

Identifying—and Breaking—Spiritual Strongholds in America

A veteran prayer warrior explains what it will take to bring down the demonic forces gripping our nation.

For more than 30 years I've traveled the world equipping believers to combat the forces of darkness through prayer and intercession. I've led prayer missions behind the former Iron Curtain and watched strategic prayer play a role in dismantling Communist regimes. I've been part of tearing down demonic forces in Tibet, Uzbekistan and countless other places that would qualify as the spiritually darkest areas in the world.

Yet when I was approached about writing this article and identifying America's greatest spiritual strongholds, I realized how easy it can be for prayer leaders who minister globally to talk about the often overt spiritual forces ruling other nations—and yet forget to name the enemy's strongholds established in our own nation.

I'm a natural optimist who sees most situations from a glass-half-full perspective. So I prefer to celebrate how the Holy Spirit is currently moving among His people here in the United States. But even the most positive thinkers like me must come to grips with our country's current woes.

Despite the increased emphasis American society has placed on raising children, only 63 percent of them grow up with both their biological parents—the lowest figure in the Western world. The latest statistics show that 1.2 million abortions are performed each year in our nation (and that's only those that are legal and reported), while approximately half of all marriages here end in divorce.

In a country birthed in gratitude for God's mercy and founded upon His Word, teachers are now arrested and students suspended for praying in schools. Politicians are mocked and rebuked for uttering Jesus' name in public, and our current president has already declared that America is no longer a Christian nation. Our biggest newspapers, magazines, television networks and online media outlets simply further this by spewing vitriolic "editorials" announcing the death of Christianity, evangelicalism, the church and God Himself. Meanwhile, pornography has become a cultural norm for entertainment; the sex industry makes more than \$13 billion a year—more than all of the major sports leagues combined. And in the business world, we are no longer surprised when a Fortune 500 company goes belly-up from yet another Wall Street Ponzi scheme or leadership scandal.

Clearly, we need societal transformation. In every facet of America that I just mentioned—family, religion, government, business, education, media, and arts and entertainment—we've drifted farther and farther away from following God's standards. What has become increasingly obvious, however, is the extent to which ungodly spiritual forces are in command. As a result, we remain gripped by demonic strongholds that can only be dismantled through the greatest spiritual weapon God gave the church: prayer.

Identifying those strongholds—or at least getting believers to agree upon what they are—isn't the easiest thing. Prayer leaders across the nation can name territorial spirits specific to their city, county, state or even region. But when it comes to targeting national strongholds, it seems everyone has his own list. In addition, there's often confusion over what qualifies as an actual stronghold. Because we're tackling such a broad topic in the confines of a magazine article, I've honed in on what I believe are the two overarching strongholds in America: the religious spirit and the antichrist spirit.

The Religious Spirit

The religious spirit, which is a counterfeit of the Holy Spirit, is one of the main demonic strongholds operating in our nation. Rooted in pride, this ancient spirit is the church's greatest enemy opposing our calling to establish God's kingdom throughout what have been called the "seven mountains of society": family, religion, government, business, education, media, and arts and entertainment. The religious spirit is also the No. 1 opponent to lasting revival (both personally and corporately). It manifests through such forces as corruption, homosexuality, idolatry, abortion (child sacrifice), Mammon (lust for money), witchcraft and atheism.

In 2 Timothy 3:2-5, Paul spells out what the religious spirit looks like in the flesh: "People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them" (NIV).

The religious spirit has a form of truth yet lacks the fullness of truth. It operates under the guise of Holy Spirit power yet has no intimacy with the Father to produce such power. It is a spiritual vacuum that, due to the subtle ways it manifests, can distract believers from their true destiny and calling for months, years, even lifetimes. As I heard Chuck Pierce say at a recent conference, "Religious spirits are sent to seduce you and cause you to wander in the wilderness." Tragically, that is where countless believers have remained under the influence of this spiritually poisonous power.

(To learn more about the religious spirit, including how to identify if it's operating in your life, I urge you to read my book, *Conquering the Religious Spirit*.)

The Antichrist Spirit

While the religious spirit may be Satan's deadliest tactic in his arsenal, it's also one of his subtlest—which explains why it has had such a hold on the church throughout history. Yet far more overt is the other major stronghold in America: the antichrist spirit. Its very name reveals what it is—a force that stands against or in direct opposition to Christ, who He is and all He stands for. Sadly, it has become the ruling spirit in our nation as our leaders have continued to blatantly oppose God through their public speeches, rulings or political alignments.

What's shocking to most believers, however, is that much of the American church has succumbed to this same spirit. First John 4:1-3 says: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world" (NASB).

Sadly, we have so-called leaders in the American church at large that fail to confess Jesus but instead point to other means of salvation (e.g., "Send a check to our ministry and you can save yourself!"). By the same token, many church leaders fail to teach believers or help them know who we are in Christ.

Both of these errors play into the antichrist spirit's two major orders of attack. First, this spirit will always try to diminish who Jesus is, just as the Scripture above indicates. The antichrist spirit denies Jesus' deity; therefore, it will even use counterfeit healings, signs and wonders (as Scripture attests) to mimic God's power, yet it will always fail to exalt the deity of Jesus.

The second mandate the antichrist spirit follows is to attack

who we are. The enemy wants to keep us blinded to the reality of who we are in Christ. He uses the antichrist spirit to try to diminish our role as priestly overcomers. But the truth is that Christ—the hope of glory—lives in us. Scripture says we will reign with Christ (2 Tim. 2:12)! God’s mandate has always been for us to rule on earth with Christ. The antichrist spirit will fight against this because, as Jesus said in John 14:14, we were destined to do even “greater works” than He performed while on earth.

Enemy Tactics

God doesn’t want America—or any nation, for that matter—to be held captive by the enemy’s strongholds. His desire is to see the earth become a reflection of His heavenly kingdom. So that we might overcome the forces of darkness that currently rule this world, He has equipped His children with a heavenly weapon strong enough to demolish any stronghold—including the religious and antichrist spirits (see 2 Cor. 10:4). But if prayer is truly the most potent weapon, why have we not launched an all-out assault on the demonic realm over America?

Simply put, it’s because we have succumbed to Satan’s tactics. He has many, yet one of his most successful is distorting lines of communication within the church.

Intercession is pure communication—with God *and* with the forces of darkness. It’s all about declaring to the enemy what God has already communicated to us, reminding him of his defeat and standing in the gap announcing victory. Satan is fully aware of how vital communication is to our victory and his imminent defeat. Because of this, he’ll do all he can to stir up confusion through miscommunication, which then leads to division. How often has a group of believers—a church, a network of churches or entire denominations—split because they’ve majored on the minors when it comes to scriptural interpretation, theology and eschatology? The more our enemy can wreak havoc among us with such “miscommunication,” the

less unified we are.

Satan also uses the tools of apathy and resignation to keep us from dismantling strongholds held by the religious and antichrist spirits. Once the enemy has us in a place where don't care about anything or anyone, we lose all sense of ownership. And from Satan's standpoint, what better tactic is there to keep Christians apathetic regarding whether abortion laws are enacted, whether schools incorporate Muslim history into curriculum or whether the entertainment world continues to sink further into vulgarity?

Much of the church has been content to watch evil dominate certain cultural mountains while we hunker down on our own religious mountain. Yet when we no longer care about taking back our own communities or cities, we've missed the kingdom perspective of the gospel.

Walking hand-in-hand with such apathy is the notion that it's not our responsibility as believers to save the world. This mentality resigns to believing that the earth is ultimately on a downward spiral none of us can stop, so there's no point in trying to do so. I've heard countless people—Spirit-filled *Christians*, mind you—admit that with today's world “going to hell in a handbasket,” there is nothing they can personally do to change things.

The truth is, we *can* make a difference. In fact, we not only must, we *will* make a difference. And that will come when the American church learns how to invade, dismantle and establish dominion over these strongholds in our nation.

Invade to Conquer

I always thought I understood the meaning of the word *invade*. After all, my father flew an anti-submarine warfare aircraft in the U.S. Navy. My husband served 28 years in the Air Force, including flying fighter aircrafts in the Vietnam War. I had heard the term used often since I was a little child. Yet it

wasn't until a few years ago when I discovered the full scope of this powerful six-letter word. *Invade* has at least eight different meanings:

- To enter forcefully as an enemy.
- To go into with hostile intent.
- To enter as if to take possession.
- To enter and cause injury or destruction.
- To intrude upon.
- To encroach or infringe.
- To advance beyond established limits of property, domain or rights of another in order to possess.
- To make an invasion to take possession or overrun.

Each of those definitions is loaded with meaning, yet none suggests timidity or passivity. If we want to tear down a stronghold, we don't need to send the enemy an announcement, call first or knock at the door when we arrive. We have full permission—from God—to invade.

God has anointed each of us, and the anointing breaks the yoke (Is. 10:27). But when we invade enemy territory as intercessors to dismantle a stronghold, our anointing alone (ministry from position) will not get the job done. We need authority (ministry from alignment). And to have authority imparted to us, we must have relationship with the King of Glory. Jesus summoned His 12 disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out and heal every disease and sickness (Matt. 10:1-2).

Principalities and powers ultimately have no defense against governmental signs and wonders being released. The antichrist spirit vehemently resists them, because it knows they can bring down its rule over a region. When we move into this realm of apostolic signs and wonders, we don't just heal people; we free entire regions from satanic principalities and powers. In fact, signs and wonders on this level do things that our repenting and rebuking can't.

A Different Kind of Praying

We can't resort to an old mindset of prayer if we hope to do this, however. I know far too many intercessors who, after all is said and done, approach prayer as if it involves nothing more than continually asking God for things. They're stuck in a single mode of begging God for Him to move. I call these petition prayers, and although they have their place in the arsenal of every powerful prayer warrior, God is shifting us from petition prayers to apostolic-prophetic intercession. When we spend all our time petitioning God, asking Him for that which He's *already* granted us, we've missed the purpose of intercession.

Apostolic-prophetic intercession, on the other hand, begins with two premises. First, we have been given the authority by God to speak *His* words, not ours. At its core, a petition is a formal request that originates in us rather than God. It's time we reset our default method of prayer from petition that originates in us to proclamations and declarations that originate from the Lord and align us with Him.

The second major premise—one that prayer warriors often forget—is that we are already commissioned and sent by God. Paul uses the perfect illustration of this when he refers to us as ambassadors: "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us" (2 Cor. 5:20). When an ambassador is sent to a foreign nation, he appears on behalf of his native country's ruler, is the extension of that ruler and is given the authority to speak on his behalf. The ambassador comes with inherent power not because of anything he has done personally, but purely because he serves as the incarnate expression (i.e., the mouthpiece, hands and feet) of the one who sent him.

This is our role as apostolic-prophetic intercessors. Jesus came as God incarnate, yet through Christ, we have been adopted as sons of God and joint heirs in His kingdom (Gal.

3:26-29). Since this is a foundational truth of our faith, we must stop praying as paupers and start interceding as ambassadors of the one true God. We have been given the authority: Jesus has commissioned us (Matt. 28:16-20) and empowered us with His Holy Spirit (Acts 2). We already know what to say because He has given us His message via the Word.

The End of the Fight

Let me set the record straight if there is any doubt: Jesus has won. He is the lone victor in the final battle and does not split the spoils with the enemy. The script has already been written: He wins; Satan loses. But until the American church wakes up and realizes we are the enforcers of that victory in the here and now, bringing the kingdom of God to earth, then we will remain oblivious to the battle that continues to wage over souls, cities, states and regions.

If Holy Spirit-filled Christians still can't see that we are currently in a war over this country's government, education, families, media, businesses, religion, and arts and entertainment, then I seriously wonder if they shouldn't be asking God for a hefty dose of discernment. We are at war! And having spent most of my life in and among military families, I know that when you are at war you better know your enemy and his strategies of attack.

The truth is, we *do* have the most potent weapon in the world that can change everything. But until we "wise up" on the various ways Satan distracts, removes and destroys those who wield this weapon—particularly those standing in key areas of the cultural gaps—we will continue to be an army with unlimited potential yet minimal effectiveness, simply because we fail to recognize our own God-appointed power.

(For further detail on everything mentioned in this article, I suggest reading my book *Invading the Seven Mountains With Intercession*.)

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