



Introduction

In earthly wars between countries and kingdoms, there exist two types of warfare with their own individual strategies. These are offensive and defensive types of warfare. In the spiritual fight there are the same types of warfare and both require from us personal initiative and active participation. Since Satan does not take rest, we should be involved in both wars if we want to be true soldiers in the army of Jesus Christ.

The Defensive Warfare

It is a means of defending one's territory, a forced battle launched in response to an attack from an opponent and a defensive decision made based on an offensive one. This type of warfare does not advance into the enemy's territory. Such defensive type of warfare is necessary because Satan is constantly attacking believers and therefore we should be constantly alert to apply defensive strategies in order to defend our spiritual territories. This type of warfare is pretty much what most churches stop at, getting satisfied with protecting the believers who are already active in church with the aim of:

- a. protecting believers from going astray (prophylactic in nature).
- b. nurturing and nourishing them spiritually in order to grow into the likeness of Christ.

The Offensive Warfare

It is an aggressive warfare against the enemy characterized by its dynamic nature not waiting for the enemy to launch his attack but going to the enemy in his territory and gaining rather than losing territory. In offensive warfare, the enemy is identified, his strategies recognized, and the attack is a decision the offender makes based on this knowledge. In spiritual offensive warfare, believers attack Satan either to release other believers or to release themselves from his captivity. The decision that the Prodigal Son took was an initiation of an offensive warfare to release himself from Satan's captivity and restore his original territory.

Evangelism is a type of offensive warfare in which we engage to liberate captives from Satan's territory and transfer them to Christ's kingdom. Offensive warfare aims to restore and liberate:

- a. Lost sheep who were once active members serving in church and now they are not any more. These members need to be sought out seriously and diligently and once found,

probably full of wounds, need a ministry of healing.

- b. Non believers who have never heard about Christ and His message of salvation. Our Lord's recommendation and command was that the gospel reaches to all the nations. These non believers once reached out and preached to, need to be grafted in the body of Christ, the church.

We can only reach the world offensively advancing into Satan's territory to salvage both the lost sheep and non believers thus fulfilling the Lord's wish *"And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd"* (John 10:16). We cannot afford to sit comfortably in our churches satisfied with defending our territories against Satan's attacks.

The Warfare Strategies

The story in the Old Testament, 2 Kings 13:14-19, delineates six strategies required to launch a successful war against Satan:

"Elisha had become sick with the illness of which he would die. Then Joash the king of Israel came down to him, and wept over his face, and said, 'O my father, my father, the chariots of Israel and their

horsemen!' And Elisha said to him, 'Take a bow and some arrows.' So he took himself a bow and some arrows. Then he said to the king of Israel, 'Put your hand on the bow.' So he put his hand on it, and Elisha put his hands on the king's hands. And he said, 'Open the east window'; and he opened it. Then Elisha said, 'Shoot'; and he shot. And he said, 'The arrow of the Lord's deliverance and the arrow of deliverance from Syria; for you must strike the Syrians at Aphek till you have destroyed them.' Then he said, 'Take the arrows'; so he took them. And he said to the king of Israel, 'Strike the ground'; so he struck three times, and stopped. And the man of God was angry with him, and said, "You should have struck five or six times; then you would have struck Syria till you had destroyed it! But now you will strike Syria only three times." (2 Kings 13:14-19).

1. Establish an Intention to Fight

"And Elisha said to him, 'Take a bow and some arrows.' So he took himself a bow and some arrows. Then he said to the king of Israel, 'Put your hand on the bow.' So he put his hand on it, and Elisha put his hands on the king's hands" (2 Kings 13:15-16).

Elisha's orders to the king lay down the prerequisite for launching a war and that is by getting on the mark and getting set. St Paul confirms the same concept in Ephesians 6 when he talks about putting on the six pieces of God's armor and keeping them on all the time with full obedience and readiness otherwise our victory will be jeopardized and our wounds great. Our fight is with a roaring lion.

2. Play Your Role Before God so He can Play His Role

"Then he said to the king of Israel, 'Put your hand on the bow.' So he put his hand on it, and Elisha put his hands on the king's hands" (2 Kings 13:16).

Notice that the king put his hand before Elisha did an indication of the specificity of roles. The bible provides many examples to mention a few:

- a. touch the Jordan River and God will split it
- b. remove the stone and God will raise Lazarus
- c. bring the sick to Christ and He will heal them

Similarly, possessing spiritual weapons without using them is as futile as not possessing them at

all. For example, what is the use of having a Holy Bible without reading it? Knowing the verses by heart without application is as useless as not knowing them at all. To ensure God's intervention and victory, we have to utilize the weapons he provided us with (Ephesians 6:10-20).

3. Be Unsparingly Focused

"And he said, 'Open the east window'; and he opened it. Then Elisha said, 'Shoot'; and he shot. And he said, 'The arrow of the Lord's deliverance and the arrow of deliverance from Syria; for you must strike the Syrians at Aphek till you have destroyed them.'" (2 Kings 13:17).

Opening the window towards the direction the enemy is coming from (eastward) symbolizes exposing sinful areas or weak areas of failure, defeat, bondage where Satan is taking a strong foot. In the mystery of Confession one literally opens up and exposes all his sins unsparingly and unequivocally. Examples of such areas are lack of self control, lustful thoughts, pride, lack of forgiveness, to name a few. In the book of Revelation the expression "Remember from where you have fallen" is repeated several times.

4. Shoot Without Stopping

"Then he said, 'Take the arrows'; so he took them. And he said to the king of Israel, 'Strike the ground'; so he struck three times, and stopped" (2 Kings 13:18).

Shooting symbolizes the offensive nature of the battle. Do not wait till Satan attacks before you resist. Be alert spiritually and on the go with offending Satan and fortifying your territories and occupying your mind and heart with pure thoughts, short prayers, and biblical verses. The Word of God is described as "sharper than two edged swords".

5. Aim at Total Victory

"And the man of God was angry with him, and said, "You should have struck five or six times; then you would have struck Syria till you had destroyed it! But now you will strike Syria only three times" (2 Kings 13:19).

Lack of continuity in shooting symbolizes lack of diligently, perseveringly and incessantly continuity in battling against Satan and subsequent relapse in old habits and sin. God's

objective is not partial victory. That is obvious in Elisha's anger at the king's stopping shooting.

6. In the Secret Chamber

Elisha and the king were in the secret chamber where the victorious outcome of the battle is determined and overcoming the self is achieved.

Some Defensive Weapons

- Submission. Manifest in letting God have control and doing his will at the same time. There is a big difference between letting God's will be done and letting my will be done.
- Resistance. "*Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you*" (James 4:7).
- Steadfastness in Faith. "*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world*" (1 Peter 5:8-9).

- a. Mountain moving Faith. A gift of the Spirit which is given to certain people (Mark 16:16).
- b. Belief System Faith. Summed up in the Creed. "I believe in God the Father almighty..." (Nicene Creed).
- c. Confidence-generated Faith. *"Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed"* (Luke 7:7)."

Both (b) and (c) are required defensive weapons in the face of Satan. David used both of them in facing Goliath. *"But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied"* (1 Samuel 17:45).

- Alertness. Not giving place to the devil neither through being angry at people or harboring that anger for longer than necessary. *"nor give place to the devil"* (Ephesians 4:27).
- Recovering. Not remaining entangled in the snares of Satan but getting up and saying with the Prodigal Son, *"Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; When I fall, I will arise; When I sit in darkness, The Lord will be a light to me"* (Micah 7:8).

- Abstinence. *"From all fleshly lusts which war against the soul"* (1 Peter 2:11). *"Abstain from every form of evil"* (1 Thessalonians 5:22),
- Testing the Spirits. Since Satan's main strategy is deception, we need to constantly test our thoughts by comparing them against the truths established in the Scripture (1 John 4:1). Revealing thoughts is a biblical order and recommended by the early fathers who believed that revealing thoughts weaken them.
- Avoiding Worldly Distractions. *"You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier"* (2 Timothy 2:3-4). The analogy of athletics and hard working farmers (two other examples St. Paul uses in this verse). Many of us go to war but are distracted by this world, *"But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none"* (1 Corinthians 7:29). St. Paul does not mean to stop the activities of this world but do not let them distract you from your goal.

Conclusion

We are in constant warfare with Satan. Both

defensive or offensive warfare require weapons and strategies. The good news is that we are not alone in this constant warfare. Our victory is sure in the presence of the Holy Spirit. Some verses that prove the existence and assistance of the Holy Spirit:

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

"Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:26-27).

With the help of the Holy Spirit, correct use of the right strategies and right spiritual weapon Satan cannot overcome us but will flee because the One Who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world.

Bishop Youssef
Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern
United States