

# Sometimes Spiritual Warfare Isn't Demons—It's Other Christians

I recently shared a meal with a pastor who loves his congregation and works tirelessly to serve his community. But this man was in a spiritual battle. A small group of people in his church were dissatisfied with this pastor's leadership, so they were busy plotting ways to get rid of him.

I'm glad I could encourage with this leader, because people on the front lines of ministry are often hit with negativity that is designed to take them out. I don't want to be the guy who says discouraging words. Instead, I want to hold up my friends' arms, pray for them and say, "You are doing a great job," "Don't listen to those comments" and "Hang in there."

Those of us in the Spirit-filled community talk a lot about spiritual warfare, and we love to identify the demons behind every problem. But I've learned that we give demons too much credit. In many cases, "spiritual warfare" is actually caused by Christians who don't know how to love.

It's true: Christians are guilty at times of gossip, slander, character assassination and other devilish activities that destroy people and churches. The devil and his demons may ultimately be behind it all, but carnal people are the devil's willing pawns. That's why Paul told the Galatians: "If you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another" (Gal. 5:15, NASB).

As we step into this new year, I challenge you to make it your goal to become a loving encourager. Here's how you can avoid being a tool of spiritual destruction:

- 1. Remember that the devil is the accuser.** Satan is called

“the accuser of our brethren” in Revelation 12:10, and he hurls his accusations at us “night and day.” So it shouldn’t be surprising that sometimes we hear his accusations about others, and he tempts us to repeat them. If our hearts aren’t full of the love of God, we will toss the devil’s grenades for him.

Do you honestly want to be on Satan’s side in spiritual warfare? You are fighting for his team when you spread negativity about others. Never align yourself with the accuser. Make sure your heart is free from unforgiveness, jealousy and hatred so you don’t end up being a minion of the devil.

**2. Never entertain suspicions.** I know some charismatic Christians who claim to have a “gift of discernment” that is really nothing more than a hostile spirit of accusation. These people will claim that God showed them something negative about a person, and then share this secret “information” (often in the form of a “prayer request”) to destroy others. Don’t ever play this cruel game.

**3. Never repeat something negative you’ve heard about someone unless you know it’s true.** There’s a reason we call gossip “juicy.” We like to hear negative things about others because it makes us feel better about ourselves. It feeds our flesh. Proverbs 26:22, in The Passion Translation, says: “Gossip is so delicious, and how we love to swallow it! For slander is easily absorbed into our innermost being.”

Gossip tastes sweet, but it will make you bitter. You don’t have to listen to it, and you certainly don’t have to repeat it. Tell gossipers you won’t listen to their toxic talk. If you have God’s love in your heart, you won’t slander another person. Love covers negativity with mercy and kindness. Proverbs 17:9 (MEV) says: “He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates friends.”

This doesn't mean we don't confront sin. But if someone has wronged you, you should go to them privately and discuss it. Don't tell 12 people what happened so you can organize a jury. And don't post your experience on social media so you can gather sympathizers.

**4. When you hear something negative about someone, pray rather than prey.** James 4:11a (NIV) says: "Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another." The word "slander," *katalaleō* in the Greek, means, "to speak badly about someone so as to damage their reputation." How do we respond to the temptation to gossip? The best way is to pray. One of my favorite authors, Leonard Ravenhill, wrote: "We never pray for folks we gossip about, and we never gossip about the folk for whom we pray."

**5. Resolve to be an encourager.** Words have power. You have the choice to bless or to curse; to build people up or to tear them down. Proverbs 10:11a (NASB) says: "The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life." As you prepare for 2022, make it your goal to always use your words to encourage those around you. If you let words of life, blessing, healing and affirmation flow out of your mouth continually, your friends will be strengthened, your church will be healthy, and the devil will flee. {eoa}

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