

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

ANGELOLOGY

The Doctrine of Angels, Demons, and the Spiritual Realm

UNIT 6: SPIRITUAL WARFARE — A SOBER, BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

Lesson 17

Common Errors in Spiritual Warfare Teaching

What the Bible Does Not Teach About Fighting the Devil

Key Texts: Jude 9; James 4:7; 1 John 4:4; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Luke 10:20; Ephesians 6:10–18

“Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”

James 4:7–8, NASB 1995

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Introduction

Lessons 15 and 16 have built the positive theology of spiritual warfare: the reality of the conflict, the triple opposition of the world, the flesh, and the devil, the sober middle path between complacency and obsession, and the comprehensive provision of the full armor of God in Ephesians 6:10–18. Lesson 17 takes the necessary complementary step of identifying the common errors in spiritual warfare teaching that this series has consistently gestured toward but has not yet addressed directly and systematically. The positive and the negative belong together. A congregation that knows what the Bible teaches about spiritual warfare but has not been equipped to identify and resist the specific distortions of that teaching that circulate in the broader evangelical and charismatic worlds is a congregation that remains vulnerable to being pulled off the sober middle path by the attractive and energetic teaching of those who have moved well beyond the biblical warrant.

The six errors addressed in this lesson are not obscure theological deviations known only to specialists; they are pervasive, influential, and in many cases widely treated as marks of genuine spiritual seriousness and practical faith. They appear in best-selling books, popular conferences, influential online teaching ministries, and the devotional vocabulary of large portions of the contemporary evangelical world. A well-meaning believer who has absorbed these errors is not merely theologically mistaken; he has been given a set of expectations, practices, and frameworks for interpreting his spiritual experience that will consistently lead him away from the apostolically prescribed means of grace and toward the exotic, the dramatic, and the spiritually inflating, which are precisely the forms of spiritual engagement that the New Testament's sober, Christologically grounded spiritual warfare theology consistently warns against.

The governing pastoral concern of this lesson is not merely doctrinal correction; it is the protection of the congregation's spiritual health and freedom. The errors addressed here cause real pastoral damage: they produce anxiety, false guilt, misplaced spiritual effort, inflated self-assessment, and the misdirection of spiritual energies away from the Word, prayer, and the pursuit of holiness toward the elaborate and ultimately futile project of managing a demonic realm that has already been decisively defeated at the cross. The Reformed corrective, ordinary faithfulness as the best defense against the devil, is not a counsel of spiritual timidity but a counsel of spiritual wisdom: the wisdom that knows where the real power lies and deploys it with the confidence of those who have received the apostolic provision in full.

Each error is presented with its specific exegetical basis (where it draws on biblical language), its specific exegetical problem (where the biblical evidence actually points), and its specific pastoral harm (what it does to the congregation that receives it). The lesson closes with the Reformed positive corrective and the governing text of the entire unit: James 4:7–8, in which the proper sequence of the Christian's engagement with the adversary is stated with definitive apostolic clarity, submission to God first, resistance of the devil second, and the assured outcome: "he will flee from you."

I. Error 1: Territorial Spirits and Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare

The Claim That Named Demonic Beings Over Geographic Regions Must Be Confronted Before the Gospel Can Advance

A. The Claim and Its Apparent Biblical Basis

The first and most elaborate error in contemporary spiritual warfare teaching is the doctrine of territorial spirits and its associated methodology of Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare (SLSW). The doctrine claims that specific high-ranking demonic beings exercise territorial authority over specific geographic regions, cities, nations, cultural zones, and that their authority must be identified, their names discovered, and their strongholds addressed through specific prayer campaigns before the gospel can effectively advance in those regions. The apparent biblical basis is Daniel 10:13–21, where the angelic messenger describes opposition from “the prince of the kingdom of Persia” and speaks of a coming conflict with “the prince of Greece.” As discussed in Lesson 13, these “princes” are most naturally read as high-ranking demonic beings exercising influence over the nations of Persia and Greece.

The SLSW methodology extends this observation into an elaborate practice: the “spiritual mapping” of a city or region to identify the specific demonic powers and their historical footholds, the organization of strategic prayer campaigns designed to “bind” or “loose” those powers, and the coordination of intercessory prayer with evangelistic advance to ensure that the demonic resistance has been overcome before the gospel proclamation begins. In its most developed forms, particularly in the New Apostolic Reformation of C. Peter Wagner and his associates, SLSW involves direct address to territorial spirits by name, elaborate rituals of spiritual identification with past sins of a region (“identification prayer”), and the appointment of specialized “intercessory apostles” whose specific calling is to engage in this territorial-level spiritual warfare on behalf of the church’s mission.

B. The Exegetical and Pastoral Problems

The exegetical problems with SLSW are multiple and serious. First, Daniel 10 establishes that demonic powers of high rank exercise influence over nations; it does not command the identification, naming, and direct confrontation of those powers as a prerequisite for the gospel’s advance. The angelic messenger in Daniel 10 engages the prince of Persia, but he does so as an agent of God in the invisible realm, not as a human practitioner of a spiritual warfare methodology. The text provides no instruction to Daniel himself to engage in direct confrontation with the princes of Persia or Greece. Second, and most decisively, the New Testament missionary practice of the apostles provides no precedent whatsoever for territorial spirit identification and confrontation as a prerequisite for gospel advance. Paul did not conduct spiritual mapping exercises before planting churches in Corinth, Ephesus, or Rome. Peter did not identify and bind territorial spirits before preaching at Pentecost. The apostolic methodology was preaching, prayer, and the power of the Spirit, period.

The pastoral harm of SLSW is equally serious. It displaces the ordinary means of grace as the primary instruments of gospel advance by introducing an elaborate, specialized methodology that has no apostolic warrant; it creates a spiritual elite of “intercessory specialists” whose engagement is supposedly

prerequisite to evangelistic effectiveness; it produces the preoccupation with the demonic realm that the series has consistently warned against; and in its most extreme forms it introduces semi-magical practices of naming, binding, and ritual engagement with demonic powers that bear a closer resemblance to the occult practices of the ancient world than to the apostolic spiritual warfare of the New Testament. The Daniel 10 data is real; the SLSW methodology built upon it is a methodological elaboration far beyond biblical warrant.

II. Error 2: Binding and Loosing Demons

The Misapplication of Matthew 16:19 and 18:18 to Exorcistic Prayer Formulas

The second error is the widespread practice of “binding” demons through direct verbal commands or prayer formulas, a practice that appeals to Jesus’ language in Matthew 16:19 and 18:18 about binding and loosing. In Matthew 16:19, Jesus says to Peter: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven” (NASB 1995). In Matthew 18:18, the same binding and loosing language is addressed to the disciples in the context of church discipline: “Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven” (NASB 1995). These texts are widely applied in the charismatic spiritual warfare tradition to the direct, verbal “binding” of demonic beings in prayer: “I bind you, spirit of X, in the name of Jesus”.

The exegetical problem with this application is fundamental and has been documented thoroughly in the scholarship of the past generation. The binding and loosing language of Matthew 16:19 and 18:18 is a well-established Rabbinic idiom that refers to authoritative doctrinal and disciplinary rulings, declaring something permitted (loosing) or prohibited (binding), or including (loosing) or excluding (binding) someone from the community. In Matthew 16:19, Jesus is conferring on Peter (and, by extension, on the apostolic community) the authority of the keys of the kingdom, the authority to declare the terms on which the kingdom is entered and to make the corresponding doctrinal and disciplinary determinations. In Matthew 18:18, the same authority is applied explicitly to the context of church discipline: the community’s disciplinary decisions carry divine authorization. Neither passage has anything to do with demonic beings or exorcistic prayer formulas; neither can be legitimately applied to the direct verbal confrontation of named demonic spirits.

The pastoral harm of the binding and loosing error includes the production of a formulaic, quasi-magical approach to spiritual conflict in which the specific verbal formula (“I bind you in Jesus’ name”) is treated as an effective instrument of spiritual warfare, regardless of the faith, character, or spiritual condition of the one uttering it. This is precisely the error that Acts 19:13–16 illustrates negatively: the seven sons of Sceva attempted to use Jesus’ name as an exorcistic formula without the personal relationship and commission that gave the name its authority, and the demonic being, explicitly distinguishing between Jesus and Paul, whose authority it recognized, and these unauthorized practitioners, attacked and wounded them. The name of Jesus is not a verbal talisman; it is the name of the Person whose authority is available to those who belong to Him and are commissioned by Him.

“Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?” Acts 19:15, NASB 1995

III. Error 3: Generational Curses

The Claim That Demonic Influence Is Inherited Through Family Lines

A. The Claim and Its Apparent Biblical Basis

The third error is the doctrine of generational curses, the claim that demonic influence, spiritual bondage, and specific patterns of sin can be transmitted through family lines and inherited by descendants, and that freedom from these inherited patterns requires specific prayers, rituals, or acts of spiritual warfare designed to “break” the generational curse. The doctrine draws on Old Testament texts that speak of God visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations (Exodus 20:5; 34:7; Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 5:9) and interprets them as evidence that specific demonic strongholds attached to family lines are passed down from generation to generation, requiring specific spiritual intervention to overcome.

A secondary element of the generational curse doctrine involves the identification of specific “generational spirits”, demonic beings who have been given authority over a family line through the sins of previous generations, and the practice of specific “generational deliverance” prayer designed to break their claimed authority. In more extreme forms, the doctrine involves the renunciation of specific sins of specific ancestors (whose identities must sometimes be discovered through genealogical research), the specific repentance for those ancestral sins as though the living descendant bears personal guilt for them, and the declaration of freedom from the demonic claim over the family line.

B. The Exegetical and Pastoral Problems

The exegetical problems with the generational curse doctrine begin with the misreading of the Old Testament texts on which it relies. The passages that speak of God visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children are set within the covenantal framework of corporate Israel’s relationship with God, the natural consequence of parental sin producing the social, moral, and relational environment in which children grow up, not the metaphysical transmission of demonic bondage through bloodlines. Ezekiel 18 explicitly and extensively addresses the question of inherited guilt in the Old Testament context and reaches a definitive conclusion: “The soul who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son’s iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself” (Ezekiel 18:20, NASB 1995). Each individual is responsible for his own sin; inherited guilt is explicitly rejected.

More decisively, the New Testament provides the definitive answer to every claimed inheritance of sin’s power: the new birth. “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Corinthians 5:17, NASB 1995). The person who has been born again in Christ has received a new nature, has been transferred from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of

the Son of God (Colossians 1:13), and is a new creation whose identity is defined not by the sins of previous generations but by the righteousness of Christ imputed to him and the Spirit of adoption who indwells him. The new birth is the comprehensive answer to every claimed generational bondage: there is no family curse that the blood of Christ does not cover, no inherited spiritual bondage that the regenerating work of the Spirit does not break, and no generational deliverance ritual required beyond the one regenerating act of the Holy Spirit that has already made the believer a new creation in Christ. “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36, NASB 1995).

The pastoral harm of the generational curse doctrine is among the most damaging of all the errors addressed in this lesson. It burdens believers with responsibility for ancestral sins that Ezekiel 18 explicitly refuses to assign to them; it keeps believers in a state of spiritual anxiety about their family history rather than resting in the comprehensive new creation they have received in Christ; and it produces an endless cycle of “generational deliverance” prayer and ritual that substitutes for the genuine rest of those who have received the full freedom that the Son’s work provides. The believer who is told that he must investigate and ritually repudiate the sins of his great-grandparents in order to be free from demonic influence has been given a project that the gospel explicitly renders unnecessary.

IV. Error 4: Over-Attribution of Sin and Suffering to Direct Demonic Causation

Not Every Difficulty Is Spiritual Warfare, Discernment Is Required

The fourth error is the systematic over-attribution of sin, suffering, and difficulty to direct demonic causation, the tendency to interpret every recurring sin as a demonic attack, every illness as demonic oppression, every relational conflict as the work of a territorial or relational spirit, and every period of spiritual discouragement as a direct demonic assault requiring specialized spiritual warfare. This error has been addressed at several points throughout the series (particularly in Lesson 13’s section on physical affliction and oppression), but it merits direct attention as a specifically identifiable and consistently harmful pattern in spiritual warfare teaching.

The exegetical problem with systematic over-attribution is the failure to maintain the tripartite analysis of spiritual opposition that the Reformed tradition has consistently applied: the world, the flesh, and the devil are three distinct sources of spiritual opposition, and the specific character of the opposition in any given situation must be determined by discernment rather than by a blanket attribution of everything to the demonic. The flesh has its own independent capacity for sin that requires neither demonic assistance nor demonic attribution: “For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh” (Galatians 5:17, NASB 1995). Natural illness has natural causes that do not necessarily require a spiritual explanation. Relational conflict has its roots in the pride, self-assertion, and communication failures of sinful human beings who do not need demonic prompting to produce friction. Over-attributing all of these to direct demonic causation misidentifies the problem and misdirects the solution.

The pastoral harm of over-attribution is significant in several specific ways. First, it displaces personal responsibility for sin by locating the cause of sinful behavior in a demonic being rather than in the believer's own fallen nature and free choices. The believer who has been taught to interpret every recurring sin as demonic attack will tend to pursue deliverance from a demon rather than the genuine repentance, mortification of the flesh, and sanctifying work of the Spirit that the actual problem requires. Second, it produces the anxious, hypervigilant preoccupation with the demonic that the series has consistently warned against, the spiritual atmosphere in which the adversary is more present to the believer's consciousness than the Christ in whom he stands. Third, it can produce genuine pastoral harm when believers experiencing natural illness or mental health conditions are told that their condition is demonic oppression requiring deliverance ministry rather than the medical care and pastoral support their situation actually demands.

"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." 2 Corinthians 5:17, NASB 1995

V. Error 5: Speaking Directly to Satan or Demons in Prayer

Scripture Teaches Us to Pray to God, Not to Address the Devil

The fifth error is the practice of addressing Satan or demonic beings directly in prayer, a practice that manifests as the verbal rebuking of the devil, the direct command to named demons to depart, or the inclusion in corporate prayer of sustained direct address to the adversary and his forces. This practice is widespread in charismatic and Pentecostal worship settings, and it is frequently modeled in the spiritual warfare literature as an essential element of effective spiritual warfare. Its apparent biblical basis is Jesus' rebuking of Satan in the temptation narrative (Matthew 4:1–11) and in the wilderness confrontation that precedes Peter's confession ("Get behind Me, Satan!", Matthew 16:23).

The exegetical problem with direct address to Satan in prayer is best illuminated by the text that the outline specifically identifies: Jude 9. In this passage, the archangel Michael, the highest-ranking angel in the divine army, whose specific assignment is the defense of God's people, is described as disputing with the devil over the body of Moses: "Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'" (Jude 9, NASB 1995). The theological significance of this passage for the question of direct address to Satan cannot be overstated. Michael, who possessed far greater authority over the demonic realm than any human being, did not address Satan in his own authority. He referred the dispute to the Lord: "The Lord rebuke you." If the archangel Michael, in his own confrontation with Satan, deferred to the authority of the Lord rather than pronouncing a direct condemnation, the believer has no basis for assuming that his own direct address to the adversary represents an appropriate or effective form of spiritual engagement.

The New Testament's consistent instruction regarding prayer is to address God, the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit, not to address the adversary. The Lord's Prayer is addressed to "Our Father who is in

heaven” (Matthew 6:9, NASB 1995); it includes the petition “deliver us from evil” (or “from the evil one”, Matthew 6:13), addressed to the Father as a petition for deliverance, not as a direct command to the adversary to depart. The apostolic instructions for prayer throughout the New Testament epistles are consistently addressed to God; there is no apostolic precedent for sustained direct address to the devil as a normative element of Christian prayer. The appropriate posture in the spiritual conflict is the posture of Jude 9: to bring the specific conflict before the Lord whose authority over the adversary is absolute, rather than to address the adversary directly as though the believer’s personal authority over him were the relevant factor.

The pastoral harm of this error is more subtle than some others but no less real. It subtly repositions the believer’s attention from God, the source of every resource for the spiritual conflict, toward the adversary, creating a form of spiritual engagement in which the devil receives sustained personal address and the God whose authority over the adversary is the only relevant authority receives the petition for His intervention as an afterthought. It can produce the sense of direct personal engagement with demonic beings that feeds the spiritual pride and the adversary-preoccupation that the New Testament consistently discourages. And it fails to model for the congregation the fundamental principle of James 4:7–8: the sequence is submission to God first, resistance of the devil second, not direct address to the devil in the believer’s own authority, however earnestly meant.

VI. Error 6: Seeking Spiritual Power Over the Enemy as a Mark of Maturity

Jesus Himself Corrected This: Our Identity Is in Grace, Not in Spiritual Authority

The sixth error is one that the series has addressed directly at two earlier points, in Lesson 11’s treatment of Luke 10:20 and in Lesson 14’s treatment of the same passage, but it merits its own full treatment in the context of spiritual warfare errors because it is the specific spiritual danger to which effective spiritual warfare ministry most consistently exposes those who engage in it. The error is the elevation of spiritual power over the enemy, experiences of effective spiritual authority, dramatic encounters with the demonic realm, and the reputation for spiritual warfare effectiveness, as the primary marker of spiritual maturity and the primary source of spiritual identity and confidence.

The biblical text most directly relevant to this error is the passage that has appeared at two earlier points in the series: Luke 10:17–20. The seventy returned with joy, reporting that demons had submitted to them in Jesus’ name, a genuine, divinely-given experience of spiritual authority. Jesus confirmed the reality of what they had experienced (“I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning”, v. 18) and affirmed the authority He had given them over all the power of the enemy (v. 19). And then He delivered the decisive reorientation: “Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven” (v. 20, NASB 1995). The reorientation is not from something bad to something good; the seventy’s joy at their experience of spiritual authority was genuine and reasonable. The reorientation is from something genuinely good to something incomparably better: not the weapon but the identity, not the authority but the grace that has recorded their names in the book of life.

The specific danger Jesus' reorientation addresses is one that the entire history of charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity has repeatedly illustrated: the experience of genuine spiritual power creates a spiritual environment in which that power becomes the primary criterion of spiritual validity, spiritual maturity, and spiritual identity. The congregation whose spiritual self-understanding is built around the experiences of power over the demonic realm has its spiritual confidence in the wrong place, in the contingent and variable experiences of spiritual authority rather than in the unconditional and permanent grace of God that has recorded the believer's name in heaven before the foundation of the world. When the experiences of spiritual power diminish, as they inevitably will in the normal course of spiritual life, the congregation whose identity rests on those experiences is vulnerable to the spiritual despair that the helmet of salvation is designed to resist.

The pastoral application of Jesus' reorientation is one of the most practically significant in the entire series. The pastor who has led his congregation in the kind of sober, apostolically grounded, Christologically confident spiritual warfare that this series has described, and who has watched his congregation experience the genuine freedom and the genuine fruitfulness that come from the faithful wearing of the full armor of God, that pastor must consistently redirect his congregation's joy from the experiences of spiritual effectiveness toward the incomparably greater ground: your names are recorded in heaven. The cross, not the conquest; the grace, not the authority; the identity, not the power. That is where the stable, permanent, unshakeable confidence of the Christian soldier is located.

"Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'"

Jude 9, NASB 1995

VII. The Reformed Corrective: Ordinary Faithfulness as the Best Defense

The Wisdom That Knows Where the Real Power Lies and Deploys It Accordingly

Having catalogued the six errors that most consistently distort the biblical theology of spiritual warfare, this lesson turns to the Reformed positive corrective, which is, in its essence, a reaffirmation of what Lessons 15 and 16 have already established. The best defense against the devil is not dramatic confrontation, specialized methodology, elaborate deliverance protocols, or the cultivation of experiences of spiritual power. It is the daily, faithful, Word-saturated, prayer-soaked life of the Christian who has submitted to God, put on the full armor of the gospel, and stands firm in the victory that Christ has already accomplished at the cross. This is not a counsel of passivity or a minimization of the genuine danger of the spiritual conflict; it is the counsel of those who have understood what the apostolically prescribed means of grace actually are and what they are actually capable of.

The Word of God is “divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses” (2 Corinthians 10:4, NASB 1995). The preaching of the gospel is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16, NASB 1995). Prayer offered in faith, without doubt, accomplishes the purpose of the God to whom it is addressed (James 5:16–18). The fellowship of the church provides the communal strength and accountability that closes off the specific vulnerabilities the adversary exploits through isolation. The holiness that comes from the Spirit’s sanctifying work gives the adversary no foothold. And the daily mortification of the flesh, the specific, persistent putting to death of the specific deeds of the body by the Spirit (Romans 8:13), addresses the specific vulnerability that the adversary most consistently exploits. These are not the weapons of a spiritually timid tradition that has abandoned the field to the charismatic tradition’s more enthusiastic warriors; they are the weapons Jesus used in the wilderness, the apostles deployed in their mission, and the God of the armor has promised to bless.

The wisdom of the Reformed corrective is not merely exegetical; it is experiential. The history of Christian mission confirms that the gospel has advanced into the most deeply entrenched demonic strongholds, the idol-saturated cultures of India, China, Africa, and the indigenous peoples of every continent, through the ordinary apostolic means of gospel proclamation, prayer, and the patient witness of transformed lives, not through the specialized methodologies of territorial spirit identification and confrontation. The Reformed missionary tradition has consistently demonstrated that the God who said “my Word will not return to Me empty” (Isaiah 55:11) means what He said, and that the ordinary means of grace, deployed with the faith-grounded confidence of those who know the Lord holds the leash, are precisely adequate for the specific spiritual conflict they are designed to address.

VIII. James 4:7–8: The Governing Text of the Entire Unit

Submission to God First, Resistance to the Devil Second, and the Assured Outcome

“Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4:7–8, NASB 1995). These two verses constitute the most concise, theologically precise, and practically definitive statement of the proper sequence of the Christian’s engagement with the adversary in the entire New Testament. They function as the governing text of the entire Unit 6 precisely because they capture, in two sentences, everything that the positive theology of Lessons 15 and 16 has established and everything that the error-correction of Lesson 17 has been safeguarding: the proper order, the proper posture, and the assured outcome of the spiritual conflict.

The proper order is theologically foundational: submit to God first, resist the devil second. The sequence is not reversible; the second does not work without the first. The believer who attempts to resist the adversary in his own authority, without the prior submission to God that makes the resistance an expression of the divine authority rather than a personal spiritual achievement, has separated the resistance from the only power that makes it effective. Every one of the six errors addressed in this lesson is, at its root, a form of the attempt to resist the devil without the prior submission to God that the passage requires: SLSW substitutes elaborate methodology for dependent prayer; binding and loosing formulas substitute verbal technique for personal relationship with the One in whose name the authority is

exercised; generational curse deliverance substitutes ancestral investigation for the rest of the new creation; over-attribution substitutes dramatic spiritual warfare for the quiet mortification of the flesh; direct address to Satan substitutes confrontation with the adversary for petition to the God whose authority over the adversary is absolute; and the pursuit of spiritual power over the enemy substitutes experiences of authority for the identity given by the grace that records names in heaven.

The assured outcome is the most practically sustaining element of the entire passage: “he will flee from you.” The promise is not that the adversary will be permanently defeated by the believer’s resistance, his permanent defeat has already been accomplished at the cross. The promise is that he will flee: retreat before the resistance of the submitted, God-drawing-near believer, unable to maintain his assault in the face of the authority of the God to whom the believer is submitted. This is the outcome the entire series has been building toward: the confident, sober, submitted, Word-saturated, prayerful believer, standing in the full armor of God, who draws near to God and finds that God draws near to him, who resists the adversary and watches him flee. That is the spiritual warfare of the New Testament. That is the life of the Christian soldier. That is enough. That is everything.

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Territorial Spirits	High-ranking demonic beings alleged to exercise authority over specific geographic regions (cities, nations, cultural zones). The concept draws on the “prince of Persia” and “prince of Greece” in Daniel 10:13–20. The SLSW methodology built around this concept involves spiritual mapping (researching the spiritual history of a region to identify its demonic rulers), prayer campaigns designed to bind those rulers, and direct address to them by name. The Reformed critique: Daniel 10 establishes that demonic powers exercise national influence (a fact to be acknowledged); it does not command the identification, naming, and direct confrontation of territorial spirits as a prerequisite for gospel advance, a methodology without New Testament precedent or apostolic warrant.
Spiritual Mapping	A practice associated with Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare in which the spiritual history, demonic footholds, and territorial spirit authorities over a geographic region are researched and documented as preparation for organized prayer campaigns designed to bind those spirits. Involves research into the history of sins, occult practices, and religious idolatry of a region, the identification of the specific demonic beings allegedly exercising authority over it, and the coordination of intercessory prayer with evangelistic advance. The Reformed critique: no New Testament precedent exists for this methodology as a prerequisite for gospel advance, and it displaces the ordinary means of grace as the primary instruments of mission.
Binding and Loosing	Language drawn from Matthew 16:19 and 18:18, where Jesus uses the Rabbinic idiom of binding (prohibiting, declaring unlawful, excluding) and loosing (permitting, declaring lawful, including) to describe the authority of apostolic doctrinal and disciplinary rulings. Widely misapplied in charismatic spiritual warfare to direct verbal commands to demonic beings (“I bind you, spirit of X”). The Reformed exegetical position: the binding and loosing of Matthew 16 and 18 refers to church authority in doctrine and discipline, not to exorcistic prayer formulas. The negative illustration of Acts 19:13–16 (the sons of Sceva) demonstrates the consequences of treating authoritative spiritual engagement as a transferable verbal technique.
Generational Curses	The doctrine that demonic influence, spiritual bondage, and specific patterns of sin can be transmitted through family lines and inherited by descendants, requiring specific prayers, rituals, or “generational deliverance” to break. Draws on Old Testament texts about God visiting iniquity of fathers on children (Exodus 20:5; Deuteronomy 5:9). The Reformed critique: Ezekiel 18:20 explicitly

Term	Definition
	rejects inherited guilt (“the son will not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity”); 2 Corinthians 5:17 establishes the new creation as the comprehensive answer to every claimed generational bondage; John 8:36 assures that those the Son sets free are free indeed. No additional generational deliverance ritual is needed beyond the regenerating act of the Holy Spirit.
Identificational Repentance	A spiritual warfare practice associated with SLSW and the New Apostolic Reformation in which believers repent and “identify” with the sins of their ancestors, their nation, or their ethnic group, assuming a form of corporate or proxy guilt for historical sins as a mechanism for “breaking” the demonic bondage those sins allegedly created. Has some precedent in Old Testament intercession (Daniel 9; Nehemiah 1) but is applied in SLSW to the specific goal of overcoming territorial spirit authority. The Reformed critique: the Old Testament intercessory models are motivated by genuine covenant concern, not by the claim that ancestral sin creates transferable demonic bondage; Ezekiel 18’s explicit rejection of inherited guilt undermines the theological basis of identificational repentance as a spiritual warfare technique.
New Apostolic Reformation (NAR)	A contemporary theological and ecclesiastical movement associated with the late C. Peter Wagner and related figures, characterized by claims of restored apostolic and prophetic offices, dominionist eschatology (the church’s mandate to transform society before Christ returns), Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare methodology, and the elevation of direct supernatural revelation and experiences of spiritual power. The NAR has produced many of the most influential contemporary spiritual warfare teachings, including territorial spirit identification, spiritual mapping, identificational repentance, and the binding and loosing of high-ranking demonic powers. The Reformed critique engages the NAR’s spiritual warfare methodology on both exegetical grounds (lack of New Testament warrant) and ecclesiological grounds (false restoration of normative apostolic authority).
Over-Attribution	The systematic interpretation of sin, suffering, illness, and difficulty as direct demonic causation, without adequate engagement with the natural, fleshly, and worldly dimensions of human experience. Characterized by attributing recurring sins to demonic spirits rather than the flesh, interpreting illness as demonic oppression rather than natural causes, reading relational conflict as territorial or relational spirit activity, and treating every period of spiritual discouragement as a direct demonic assault. The Reformed critique: the tripartite analysis of world, flesh, and devil requires discernment about which source of opposition is operative in a specific situation; systematic over-attribution misidentifies the problem, displaces personal responsibility, and

Term	Definition
	misdirects pastoral care toward deliverance ministry when sanctification, medical care, and ordinary pastoral support are what the situation requires.
Jude 9 Principle	The theological axiom derived from Jude’s account of Michael the archangel’s dispute with the devil over Moses’ body: even the highest-ranking angel in the divine army “did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you.’” The Jude 9 principle establishes the appropriate posture for the believer’s engagement with the adversary: not direct personal confrontation in the believer’s own authority (even Michael did not do this), but the deferral to the Lord’s authority through prayer. The believer who addresses the adversary directly in his own name, rebuking and binding in his own authority, has assumed a posture that the archangel Michael, with far greater authority over the demonic realm, deliberately declined to take.
Mortification of Sin	The specific spiritual discipline of putting to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit (Romans 8:13), crucifying the flesh with its passions and desires (Galatians 5:24), and the persistent, deliberate, Spirit-empowered turning away from specific patterns of sin in the believer’s life. In the Reformed theology of spiritual warfare, mortification of sin is one of the most direct and most effective forms of spiritual warfare available to the believer, because it addresses the specific vulnerability that the adversary most consistently exploits: the inclinations of the flesh. The believer who is actively mortifying sin in the specific areas of his greatest vulnerability is closing specific doors through which the adversary most readily gains leverage, wearing the practical dimension of the breastplate of righteousness.
James 4:7 Principle	The apostolic statement of the proper sequence of the Christian’s engagement with the adversary: “Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” The James 4:7 principle establishes three truths: (1) submission to God must precede resistance to the devil, the sequence is not reversible; (2) resistance that flows from prior submission to God carries the authority of the God to whom the believer is submitted, not merely the believer’s personal spiritual power; and (3) the outcome of properly ordered spiritual warfare is assured: the adversary will flee. Every error addressed in this lesson is, at its root, a form of the attempt to resist the devil without the prior submission to God that the James 4:7 principle requires.

Practical Application

A. *For the Mind: What Must We Believe?*

We must believe that the six errors addressed in this lesson are not marginal curiosities but pervasive, influential, and genuinely damaging distortions of the biblical theology of spiritual warfare that affect significant portions of the contemporary evangelical church. This belief is not the product of sectarian hostility toward the charismatic tradition; it is the product of the exegetical rigor that the series has consistently modeled. Each error draws on real biblical language and real biblical categories; each distorts them in specific, documentable ways that produce specific, documentable pastoral harm. The congregation that has been taught to identify these errors specifically, to understand where their biblical language comes from, and to articulate the specific exegetical problems with their application is a congregation that is both better protected from them and better equipped to engage those who hold them with the clarity and charity that a genuine disagreement within the body of Christ deserves.

We must also believe that the Reformed corrective, ordinary faithfulness as the best defense against the devil, is not a spiritually timid retreat from genuine engagement with the demonic realm. It is the apostolically prescribed, historically validated, comprehensively sufficient provision that the God of the armor has made available and promised to bless. The Word, prayer, holiness, the fellowship of the church, and the daily mortification of sin are the weapons that conquered the Roman Empire, penetrated the animistic cultures of sub-Saharan Africa, opened the closed societies of East Asia to the gospel, and have sustained the church's mission across two millennia of genuine spiritual conflict. They are adequate. They are sufficient. They are enough.

B. *For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?*

Let the correction of these errors produce not a sense of theological superiority over those who hold them but a pastoral compassion for the spiritual damage they cause. The believer who has been burdened with generational curse deliverance has been given an unnecessary burden that the gospel explicitly removes; the appropriate response is not condescension but pastoral care. The congregation that has been encouraged to seek experiences of spiritual power over the enemy as markers of spiritual maturity has been subtly diverted from the most secure ground of its spiritual confidence; the appropriate response is to redirect it toward the incomparably greater ground that Jesus Himself identified: the recording of their names in heaven by the grace of the God who called them. Every error addressed in this lesson is a misdirection of genuine spiritual hunger toward a counterfeit provision; the pastoral response is to provide the genuine provision with the generosity of those who know how good it actually is.

Desire the settled, practical wisdom of the James 4:7 sequence: the submission that makes the resistance effective, the drawing near to God that brings God near to you. This is the most practically available and the most consistently reliable form of spiritual warfare engagement open to every believer in every situation: not the dramatic methodology of the SLSW tradition but the humble, deliberate, God-directed

submission and resistance of those who have learned that the key to the entire conflict is not the intensity of their engagement with the adversary but the quality of their nearness to the God who holds the leash.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

- **Develop a congregation-appropriate teaching series on the common errors addressed in this lesson.** The goal is not to produce cynical suspicion of all things charismatic but to equip the congregation with the specific exegetical tools to evaluate specific claims: Does this teaching have New Testament precedent in the apostolic practice? Does this passage actually say what it is being used to say? Does this practice help or hinder the believer's dependence on God and engagement with the ordinary means of grace? These are the diagnostic questions that enable the congregation to evaluate spiritual warfare teaching, including this series, with the kind of Berean diligence that Acts 17:11 commends.
- **Read Jude 9 in its context (Jude 3–16) and develop a brief teaching on the Jude 9 principle for your congregation.** Jude 9's account of Michael's refusal to pronounce a direct condemnation against Satan, even in the context of a direct personal dispute, is the most direct biblical statement about the appropriate posture for human engagement with the adversary. If the archangel Michael, whose authority over the demonic realm incomparably exceeds any human being's, declined to address Satan directly in his own authority and referred the matter to the Lord, what does that establish about the believer's appropriate posture? Teaching this text carefully and pastorally will provide the congregation with the specific biblical grounding for the Jude 9 principle in a way that engages rather than dismisses the genuine spiritual instincts that lead many believers toward direct address to the adversary.
- **Engage charitably and carefully with members of your congregation who have been influenced by one or more of the six errors this lesson addresses.** The pastoral approach is not to begin with "you are wrong about the following six things" but to begin with the positive: What has the believer experienced in the context of this teaching that is genuinely good, a heightened awareness of the spiritual conflict, a passion for prayer and intercession, a desire for genuine freedom from bondage? Affirm those genuine spiritual hungers and then gently redirect them toward the provisions that actually satisfy them: the biblical awareness of the spiritual conflict without the SLSW methodology, the genuine prayer warfare of Ephesians 6:18 without the direct address to territorial spirits, the real freedom of the new creation without the generational deliverance ritual.
- **Memorize and meditate on the complete James 4:7–10 passage as the apostolic summary of the entire spiritual warfare theology of Unit 6.** The full passage moves from humility before God (v. 10: "Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you") through the submission and resistance of verse 7 to the drawing near and cleansing of verse 8. The washing of hands and purifying of hearts in verse 8 is the practical righteousness of the breastplate; the drawing near to God is the submission that makes the resistance effective; the promised exaltation of verse 10 is the outcome of the entire passage. The James 4:7–10 sequence is the

most complete, practical, and apostolically authoritative summary of the spiritual warfare posture that Unit 6 has been developing across three lessons.

- **Read one of the following as a final resource for deepening the Reformed theology of spiritual warfare:** D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Warfare* (an exposition of Ephesians 6:10–13); Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices* (the Puritan classic on the adversary's specific tactics and the scriptural remedies for each); or John Bunyan, *Holy War* (the allegorical treatment of the spiritual conflict at the level of the soul's redemption). These three works together represent the richest vein of Reformed spiritual warfare theology in the English language and provide the positive substance that the corrective work of this lesson has been clearing the ground for.

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- Before engaging the discussion questions, identify which of the six errors addressed in this lesson you have most directly encountered, either as a teaching you have received, a practice you have engaged in, or a pattern you have observed in other believers or congregations. What was your initial response to the lesson's treatment of that error? Did you find the exegetical critique persuasive? Were there aspects of the error's appeal that the lesson's correction left unaddressed in a way that you wish it had engaged more directly?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read Matthew 16:13–20 carefully. In what context does Jesus give Peter the keys of the kingdom (vv. 17–19)? What is the immediate occasion (Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ, v. 16)? And what is the most natural reading of "bind on earth" and "loose on earth" in this context, does the context suggest doctrinal and disciplinary authority, or exorcistic authority? How does the parallel Matthew 18:15–20 context (church discipline for sin, vv. 15–17) illuminate the meaning of the binding and loosing language in verse 18?
- Read Ezekiel 18:1–20 carefully. What is the proverb that Ezekiel is addressing (v. 2: "The fathers eat the sour grapes, but the children's teeth are set on edge")? What is God's response to this proverb (vv. 3–4)? What is the comprehensive principle of verse 20? And how does this passage address the theological claim that specific sins of ancestors create transferable demonic bondage in descendants that must be specifically broken through deliverance prayer?
- Read Jude 1–16 to understand the full context of verse 9. What is the occasion of the letter (v. 3–4)? What is the character of those against whom the letter warns (vv. 8–11)? How does the account of Michael and Satan in verse 9 function as a counter-example to the "railing judgments" of the false teachers described in verse 8? And what does the phrase "did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'" specifically establish about the appropriate posture for engagement with the adversary?
- Read James 4:1–10 as a complete unit. What is James identifying as the source of the conflicts and quarrels among his readers (vv. 1–3)? How does the problem of spiritual adultery (vv. 4–5) set the context for the command of verse 7? What is the specific sequence of commands in verses 7–8, and what is the theological relationship between each command and the next? And what is the promised outcome of the sequence (vv. 7b, 8b, 10b), and how do the three promised outcomes relate to each other?
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:14–21. What is Paul's comprehensive description of what the new creation in Christ means for the believer's identity (v. 17)? What has "passed away," and what has "come"? How does the reconciliation described in verses 18–21 relate to the question of what the believer's new creation status means for the claims of any alleged generational bondage? And how does the imputed righteousness of verse 21 ("He made Him who knew no sin to be sin

on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”) function as the comprehensive answer to every alleged claim of inherited demonic influence?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson argues that every one of the six errors addressed is, at its root, a form of the attempt to resist the devil without the prior submission to God that James 4:7 requires. Is this analysis persuasive for each of the six errors? Working through each error: what specific form of the attempt to resist the devil without prior submission does each represent? And how does the James 4:7 sequence, submission first, resistance second, constitute the specific correction to each error?
- The lesson distinguishes between the data Daniel 10 provides (demonic powers exercise influence over nations) and the SLSW methodology built upon it (those powers must be identified, named, and directly confronted as a prerequisite for gospel advance). Is this distinction between a genuine biblical datum and an unwarranted methodological elaboration the right way to engage SLSW? What specific biblical evidence would be required to move from the Daniel 10 datum to the SLSW conclusion? And why does the lesson argue that the absence of that evidence in New Testament apostolic practice is decisive?
- The lesson presents the new birth as the comprehensive answer to the doctrine of generational curses: 2 Corinthians 5:17, Colossians 1:13, and John 8:36 together establish that the new creation in Christ is the complete and sufficient breaking of every claimed inherited bondage. Some proponents of generational curse theology argue that while the judicial penalty for ancestral sin is removed at salvation, the experiential effects of inherited patterns may persist until specifically addressed. Is this distinction between judicial freedom and experiential freedom theologically coherent? And what is the Reformed response to it?
- The Jude 9 principle establishes that even Michael the archangel declined to pronounce a direct condemnation against Satan but deferred to the Lord’s authority. Some argue that this principle applies specifically to Michael’s unique situation (disputing over Moses’ body with the adversary in the adversary’s own domain) and should not be generalized to the believer’s engagement with demonic beings. Is this a persuasive objection? And what does the broader pattern of New Testament prayer instruction, consistently addressed to God rather than to the adversary, contribute to the assessment of this objection?
- The lesson argues that the pursuit of spiritual power over the enemy as a mark of spiritual maturity is the specific danger to which effective spiritual warfare ministry most consistently exposes those who engage in it. Do you agree that this is a distinctive danger of effective spiritual ministry rather than a danger of spiritual weakness? And how does the specific reorientation of Luke 10:20, from the contingent experience of spiritual power to the unconditional grace of names recorded in heaven, provide the specific correction that this specific danger requires?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson recommends engaging believers who have been influenced by one or more of these errors with charity and with a pastoral approach that begins with the genuine spiritual hungers the errors represent before moving to the exegetical corrections. Identify the specific genuine spiritual hunger behind each of the six errors: What legitimate spiritual desire does SLSW represent? What does the binding and loosing practice represent? What does the generational curse doctrine represent? What does over-attribution represent? What does direct address to Satan represent? And what does the pursuit of spiritual power represent? For each genuine spiritual hunger, identify the provision that the biblical theology of spiritual warfare actually makes available to meet it.
- The lesson recommends memorizing and meditating on James 4:7–10 as the apostolic summary of the entire spiritual warfare theology of Unit 6. Write out the sequence of commands in verses 7–10 and identify the specific connections between each command and the next. What is the theological logic that links “submit to God” with “resist the devil”? What is the theological logic that links “draw near to God” with “cleanse your hands” and “purify your hearts”? And what is the relationship between the humility of verse 10 and the exaltation the verse promises? Is the sequence of James 4:7–10 a description of a single act or a description of an ongoing posture?
- The lesson concludes with a commendation of three works of Reformed spiritual warfare theology: Lloyd-Jones on Ephesians 6, Thomas Brooks on Satan’s devices, and Bunyan’s Holy War. If you are able to read one of these in the coming months, which one would be most beneficial for your specific ministry context, and why? What specific form of the spiritual conflict, which of the six errors, which of the forms of demonic activity described in Unit 5, or which of the armor pieces examined in Lesson 16, would benefit most from the specific engagement that your chosen work provides?
- This lesson is the conclusion of Unit 6 and of the main series content. Unit 7 (Lessons 18–20) addresses the eschatological consummation: the victory of the cross, the final judgment of Satan and the demonic realm, and the new creation in which every demonic power has been permanently eliminated. As you prepare to engage Unit 7, what is the single most important truth about spiritual warfare that Unit 6 has established for your pastoral ministry? And how has the correction of the six errors in this lesson clarified what it means to “resist the devil, firm in your faith” (1 Peter 5:9) in the specific context of the contemporary church’s engagement with the spiritual conflict?
- As this lesson closes the spiritual warfare section of the series, take stock of the full arc of Unit 6: Lesson 15 (the reality of the conflict and the sober middle path), Lesson 16 (the full armor of God in theological depth), and Lesson 17 (the six errors and the Reformed corrective). What is the single sentence that best summarizes what Unit 6 has established about the nature and practice of spiritual warfare? And how does that summary relate to the Great Commission with which Lesson 15 concluded: “Go therefore and make disciples... and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19–20)?

Prayer Focus

Open this lesson's prayer time with a reading of James 4:7–10, not as a text to be analyzed but as a liturgy to be inhabited. Read it slowly, allowing each command to become a specific act rather than a doctrinal proposition. Submit to God: stop; be still; acknowledge specifically who God is and who you are before Him. Resist the devil: not dramatically, not with a loud verbal rebuke directed at a demonic being, but with the settled, submitted, faith-grounded resistance of one who knows that the God to whom he is submitted holds the leash. Draw near to God: move toward Him, deliberately, specifically, with the expectation that He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands; purify your hearts: bring the specific patterns of sin and the specific areas of divided loyalty before the God who is greater than your heart. Humble yourself in the presence of the Lord, and receive the promise: He will exalt you. That is the spiritual warfare of the New Testament. Let it be the foundation of this prayer.

Pray specifically for protection from the six errors addressed in this lesson, not as a formal recitation of a list but as a specific, pastoral intercession for the specific vulnerabilities in your congregation. Pray for protection from the SLSW mentality that displaces the ordinary means of grace with elaborate methodology: that your congregation would trust the preaching of the Word and the prayer of faith as the divinely powerful weapons for the destruction of the strongholds in your specific mission context. Pray for protection from the binding-and-loosing error that reduces genuine spiritual authority to verbal formula: that your congregation would exercise the genuine authority of those who know the One in whose name they act and whose commission they carry. Pray for protection from the generational curse burden: that those in your congregation who are carrying unnecessary spiritual weight about their family history would receive the full rest of the new creation in Christ, the old things have passed away, the new have come.

Pray for protection from over-attribution: that your congregation would have the discernment to identify the specific source of specific forms of spiritual opposition, world, flesh, or devil, and the wisdom to deploy the specific provision that the specific situation requires rather than attributing everything to the demonic and seeking deliverance ministry for what the flesh and the world have produced. Pray for protection from the direct-address-to-Satan habit: that your congregation's prayer life would be consistently and wholly directed toward the God who holds the leash, whose authority over the adversary is absolute, and whose response to the petition "Deliver us from the evil one" is both reliable and sufficient. And pray for protection from the spiritual-power-as-identity error: that every experience of effective ministry, every answered prayer, every person set free from spiritual bondage, would produce in your congregation not the spiritual pride of those who glory in their authority but the deep, stable, permanent joy of those whose names are recorded in heaven.

Pray for the broader church's engagement with spiritual warfare teaching. The errors addressed in this lesson are causing real pastoral damage in real congregations at this moment, not as abstract theological deviations but as specific practices producing specific forms of spiritual anxiety, misdirected effort, and pastoral harm. Pray for the pastors and teachers who are responsible for those congregations: for the

courage to engage these errors directly and the wisdom to do so with the pastoral charity that distinguishes genuine doctrinal correction from theological condescension. Pray for the believers who have been burdened by these errors: that they would receive the full rest of the gospel, the full provision of the armor, and the full confidence of those who are submitted to God, who resist the devil who flees, and who draw near to the God who draws near to them.

Close with the great declaration of Romans 16:20 as the eschatological horizon of everything this unit has been building toward: “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you” (NASB 1995). “Soon”, in quickness, with dispatch, as certainly as the cross accomplished the proleptic defeat that the eschatological consummation will make final. The same God who provided the armor, who holds the leash, whose name Michael invoked when he declined to address the adversary directly, whose authority makes the resistance effective, whose nearness is the response to the drawing near, this God will soon crush the adversary under your feet. Unit 7 will unfold that consummation. For now, stand in the certainty of it, and receive the grace that makes the standing possible.

“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.”

Romans 16:20, NASB 1995

Key Texts: *Jude 9; James 4:7–10; 1 John 4:4; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Luke 10:20; Ephesians 6:10–18; Acts 19:13–16; Ezekiel 18:1–20; Matthew 16:19; 18:18; Romans 16:20; Daniel 10:12–21; Acts 17:11*

Soli Deo Gloria
To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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