

Winning the War Within: A Biblical Strategy for Spiritual Warfare by Jay E. Adams.

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—Reviewed by Christopher K. Lensch.

What is a modern Reformed author like Jay Adams doing in writing a book about “spiritual warfare?”

There are a lot of popular yet misconstrued ideas about the topic. Lest Bible believers allow a heterodox approach to kidnap a biblical issue, Adams sets the record straight from the Bible. *A Biblical Strategy for Spiritual Warfare* is a legitimate title because it is a biblical one. It is a timely book because of modern confusion.

The Bible is full of military illustrations for the life of the believer: “fight the good fight,” “endure hardness as good soldier,” “put on the whole armor of God,” and “the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but spiritual.”

Some Christians, however, don’t realize that there is a spiritual struggle. Others do see the conflict but respond like the proverbial ostrich with their head in the sand. Adams addresses the topic of spiritual warfare as a call to arms. Few modern Christians are willing to face conflict for God’s sake on God’s terms. He argues that

the same forces that have spawned an effete Christianity that shuns confrontation, glorifies self, and represents Jesus as a Savior who can add a dimension to your happiness (rather than one who will radically change your life) are at work. This cowardly self-indulgence of which I am speaking has been largely the result of doctrinal defection that fails to grapple with the hard truths of God’s Word, or explains them away. At present it seems that the mentality of an over-prosperous Christianity is very much like that of the first-century Judaism that rejected Christ because it wanted the crown without the cross.

There is no safe way to avoid the conflict. The war rages on two fronts, within and without. Thankfully, “the battle is the Lord’s” (2 Chron. 20:15). Adams stresses this important point. Christians must not think that we fight alone; rather we must look in dependence to God’s Spirit and to His resources to fight His battle in and through us.

The author systematically develops the biblical doctrine of spiritual conflict, with a whole chapter of illustrated cases. He addresses confusion over the role of demons in the believer’s life. John’s First Epistle teaches that the “evil one cannot touch you” (1 John 5:18); rather, the source of most of our woes is from within (James 1:14). The victory comes, not by following feelings or intuitions, but by submitting to the clear instruction of the Spirit revealed in His Word.

It is not always clear in modern preaching or writing just how the Spirit works.... I want to leave no one in doubt about the answer: He works through His Word. While it is true that he can work in other ways (and in times past has done so), He has chosen in this day

to work by the Scriptures, of which He (using the personalities and pens of chosen men to write inerrantly) ultimately is the Author. That is why, when exhorting us to fight the battles within, He tells us to take up 'the Spirit's sword, which is God's Word' (Ephesians 6:17) (p. 80).

Thankfully, Adams also analyzes other aberrant fads like modern deliverance ministries. These misguided distractions attempt to short-cut the real spiritual warfare of the inward struggle against the flesh.

It is because people don't want to endure prolonged battles with the flesh, and instead desire quicker, less painful ways of eliminating sin, that they invent their own methods for doing so. One popular idea is to call on 'experts' to cast out demons of envy, anger, lust, etc. These so-called 'deliverance' ministries are substitutes for the often long, wearisome, painful wars to which you were called as a Christian. Don't be fooled by such 'ministries.' If exorcism of sin, in the form of such 'labeled' demons, were truly God's way of deliverance from the flesh, then the New Testament would exhort you to go your pastor (or some other 'expert') to have demons cast out. However, there is not even a whisper of any such command in the Bible (p. 119).

Real spiritual warfare recognizes the enemy within for what it is. At the same time, the biblical view also recognizes the sure warfare of spiritual beings in the invisible world all around.

The outcome of the war is just as certain as the promises of our sovereign God. Jay Adams makes it plain from the Bible that, with God working in us in the midst of the battles, the believer may taste victory today before resting in God's final conquest of evil.