, but I won't be alone." She said, "I'm not coming back." I said, "Okay, it's your choice. You said you needed help. I'll be here, and I won't be alone." I went home, got on the phone, called up Walter Elwell, who was one of our profound theologians, and Julius Scott, who is a New Testament scholar. I called up a couple of psychologists. I called up my intern, Kenny Dodd, who was a Gordon Seminary grad, and there was another theologian or two I called up. And David Benner, who did the *Baker Dictionary of Psychology*. He came. And they were all there. She came back, and we talked with her for about three hours and she left.

This was a Saturday night. All of them said they thought for sure she was possessed, and I didn't know what else to do. She left. That's, I guessed, the end of it. Monday, she comes to the office. Well, these other guys were all teaching classes. They couldn't come over. So I'm on the phone to Walter Elwell saying, "Okay, guide me through this process. I don't remember this course in seminary." He said okay. My intern, Kenny Dodd, was with me. Elwell said, "Have her read from one text of Scripture. One of you read from that same text, and have her read long passages that talk about Christ's power over the evil one. If there's

something going on, it will manifest itself. And I'm not talking about a few verses. I'm talking about long passages. John 10, John 17, the end of the Book of Revelation, that sort of thing." And so we had her read, and, sure enough, the voice came out, "No! I don't have to read this." We said, "What's your name?" And eventually we got a demon to identify itself.

There were about five demons that were cast out of her, and we saw her the whole time fumbling with a ring. I said, "What's the issue with that ring?" She said, "It is a ring I use in witchcraft." I said, "Please give it to me." I put it flat in my trash can. It was a metal trash can. It was empty. We go back to talk to her, and a few minutes later the ring starts rattling around in the trash can. And she has this impish look on her face. And I said, "So what? Your demons can rattle rings around in a trash can. My God created the universe, and your demons are in trouble." And it ended up that there were eight demons cast out of Pam. We got her hooked up with a woman who was preparing for missions. We led her to Christ that night. We followed up with her for two years, and she grew in Jesus, cleaned up her act. You wouldn't have been able to recognize her two years after we had first encountered her. And I've had about eight experiences like this.

And I just want to start off up front saying I believe that demons are out there, I believe they're real, and I don't think you should be afraid. Basically, Satan traffics in fear. But the Bible says, "Perfect love casts out fear." The Bible says, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." It says, "Flee temptation." I think we tend to get these mixed up. We decide we can resist temptation and we fall. We run from Satan when we're supposed to resist him and watch him flee. Furthermore, spiritual warfare comes in at least three categories. The Scripture has defined the world, the flesh, and the devil. And we don't have time to go into all the nuances of those. But these are the ways where we can often be tempted and struggle.

So where I'm going to go with this talk is—I will first define some important terms I think we need to know. Second, I will address some of

the conditions that make us vulnerable. And third, I will highlight some of the resources we've been given to assure victory in these battles when we are called to face them.

## **The Meaning of Spiritual Warfare**

First, defining some important terms: Spiritual warfare. Spiritual. As humans, we are, as C.S. Lewis reminds us in *The Screwtape Letters*, amphibious creatures. We are both spiritual and embodied. Embodied souls. George MacDonald, the one who mentored Lewis through his writings, said in *Annals of a Quiet Neighborhood*, We do not have souls. We are souls. We have bodies. You tell a child he has a soul, he thinks, like anything else he has, his books, his keys, his coat. He could leave it behind someplace. Tell the child, MacDonald says, that he is a soul and he has a body, and when he dies he goes to heaven and he leaves his body behind like cut hair on a barbershop floor, for those of you that still have haircuts. I've read a lot on this. Not exhaustively, obviously, but I've read significantly in this area, and I think I could set forth proof for the immaterial part of what it is to be human.

And for good reason, it's been a long-held tradition that we are amphibious, as Lewis says, and that the immaterial part of us, the soul, has been held to have at least three components. There's the thinking feature—reason. There is the feeling feature—emotion. And there is the choosing feature—volition. Reason, emotion, volition. I want to suggest to you—even coming from an academic environment—reason is, hands down, the weakest of those three. If I make a stupid choice with my volition, my will, my reason doesn't kick in and say, "Boy, Jerry, you made a stupid decision. If you continue down that line, you're just going to hurt yourself, and you're going to hurt others. You need to repent of that and get back on track." No, my reason, being weak, is marshaled by my volition to make all kinds of excuses and rationalizations for that bad choice. It keeps me in a state of moral blindness. We'll talk more about that in a moment.



If I'm hurt emotionally, my reason doesn't say, "Jerry, you need to grieve what happened to you, and you need to forgive the person who hurt you, so that you don't become bitter and then end up passing it on to other people. You need to forgive and grieve." No, my reason, being weak, doesn't say that. My reason instead keeps encapsulated in some sort of soul cyst, all that bitterness and anger, and it just fills up and spreads the pus all over, and it's toxic. Consequently, my reason, being weak, doesn't always help me.

The sins of the flesh are dangerous as they are. They're impediments to spiritual development, but they're not as threatening as the sins of the spirit. Things like pride, envy, greed, jealousy, hatred, and the lot. The worst sinner, Satan himself, as a fallen angel, didn't even have a body. The sins of the spirit, I think, are worse. Lewis himself says that. Nevertheless, this does not give comparative license to the sins of the flesh, for the sins of the flesh can become the gateway drug, so to speak, for the sins of the spirit.

When I sin, I come to a mystical moment. I can repent of my sin. All of us are pretty messed up. We're neophytes at this whole life thing. We don't know very much, we're pea brains, and we're trying to work our way through the labyrinth of life. So I can repent and get back on track and learn and grow from my mistake. Or I can rationalize and justify the wrong. Aristotle called this rationalizing and justifying *akrasia*. It comes from two Greek words, the alpha negation on the word for command. I'm without command of my moral life, because I've sacrificed that kind of command, and it leads to a moral blindness. *Akrasia*, without command of my moral life. C.S. Lewis put it this way: "Continued disobedience to conscience makes conscience blind." Or Paul said in Romans 1:18, "we suppress the truth in our unrighteousness."

That's spiritual. Then you've got warfare. We have an enemy, Satan. The Hebrew word *Satan* means "the accuser." The devil. *Diabolos* in Greek means, "the one who casts or throws at or hurls abuses." The characteristics of this enemy: Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, the two scriptural



passages that talk about his fall, say basically he is a rebel who entered into a state of utter madness, thinking he could become God. “I will be like the most High.” What could be more mad than that? Than to deny the central reality of the universe? Matter of fact, Milton, when he writes about this in *Paradise Lost*, do you remember what he named the capital of hell in that book? Anybody remember? Pandemonium. What does it mean? “All demons.” We think of the word as confusion, but it literally means “all demons.” Satan is living in utter madness. Very clever, but he’s mad. He’s self-deceived. He traffics in deception. In 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul writes, “I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”

If you follow some of the news, some of you have to be aware that there’s some relative madness going on, that we’re engaged in just all kinds of equivocation in our culture and so on. Jesus called Satan the father of lies, in John 8:44. In 2 Corinthians 11:14, it says, sometimes he disguises himself as an angel of light. He twists Scripture in Matthew 4:5–6, in the temptation of Christ in the wilderness. In the three recorded temptations, Jesus rebukes Satan with Scripture, all from the book of Deuteronomy, by the way. So then Satan, when he tempts Christ in one of the temptations, actually uses Scripture to tempt Christ. He’s a Scripture twister. He appeals to the world and the flesh, as if these could ever replace the eternal. There’s nonsense in what he does. James 1:17: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” He tempts us to engage with the things that are temporal and mutable, the things that moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal. Why would we ever reject the God who is eternal, immortal, immutable, all sustaining, and all powerful for him?

Psalm 16:11, “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” God gives us right-handed pleasures for sure, but never to replace Him.



And yet somehow Satan tempts us to think that these other things can ultimately satisfy. And they cannot. “Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth,” Jesus said, “where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal.” Satan is a fool and plays us for fools as well.

And I think much of the battle in spiritual warfare is as foolish as that. We are amphibious. We must order our loves, Augustine wrote. *Ordo amoris*. Or, as C.S. Lewis said, we have to put first things first, and we get second things thrown in.

## Conditions That Make Us Vulnerable

Well, there are conditions now—let’s move on to that area—that make us vulnerable. First is sin. Sin. Let me define it for you. Sin is man playing God of his own life. Romans 3:23. The Greek word for sin, *hamartia*. A seminarian, studying theology, when they do a unit on sin, it’s called hamartiology, coming from that Greek word. It’s an archer’s term. It means to miss the mark. The archer takes the arrow out of the quiver, nocks it in the bow, shoots it at the target. If the [aim] falls short, it’s called the *hamartia*. For all have sinned and fallen short. What’s the target we fell short of? The glory of God. We assumed a position we were never qualified to play. Sin is man playing God of his own life.\*\*

Another definition: 1 John 3:4. It says sin is lawlessness. In Greek there is *anomos*. *Nomos* is a Greek word for law, with the alpha negation. Sin is not antinomian. It’s not against God’s law. It’s *anomos*. It’s without God’s law whatsoever. It’s anarchistic. It’s man playing god of his own life. And guess what? Anarchists make bad community people. Their lives are characterized by estrangements. We’re estranged from God. We’re estranged from one another. In some ways, we’re estranged even from ourselves. We can’t seem to fit head and heart issues together and so on. It’s very complex, but that’s the condition. And, by the way, it affects your theology, how you look at sin. I think it will affect how you look at spiritual warfare. How many of you think man is sinful by nature? Okay. I think you’re wrong. I think man is sinful in his nature.

That preposition is very important. Sin is an encroachment on us. It's not characteristic of the way God designed us. We're made in the *imago Dei*. That is our image. That is our nature. So man is sinful in nature, but not sinful by nature.

And your theology is affected at least four ways by how you look at this. First, theology proper, your doctrine of God. The Scriptures say that there is no darkness in God. God is light, and there is no darkness in Him at all. God could not have made us essentially sinful. Sin is an encroachment, something that happened later. Second, your doctrine of Christ. How many of you believe Jesus was sinful? How many of you believe He was a man, became fully man, yet without sin, so sin couldn't have been the defining characteristic in His life. He's giving us an opportunity to see what our hope is for restoration when we look at Christ.

Third, is your biblical anthropology. You have four categories of humankind in Scripture, Adam and Eve before the fall, no sin. Adam and Eve and all who follow after the fall. That's the category we're in. Sin is present. Christ in His humanity, no sin. Man in his glorified state in heaven, no sin. It will be eradicated. I don't know about you, but I am weary of being a sinner, and I am eager to have all this stuff flushed out of my system. When I was in college, you have to take it completely by faith now, I was an athlete. I played football, and I got a really bad concussion. I cried out to God when this happened, and I said, "O Lord, this is my senior year. Don't let this happen to me." And my mind went immediately clear. I played some form of American football till I was 44 years old, and I never had another concussion after that. I wonder, when we get to heaven, if all of a sudden everything will be clear, and we'll realize we've lived our lives concussed. Anyway, it'll one day be eradicated. I can't wait.

Fourth area: doctrine of salvation. Your soteriology. If you see a pig wallowing in the mire, you don't tell the pig, "Get out of the mire." He's living according to his nature. He has to wallow because he doesn't have

sweat glands, and he finds a way to cool his body. If you see a person living in sin and degradation, you tell them they shouldn't live like that. If they're living according to their nature, let them go. But when you preach the gospel, aren't you saying, "You're not living according to your nature, and you need to know that there's hope for your condition, and there's a God who loves you."? So we've seen four ways we look at the nature of man in Scripture.

Man is sinful in his nature. He's not sinful by nature. The whole issue of our Christian life is the sanctification process of restoring the image of Christ. Consequently, that's going to factor into spiritual warfare. Because of the fall, of us playing God of our own life, because of us assuming a position we're unqualified for, the sins, plural, are the resulting mismanagement of us having assumed this position we're not qualified to play.

Thus, we can easily be deceived to accept what Lewis called false infinites for God. The longing for God is a part of our hard wiring as creatures made in the image of God. Our hearts are restless, Augustine observed, and they're restless until they find God. Without Him, we quest for surrogates. The longing in us seeks an object. We want to fill the void. And C.S. Lewis said we go through what he calls the dialectic of desire. We tether our longing to this. It doesn't fulfill us. We untether and tether it to this. It doesn't fulfill us. Finally, in frustration, we say, "I don't think I have anyplace else to go but to God," and He's always there waiting, waiting for the prodigal to come home. Our mismanagement leads to frustration and despair, or it may be the very thing God uses to lead us to Him, but it will certainly become the kind of thing Satan will use for his particular evil designs.

## Resources We've Been Given for Spiritual Warfare

We've defined some terms. We've talked about the conditions that make us vulnerable. Now we want to look at resources we've been given for spiritual warfare. And there are gazillions of them. God has furnished us with all kinds of things. We don't have time to talk about them all. But I'm going to talk about a few that I think are really important. And the first and foremost one is the incarnation of Christ.

God has given us the greatest resource of all. He's given us His Son. We're not alone in the battle. It says, in 1 John 3:8, "The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil." 1 John 4:4, "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world." I remember once having a quiet time; I was reading about the temptation of Christ in Luke's Gospel. And Jesus hadn't eaten in forty days, it says, and He was hungry. And Satan comes to Him, and he says, "If you're the Son of God, why don't you turn these stones into bread?" I remember, that particular time, thinking to myself, "Yeah, why didn't He just turn Satan into a loaf of bread? It would have uncomplicated things a little bit," but He didn't. He didn't turn him into a loaf of bread. Why is that? Why would the God of the universe think it would be okay for Satan to be here? Maybe with all of his evil designs, God is trumping those evil designs because He's got some good He wants to bring out of it.

And I think that the whole process of being remade into the image of Christ requires refining, testing, proving, burning off the dross, and making it pure. In 2 Timothy 3:12, it says, "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Our skills are far beneath what we think they are, and God wants to improve them by this refining process.

*The Allegory of Love* by C.S. Lewis—it's a book nobody reads. But it was the book that, when it was published in 1936, established his academic reputation as a great medieval and literary critic and scholar. In a throwaway line on page 60 in that book, Lewis says, "Innocence is not goodness." He's not saying innocence is not good. It is good, in that

it's unspoiled, but it's not goodness. It's not proven character. And Lewis goes on to say, "Innocence is not goodness. Even divine Nature, even in her prime, cannot make a virtue a gift." Virtue has to be cultivated, through the challenges that bring about courage, temperance, justice, and wisdom.

So how does it work? Well, let's say there's something that you've been challenged with, and every time you face this set of circumstances, you cave, and all of a sudden you're just so weary of it. You call together a couple of close friends, and you let down your guard. The secrets you can't talk about control you. You need to have people in your life, with whom you can talk about these struggles, ones you trust. If somebody violates your trust—I've had that happen before. You can't let that person who violated your trust keep you from the resources you need to keep on track. So you bring together a couple friends. You make it a matter of prayer, maybe even of fasting. You say, "Lord, I need to get past this stuck place in my life." And the next time you become confronted by it, you say, "Lord, this is going to be a tough one. Help me." Call up those friends. Say, "Be praying for me right now." And let's say you get through it, something that always caused you to stumble whenever you came, but you get through it this time.

A couple of weeks later, it happens again. You call up some friends. You pray again. You get through it. A couple weeks later, it happens again. A couple weeks later, you stumble and fall flat on your face. You can expect that might happen. Get back up. Call your friends. Eventually, though, you get to the place where you're less and less deliberate, and it's starting to happen naturally. Actually, you get to the place where it becomes a habit in your life. And you don't fall when that thing happens. Aristotle said, "Habit is man's second nature." It becomes natural for you. At that particular place in your life, you're better off than Adam and Eve were before the fall in that place. They were innocent. They didn't have goodness, because at the testing place they fell.

Don't get cocky if you have victory over some spiritual issue. Because

if you start to get cocky, God will widen the curtain and show you all kinds of more vermin that needs to be cleaned up yet. We're going to be at this for a long time, until Jesus either comes and takes us home or until He takes us home because we pass away. Nevertheless, innocence is not goodness. It's good. It's not goodness. Even divine nature, even as prime, cannot make a virtue a gift.

And this is the point Milton makes in his *Paradise Lost*. In *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve fall. *Paradise Regained* is the temptation of Christ, where Christ is opening the way for us. We're talking about the resource of the incarnation. Christ is opening the way for us to win over these places of temptation. It's about restoring the image.

It's interesting, Jesus talks about this even to Peter, in Luke 22:31-32. He says, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." I don't like that verse. "Peter, Satan asked to sift you like wheat, and I prayed for you." I'd rather have Him say, "Peter, Satan asked to sift you like wheat, and I told him to keep his mitts off of you," but He didn't do that. He said, "Somehow, I prayed for you, that this is going to work in such a way that you will be refined, and you will actually be better at doing what I want to deploy you to do in the world." You have similar teaching with Joseph and his brothers in Genesis 50. He says, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good," and he restores his brothers. You've got it with Job, after all the struggles and temptation he went through. You get to Job 42:10. When does God restore him? When he prays for his friends. Who are his friends? The ones that hurt him so badly.

So the incarnation of Christ is the believer's greatest resource for spiritual warfare. He came to us, and all redemptive history testifies to the fact that He has, throughout time, come in one form or another to the people He is reaching out to.

*[In the next portion of the talk, Dr. Root discusses some of the times God*



*reached out to people in biblical times, beginning with Adam and Eve, and in recent times, including in the life of C.S. Lewis. He also includes examples from his own ministry. While not included in this Broadcast Talks, it is available in the video. The talk continues...]*

Anyway, it's all around us, spiritual warfare. Our greatest resource is the incarnate Christ, who appeared for this purpose that He might destroy the works of the devil. I have a fairly simple faith. I think it is fair to say it is a childlike faith. Not a childish but childlike faith. Once the father of one of my students asked me, "So, Jerry, how's your soul?" I love that question. It goes pretty deep pretty quick, doesn't it? And I took stock, and I answered this man, "I don't think I've ever had more questions about my faith than I do right now." And he looked deeply concerned. "I hope my son doesn't get in any more of your classes," something like that, and I didn't think that was a response he should have articulated, given how I felt in my heart about what I had said. But I felt that maybe the burden was on me to clarify. And I said to this father, "I feel like a child full of questions." You know how children are. Who could go to his parents, because he knows he's loved by his parents, and he can ask any question he wants, and he knows he's not going to get trashed. He knows he's going to get answers when he asks them. And if he doesn't get answers forthcoming, he trusts the one who has the answers till the answers come. That's how I feel. I feel loved by God, free to ask him any question I want.

And the thing is, I believe if we don't have any questions about our conditions and circumstances of life, any questions for the incarnate God who constantly comes to us, then I think we have become delusional. We've achieved omniscience, and we're not omniscient. We're challenged. We don't know very much, and life is complex. C.S. Lewis wrote, "If our religion is something objective, then we must never avert our eyes from those elements in it which seem puzzling or repellent; for it will be precisely the puzzling or the repellent which conceals what we do not yet know and need to know." Incarnation of Christ, the greatest

So the other resources, of course, are the Scriptures and then the love of God. And I will end with this. C.S. Lewis got a letter from an American girl. She was eleven years old. He was on the threshold of heaven. He was on his deathbed when he received the letter. He penned a response to her three weeks before he died. It's one of the last things to come from his pen. A little girl on the threshold of life, from a wise and good man on the threshold of eternity. And he said to her, "If you continue to love Jesus, nothing much can go wrong with you. And I hope you may always do so." Don't let the deceiver keep you from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. That's your greatest resource.

[Video of the complete version of this talk, including Q&A, is available [here](#). Videos of two other talks by Jerry Root on related topics, "C.S. Lewis on Spiritual Warfare" and "C.S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*: Big Themes" are available [here](#). CSLI also offers on its website a study course titled "The Screwtape Letters with Jerry Root" that includes six video lectures. (An updated version of that study course is forthcoming.)]



C A S T T A

The C.S. Lewis Institute was founded in 1976 and endeavors, in the legacy of C.S. Lewis, to develop disciples who will articulate, defend, share, and live their faith in Christ in personal and public life. From its inception, the Institute has been inter-denominational, has worked closely with a variety of churches and sees itself as a servant ministry, assisting churches and pastors in making disciples of Jesus Christ. This takes the form of discipleship programs, area-wide conferences/seminars, pastor fellowships and resources in print and on the web.



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