

Ungodly Spiritualistic Practices

In conjunction with engaging in spiritual warfare, we are not to engage in any ungodly spiritualistic practices, which ultimately involve cooperative interaction with demons and even Satan.

Avoid witchcraft and other occult practices

[MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *You must never sacrifice your sons or daughters by burning them alive, practice black magic, be a fortuneteller, witch, or sorcerer, ¹cast spells, ask ghosts or spirits for help, or consult the dead.* DEUTERONOMY 18:10-11 GW

Do not consult anyone who performs occult practices

Do not go for advice to people who consult the spirits of the dead. LEVITICUS 19:31A GNT

Do not have other “gods” or idols

[GOD, TO THE ISRAELITES:] “I, the LORD, am your God, who brought you from the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery. ³*You shall have no other gods before me.* ⁴*You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is on the earth beneath or that is in the water below.* ⁵*You shall not bow down to them or serve them,* for I, the LORD, your God, am a jealous God, responding to the transgression of fathers by dealing with children to the third and fourth generations of those who reject me, ⁶and showing covenant faithfulness to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. EXODUS 20:2-6 NET

Pray for persecuted Christians

CHAPTER 36

Standing Firm

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I. General

The New Testament contains numerous warnings and exhortations to be faithful to God and to hold to the Christian faith. It is every Christian's constant challenge to do so. We need to stand firm, until the end – while ever watching for Jesus Christ's return and the fulfillment of our hope.

Be Faithful to God

Be faithful to God and Jesus Christ

[SOLOMON, TO THE PEOPLE:] *May you, his people, always be faithful to the LORD our God, obeying all his laws and commands, as you do today.*

1 KINGS 8:61 GNT

When he arrived and saw how God had blessed the people, he was glad and *urged them all to be faithful and true to the Lord with all their hearts.* ACTS 11:23 GNT

Serve God faithfully

Obey the LORD and *serve him faithfully with all your heart.* Remember the great things he has done for you. 1 SAMUEL 12:24 GNT

Do not be unfaithful to God by not obeying him

So Saul died because *he was unfaithful to the LORD and did not obey the LORD's instructions ...* 1 CHRONICLES 10:13A NET

Remember God and His Word

Ensure you remember God

[MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *Be sure you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments, ordinances, and statutes that I am giving you today. ...* ¹⁸*You must remember the LORD your God, for he is the one who gives ability to get wealth; if you do this he will confirm his covenant that he made by oath to your ancestors, even as he has to this day.* DEUTERONOMY 8:11, 18 NET

Counteraction of Demons

Distinguishing between the Holy Spirit and demons

[JOHN:] Dear friends, stop believing every spirit. Instead, *test the spirits to see whether they are from God*, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ²*This is how you can recognize God's Spirit: Every spirit who acknowledges that Jesus the Messiah has come in the flesh is from God. ³But every spirit who does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist. ... ⁶We belong to God. The person who knows God listens to us. Whoever does not belong to God does not listen to us. This is how we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of deceit.* 1 JOHN 4:1-3A, 6 ISV

John says that his readers could tell if the spirit influencing a prophet is the Holy Spirit or an evil one by whether or not the prophet acknowledged Jesus, in particular whether they acknowledged that he had come in the flesh. To do so would be indicative of the Holy Spirit's conviction. Presumably this test for recognizing the Holy Spirit can be applied to other truths about Jesus (cf. 1 Cor. 12:3). Additionally, one can infer from v. 6 that prophets or teachers who do not listen to the teachings of the apostles are not from God and are under the influence of evil spirits.

Demons are driven out of people in Jesus Christ's "name"

She [a girl with an evil spirit] continued to do this for many days. But Paul became greatly annoyed, and turned and *said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out of her at once.* ACTS 16:18 NET

To do things in Jesus Christ's "name" involves acting: as his representative; by his authority; and in accordance with his will. It involves acting in reliance on his power, by faith in him.

The Holy Spirit and prayer also figure in driving out demons

[JESUS:] *But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has already overtaken you.* MATTHEW 12:28 NET

Then, after he [Jesus] went into the house, his disciples asked him privately, *"Why couldn't we cast it out?"* ²⁹*He told them, "This kind can come out only by prayer."* MARK 9:28-29 NET

Engaging in Spiritual Warfare

Believers are to engage in spiritual warfare both in standing firm in their faith and in advancing the cause of God's kingdom. Generally speaking, the former has a defensive sense and the latter an offensive sense.

Resist Satan

But resist the devil and he will flee from you. [JAMES 4:7B](#) NET

Use spiritual weapons and armor

For this reason, take up the full armor of God so that you may be able to stand your ground on the evil day, and having done everything, to stand. ¹⁴Stand firm therefore, by fastening the belt of truth around your waist, by putting on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵by fitting your feet with the preparation that comes from the good news of peace, ...

[EPHESIANS 6:13-15](#) NET

Verse 15 is most likely speaking of believers having a strong grasp of the truths of the gospel so as to be ready for action (cf. NASB, NCV, NKJV). Possibly a readiness to proclaim this gospel is in view.

Spiritual weapons and armor include: faith; . . .

At all times carry faith as a shield; for with it you will be able to put out all the burning arrows shot by the Evil One. [EPHESIANS 6:16](#) GNT

. . . God's word; . . .

And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. [EPHESIANS 6:17](#) NET

The description of God's word as "the sword of the Spirit" reflects its: power; offensive and defensive roles; spiritual nature; and importance to the work of the Holy Spirit. Note that the "helmet of salvation" may well have in view the hope of salvation (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:8).

. . . and prayer

Never stop praying, especially for others. Always pray by the power of the Spirit. Stay alert and keep praying for God's people. [EPHESIANS 6:18](#) CEV

Remember what God has done

Recall the miraculous deeds he performed, his mighty acts and the judgments he decreed, ... [1 CHRONICLES 16:12](#) NET

Remember God's word and commands

[A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] I will take pleasure in your laws and remember your words. ... ⁹³I won't ever forget your teachings, because you give me new life by following them. [PSALMS 119:16, 93](#) CEV

Persistently meditate on God's word and commands

[A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] O how I love your law! All day long I meditate on it. ... ¹⁴⁸My eyes anticipate the nighttime hours, so that I can meditate on your word. [PSALMS 119:97, 148](#) NET

Hold to the Faith

Continue to live by Christian teaching

[JOHN, TO HIS FRIEND GAIUS:] I was so happy when some fellow-Christians arrived and told me how faithful you are to the truth—just as you always live in the truth. [3 JOHN 1:3](#) GNT

Grow in your knowledge of God

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] You will produce fruit in every good work and grow in the knowledge of God. [COLOSSIANS 1:10](#) NCV™

Stand firm until the end . . .

[JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] And you will be hated by everyone because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. [MATTHEW 10:22](#) NET

. . . Persist so that you will receive the reward

So do not throw away your confidence, because it has great reward. ³⁶For you need endurance in order to do God's will and so receive what is promised. [HEBREWS 10:35-36](#) NET

Be Ready for Jesus Christ's Return

See also: *The Timing of Jesus Christ's Return*, p. 122

As you do not know when Jesus Christ will come, keep watch and be ready

"So keep on watching, because you don't know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³But be sure of this: if the owner of the house had known when during the night the thief would be coming, he would have stayed awake and not allowed his house to be broken into. ⁴⁴So you, too, must be ready, because at an hour you are not expecting him the Son of Man will come." [MATTHEW 24:42-44](#) ISV

Do not be deceived by false claims, for Christ's return will be only after certain events – and obvious to all

Jesus answered them [his disciples], "Watch out that no one misleads you. ⁵For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will mislead many. ⁶You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. Make sure that you are not alarmed, for this must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁷For nation will rise up in arms against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸All these things are the beginning of birth pains. ⁹"Then they will hand you over to be persecuted and will kill you. You will be hated by all the nations because of my name. ¹⁰Then many will be led into sin, and they will betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹And many false prophets will appear and deceive many, ¹²and because lawlessness will increase so much, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³But the person who endures to the end will be saved. ¹⁴And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole inhabited earth as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come. ... ²⁶So then, if someone says to you, 'Look, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out, or 'Look, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe him. ²⁷For just like the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so the coming of the Son of Man will be." [MATTHEW 24:4-14, 26-27](#) NET

In v. 8 "birth pains" denotes the time of distress which leads into – or "gives birth" to – the reign of the Messiah, following his return.

II. Spiritual Warfare

Living as God wants means involvement in spiritual warfare. Believers are faced with challenges from spiritual adversaries and also from within themselves. Although the forces that oppose believers are formidable, the Bible gives clear instructions on how to counter any threat – through the supreme power of God.

The Existence of Spiritual Warfare

Believers have spiritual enemies, notably Satan

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens. [EPHESIANS 6:12](#) NET

Be sober and alert. Your enemy the devil, like a roaring lion, is on the prowl looking for someone to devour. [1 PETER 5:8](#) NET

The believer's struggle is primarily and ultimately against spiritual powers.

Believers have human enemies

Be brave when you face your enemies. Your courage will show them that they are going to be destroyed, and it will show you that you will be saved. [PHILIPPIANS 1:28A](#) CEV

Believers have human enemies who are opposed to them in regard to spiritual matters – notably in seeking to prevent the spread of the gospel and/or in seeking to impose their own opposing beliefs.

Believers face internal spiritual conflict

[PETER:] *Dear friends, I urge you as aliens and exiles to keep on abstaining from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul.* [1 PETER 2:11](#) ISV

But God and Jesus enable Christians to overcome

[PAUL:] *What then shall we say about these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ... ³⁷No, in all these things we have complete victory through him [Christ] who loved us!* [ROMANS 8:31, 37](#) NET