

PART VIII

**Fulfilling the
Great Commission**

The Power of the Gospel

Gunner Payne is a man whose zeal for Jesus motivates him to share the gospel. Back in the late 1950s and early 1960s he went door to door in our town of Yorba Linda, telling virtually every resident about Jesus. Most nights of the week he led evangelistic Bible study groups, patiently answering seekers' questions into the late hours of the night. My wife, Carol, and I were the fruit of one of those Bible study groups.

For the first year of my Christian life I followed Gunner around, learning to do everything he did. Part of that involved telling people about Jesus. I could not go to the market or a hardware store without evangelizing someone. By the end of the year I too was leading evangelistic Bible study groups. Between 1963 and 1970 Carol and I led hundreds of people to Christ, and by 1970 I was leading several Bible study groups a week, with more than five hundred people involved. I was appointed to the staff of Yorba Linda Friends Church in 1970, because we had personally brought so many new Christians into the church.

Through example and teaching, Gunner spliced the value of evangelism into my spiritual "genetic code." Some Christians who know me believe my drive to evangelize is unique. But I do not

think it is. *All* Christians should constantly be on the lookout for evangelistic opportunities. Jesus himself preached the gospel throughout his ministry. He commissioned the Twelve (Matt. 10:5-15) and the Seventy-two (Luke 10:1-12) to preach the good news of the kingdom of God, and he now commissions us (Matt. 28:18-20). In Acts 1:8 he promised the disciples, “. . . you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Clearly one of the primary purposes of the Holy Spirit is to motivate and empower our witness.

We know that the gospel transforms us as we believe it. But few of us realize that it also transforms us as we *share* it. When we obey God and preach the gospel, *our* faith is built up. In evangelism we are forced to reach out and take risks. In doing so we grow. Sharing our faith, then, is a power point.

Remarkable Insights

Most of the people I led to Christ between 1963 and 1974 came under “normal” circumstances, at least as measured by typical evangelical criteria: I preached the gospel and answered some questions, and they repented and trusted in Jesus.

But occasionally I led someone to Christ in an unusual way. In some instances I received remarkable insights into their lives (for example, knowledge of a specific serious sin or deep hurt). At other times I experienced what seemed like a supernatural anointing of the Holy Spirit going out with my sharing and drawing people to God.¹ God would reveal details of people’s lives—their deepest secrets and hurts—that opened them to hearing the gospel.

Yet when I described these experiences to colleagues, they encouraged me not to talk about them. My colleagues were uncomfortable with claims that supernatural phenomena such as signs and wonders were still taking place in the church. (So was I!) They felt I would lose stature if other leaders heard about it. They had no explanation for what happened and, like most of us, they feared the unknown.

In 1974 I left the pastorate to become the founding director of the Department of Church Growth at what is now called the Charles E. Fuller Institute of Evangelism and Church Growth. Over the next four years I introduced several thousand pastors to church growth principles, traveling across America and visiting dozens of denominations. During this time I got to know some Pentecostals. I had previously known little about them, and most of what I did know was inaccurate. Their numbers were growing dramatically, which they attributed to combining proclamation of the gospel with works of power from the Holy Spirit.

Skepticism

Because of my theological background, I was skeptical of their claims about healing. But because of their undeniable growth, I could not write them off. So I visited their bookshops and picked up some of their literature. These writings convinced me that something genuine was going on. And they awakened memories of my earlier, unexplainable evangelistic experiences. It began to dawn on me: Perhaps my experiences were somehow related to the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

While this was going on I was getting involved at Fuller Seminary’s School of World Mission, where I served as an adjunct faculty member. I had the honor of coming to know professors like Donald McGavran, Charles Kraft, C. Peter Wagner, and the School of Theology’s Russell Spittler. And I was introduced to George Eldon Ladd’s writings on the kingdom of God.² Their thinking caused me to take a closer look at my theological reservations regarding the Holy Spirit and the charismatic gifts, especially as they were related to evangelism.

Also, at Fuller I met many Third World pastors who reported dramatic instances of signs and wonders and church growth. At first the pastors were quiet about it, but as I probed them they opened up with remarkable stories. I realized that the power of God was at work in the Third World in ways I had not thought possible today.

My earlier unexplained evangelistic encounters paled in comparison with their experiences. At this point I felt compelled to reexamine Scripture, looking more carefully at the relationship between spiritual gifts and evangelism. If this was of God, I reasoned, it had to be biblical.

When I turned to the Bible I tried to answer three questions. First, how did Jesus evangelize? Second, how did Jesus commission the disciples? Third, in the light of their commissioning, how did the disciples evangelize?

How Did Jesus Evangelize?

Jesus, at the beginning of his public ministry, rose in the synagogue in Nazareth, and recited these verses from the prophet Isaiah:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom
for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the
Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:18–19)

Then Jesus stunned his hometown audience by proclaiming, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21).

Throughout the Gospels a clear pattern of ministry unfolds, repeated wherever Jesus went. First came *proclamation*: he preached repentance and the good news of the kingdom of God. Second came *demonstration*: he cast out demons, healed the sick, and raised the dead. These signs demonstrated that Jesus was the presence of the kingdom, the Anointed One.

The Gospels occasionally summarize Jesus’ ministry. It is particularly interesting to read what Matthew thought was most significant about it:

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him. (Matt. 4:23–25; see also 9:35–36)

Here we see the pattern of proclamation combined with demonstration of the kingdom of God, resulting in large crowds and many followers.

Another important aspect of Christ’s ministry was his emphasis on the kingdom of God.³ “Kingdom” is translated from the Greek word *basileia*, which implies an exercise of kingly rule or reign, rather than a geographical realm. The kingdom of God is *the dynamic reign of God*.

Jesus did not consign the kingdom of God to a future millennium. He began his public ministry by announcing, “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:15). Thus the heart of Jesus’ message was both the proclamation of God’s action—“the kingdom is near”—and the demand for a response from all who heard—“repent and believe.”

Jesus demonstrated the presence of the kingdom by healing the sick, casting out demons, and raising the dead. Every one of his miracles had a purpose: to confront people with his message that the kingdom of God had come and that they had to accept or reject it. This powerful combination of the proclamation and the demonstration of the kingdom was a key to his ministry.

Most people can understand how Jesus was able to preach and demonstrate the kingdom of God. After all, he was God come in human form. God heals, casts out demons, and overcomes all forms of evil. But what about the disciples? How were they able to demonstrate the kingdom of God? And what about us? How can we add demonstration to our proclamation? The Holy Spirit and his gifts provide the answer to these questions.

How Did Jesus Commission the Disciples?

For three years Jesus taught the disciples how to minister as he did. He taught them to proclaim and demonstrate the kingdom of God. His postresurrection commission, as recorded in Mark 16:14–20, was consistent with their training:

Jesus appeared to the Eleven as they were eating; he rebuked them for their lack of faith . . . [and he] said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. . . . And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.”

. . . Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.

Many Western Christians are surprised by the emphasis on signs and wonders in this commissioning. Also, the genuineness of Mark 16:9–20 has been challenged on textual grounds. (While it is true that some of the most reliable early manuscripts do not contain this passage, like John 7:53–8:11, it is still included in nearly all Bible versions.) So for the sake of argument, let us discard Mark 16:9–20. Does this really change the nature of our commissioning? Matthew’s version reads:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matt. 28:18–20)

In this passage the Greek word rendered “authority,” *exousia*, denotes power that was divinely given to Jesus. Through the indwelling

Holy Spirit we receive the authority of Christ, which is the authority of the Father. “I tell you the truth,” Jesus told the Jews who were persecuting him, “the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does” (John 5:19).

Jesus proclaimed and demonstrated the gospel wherever he went, and the apostles did likewise. The early disciples cast out demons, spoke in tongues, and healed the sick. Why is their behavior so difficult for many of us to accept? Why are we always dismissing their behavior as the exception—not the norm—for how we are supposed to live the Christian life? When Jesus commissioned them to make and baptize disciples, the disciples understood that they were to go out and do exactly what Jesus had shown them. How else are we to interpret their subsequent behavior? This leads me to my next point.

How Did the Disciples Respond to the Great Commission?

An old adage goes, “The proof of the pudding is in the eating.” This is certainly true of the Great Commission. The book of Acts reveals that the disciples went out and spread the good news in the same fashion as Christ: proclaiming and demonstrating the kingdom of God. Practice is as important as belief, because it communicates our faith. Orthodoxy (right belief) and orthopraxy (right practice) are interrelated, reinforcing and validating each other. The apostles not only taught what they heard, they did what Jesus did.⁴

At the beginning of Acts, Luke wrote that the purpose of his Gospel had been to record all that Jesus did and taught (Acts 1:1). In Acts, Luke continued the story of Jesus’ works and teaching—only now they were done by the disciples (Acts 1:8). Clearly he implies that the ministry of the disciples was the continuation of Jesus’ ministry on earth, the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Notice too that power evangelism went beyond the first “generation” of disciples. There were the apostles themselves. Then a second generation, Stephen, Philip, and Ananias—none of them

apostles—proclaimed and demonstrated the kingdom (Acts 7; 8:26–40; 9:10–18). Barnabas, Silas, and Timothy represented a *third generation* of those who performed works of power. Finally, from every century of church history we have reliable reports of works of power.⁵

The key to their advancing the kingdom of God was of course the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. When the Spirit came on them the disciples received God's power. Now they were able to do works of power and preach with power. In the next chapter we will take a closer look at how they did it.

Proclamation and Demonstration of the Gospel

There are recorded in the book of Acts at least ten kinds of sign phenomena that produced evangelistic growth in the church. They are specifically called “signs and wonders” nine times. They include healing, expelling demons, resuscitation of the dead, speaking in tongues, and being transported from one place to another. Acts 5:12–14 summarizes the disciples’ ministry in a fashion similar to Matthew 4:23–25, the passage that summarizes Christ’s ministry. It says, “The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. . . . [And] more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.” In the book of Acts there are fourteen instances where both apostles and others (for example, Stephen) preached, performed works of power, and saw significant church growth.¹

Even more revealing for me is the contrast in evangelistic results between Paul’s work in Athens (Acts 17:16–34) and his work in Corinth (18:1–17). In Athens Paul argued eloquently at the Areopagus, with the result that “A *few* men became followers of Paul and believed” (17:34). In Corinth, the next stop on his apostolic tour,

the results were that "many who heard him believed and were baptized" (18:8).

While there are several factors that explain the different responses (particularly the different degrees of receptivity found in the people of each city), Paul himself wrote to those in Corinth,

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom. . . . My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power. (1 Cor. 2:1, 4-5)

It appears that in Corinth Paul combined proclamation with demonstration, as Christ had done throughout his ministry. The word and works of God were coupled in an expression of God's divine will and mercy, culminating in the conversion of individuals as well as groups.

Power Evangelism

The combination of my experiences at Fuller and in the field, plus a rethinking of Scripture, led me to begin praying for the sick. Around this time I returned to the pastorate, leading a small home group that my wife, Carol, had helped start. I have written extensively about my experience in the book *Power Healing*, but one aspect of it bears repeating. I discovered that as people were healed and as I encouraged members of my congregation to pray for the sick (and open themselves up to other works of power), evangelism took off. Put simply, the church exploded. Today we have 5,200 people attending the Anaheim Vineyard and 280 Vineyards (with some 50,000 attendees) scattered across North America.

Properly understood, power evangelism can make all other approaches to evangelism more effective. I define power evangelism as a presentation of the gospel that is rational but which also transcends the rational. The explanation of the kingdom of God comes with a demonstration of God's power. It is a spontaneous, Spirit-

inspired presentation of the gospel. It is usually preceded and undergirded by demonstrations of God's presence and frequently results in groups of people being saved. Still, signs and wonders do not save; only Jesus saves. The power for salvation in power evangelism is through the gospel alone. "I am not ashamed of the gospel," Paul writes in Romans 1:16, "because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." The content of the gospel, Paul writes elsewhere, is "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

In power evangelism we do not add to the gospel, nor do we even seek to add power to the gospel. But we do turn to the Third Person of the triune God in our evangelistic efforts, *consciously* cooperating with his anointing, gifting, and leading. Preaching and demonstrating the gospel are not mutually exclusive activities; they work together, reinforcing each other.²

Power evangelism is practiced by people who are open to God's power, because Spirit-empowered Christians are living demonstrations of the gospel. Every power point in this book is a means of preparation for power evangelism: thirst for God's word, obeying his voice, touching the Father's heart, living sacrificially, experiencing spiritual gifts, and so on.

But beware: power evangelism puts us in Western culture on a collision course with the way we have been taught to look at the world. We suffer from a "worldview gap" that inhibits our ability to practice power evangelism. In the next chapter we will take a closer look at how worldviews affect evangelism.

"Satan, come out in the name of Jesus!" I felt the evil spirit leave my body, but it came back immediately. For two hours they struggled to deliver me. It was only when I burned the amulets I had owned that I felt release from the power of evil.

The demon tried to return that night, but I cried out to God to protect me. Then I felt the total presence of God embrace me with his love. I became a Christian that evening.

When Virgo's family heard what had happened, they were convinced that Jesus was more powerful than any other gods or spirits. Within three months all eight members of Virgo's family became Christians.

Virgo, who as I write this is studying at Fuller Seminary's School of World Mission, claims that since 1965 millions of Indonesian Muslims have converted to Christianity. "Some social and political factors have contributed to this growth," he says, "but the major stimulus has been supernatural signs and wonders done by the Holy Spirit through evangelists and church leaders. Power evangelism is the most effective method for winning Indonesians to Christ."¹

Naturally Charismatic

Virgo's story is typical of how God is working in many Third World countries today. C. Peter Wagner offers interesting statistics on power evangelism's impact on church growth. Latin America, which in 1900 had only 50 thousand Protestants, now has more than 50 million. Well over three-quarters of these are Pentecostals or charismatics, and in the last thirty-five years the vast majority have been converted through power evangelism.²

The fastest growth of Christianity in the history of the world, Wagner claims, is occurring in China today, through house churches. When missionaries were driven out in 1950, they left about 1 million believers who were harshly persecuted. Forty years later, there are at least 50 million believers in China, and perhaps twice that number. There are practically no denominations left in

Kingdoms in Conflict

Virgo Handoyo, an Indonesian, was always fascinated by supernatural power. So it was natural that at an early age he became involved with Javanese Kundalini, a form of mysticism rooted in Hinduism and traditional Javanese beliefs. Javanese Kundalini teaches that resident in the spirit of each person is a powerful mother-guardian, and Kundalini strives to awaken and use this power.

"I sought the power and found it," Virgo recently said, "although I now recognize it as demonic. I learned how to communicate with the spirit world. I used black magic. I was able to transport my spirit to other places. I could heal people. I had many mystical experiences."

Then in March 1979 Virgo attended a revival meeting where he heard the gospel. He was attracted to the message, though he made no personal response at the time.

Two days later a friend, who did not know of Virgo's involvement with Kundalini, invited him to a Christian home group meeting. He decided to go. Virgo tells what happened:

During the meeting a woman had a vision of young people involved in black magic. Then the Lord led two people to come beside me and lay their hands on my head. I felt something like a strong electric current flow through my body. Then a brother said,

China, but about 85 percent of Chinese Christians (42.5 million) are Pentecostal or charismatic in their belief and practice. Power evangelism also appears to be an integral part of church growth in China.

Recently Don Dunkerley, director of Proclamation International, in Pensacola, Florida, wrote a letter to me in which he quoted Dr. F. Kefa Sempangi, author of *A Distant Grief*, as saying, "African Christians are naturally charismatic." By that he meant that Christians in Africa know demons are real and powerful, but—in the words of Dr. Sempangi—"Jesus is more real and more powerful and he can deliver you from the spirits that have kept you and your ancestors in bondage for centuries." His church, the Redeemed Church in Uganda, grew to 14 thousand in a year and a half. During this time 150 witch doctors became Christians and left their trade. In his letter Dunkerley continues, "In Uganda today the gospel is moving forward in power encounters between Christ and witchcraft."

Anti-supernatural

Why is power evangelism so effective in Third World countries? In part, the answer is that they are more open to spiritual activity of *all* types—good and evil—which means they easily accept supernatural healings, dreams and visions, the existence of demons, and so on. As Don Dunkerley wrote in his letter, "We [in America] don't notice demonized persons, so we don't believe that demons are cast out today by the power of Christ. We have overlooked the entire supernatural dimension, we are unaware of the spiritual warfare that surrounds us."

When those in a Third World country have a demon cast out, as in the case of Virgo Handojo, they do not wonder if they had a psychological breakdown or a hallucination. Their interpretation of supernatural events is supernatural; they look for a spiritual explanation for the experience. When they hear an explanation of the kingdom of God and are converted, their view of reality is altered. They no longer see the world in categories of "natural" and "supernatural"; all

of reality is now related to the kingdom of God. In other words, because Virgo is converted to the kingdom of God he sees God's Spirit working in the spirit world. He does not need to be convinced that there is a spirit world. The same holds true for Third World witnesses of power evangelism; when they see God's power they too are opened to the gospel. When they convert to the kingdom of God, they see signs and wonders as a natural expression of a new reality.

In Western culture there is skepticism about *anything* spiritual. We are trained to question the supernatural, always looking for alternative explanations for healings, prophecies, evil spirits, and so on. The kingdom of this world says, "The normal manifestations of the kingdom of God—healing, prayer, prophecy—are abnormal, questionable." So we should not be surprised that Great Britain, Western Europe, and North America are not experiencing revival as are other parts of the world today.³

Clearly we would be mistaken if we were to limit power evangelism only to non-Western cultures. It is the presence of God's kingdom that makes power evangelism so effective, not a culture's acceptance of supernatural phenomena. But we must not be naive about the challenge of the task of power evangelism in Western culture, for there is a powerful bias against accepting supernatural phenomena as valid today. Even Christians in Western culture question the normal signs of the kingdom of God.

Kingdom Conflict

Ephesians 6:12 says, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." This verse applies to every aspect of the Christian life, including evangelism. People engaged in power evangelism are members of God's army, sent to do battle against the forces of the kingdom of darkness. They *expect* conflict, because they are always looking to overcome the works of Satan in order to set people free.

The difficulty in the Western church is that most of us do not seem to realize there is a war going on. We do not see the relationship that the Bible sees between God and Satan. Due to our secularized, empirical perception of Christian experience, we are unaware that we are living in a world affected by the two kingdoms.

Often we are insensitive to God's kingdom because we are at best only minimally converted to it. We may have repented of our sin and trusted in Christ, but we seem unaware that we are now members of a new kingdom that is opposed to virtually everything the world around us says is important.

This "worldview gap" has led to the erroneous assumption that the spirit world is somehow less real than the tangible, materialistic one in which we live. The spirit world is relegated to myth and superstition.

By accepting the supernatural as a normal part of kingdom living, we consciously encounter Satan's kingdom daily. It is here that we must take on Christ's authority, as given in the Great Commission, to heal diseases and cast out demons, to demonstrate God's reign. How we fight the battle is the topic of the next chapter.

How to Fight the Battle

In March 1990 I went with a team to Australia to minister at conferences in Sydney and Perth. Before leaving we sensed that God wanted to do great things. We also sensed there would most likely be significant spiritual opposition. So our hundred-member team, which was drawn from the United States and Canada, began interceding in earnest for Australia.

Shortly before we left, one of our key leaders, Brent Rue (a Vineyard pastor from Lancaster, California), told me about spiritual insights that he had gained while praying. Well, actually he heard from God while *sleeping*. Let me explain. One morning while interceding Brent became sleepy, and his personal prayer hour turned into a nap time. However, the Lord gave him a dream that revealed there is a strong spirit that produces rejection in the nation of Australia.

Brent could see that this malevolent, invisible force colors the character of Australia, creating in many people poor self-images, weakness, and defeat, thus undermining the power of the gospel to free people to live fully for God.

When Brent told me about his dream I knew that we were about to be thrust into spiritual warfare. Our battle plans had to be biblical. How were we to respond to a challenge such as this?

Demolishing Strongholds

Scripture teaches that we are called to spiritual warfare. It is critical, though, that we understand the rules of war and what we are fighting against. Paul sheds much light on the nature of spiritual warfare in 2 Corinthians 10:3-6:

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.

On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.

Paul teaches that we do not wage war as the world does—lining up on opposite sides, fighting, killing one another. We have an alternative means of warfare; we employ different weapons that have “divine power to demolish strongholds,” and we fight our battles on a different kind of battlefield.

Where does the battle take place? *In the hearts and minds of men and women.* The strongholds are “arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.” The Corinthians were receiving false teaching and rejecting Paul’s message. What can we learn about spiritual warfare from the Corinthian situation? That there is a battle raging for the hearts and minds of men and women, and Satan knows that if we believe his lies we will fail to love and serve God.

In Colossians 2:8 Paul warns his readers of the influence of “basic principles of this world”—literally in the Greek, “elemental spirits”—on their thinking. We need discernment to avoid being captivated by deceptive philosophy that is based on worldly traditions and elemental spirits. His point raises at least two questions: How do we receive discernment about these spirits? And once we gain discernment, what can we do about it?

Four Steps

First, we ask God for discernment concerning the *nature and activity* of the elemental spirits. When Brent interceded God revealed to him that an elemental spirit in Australia inclines many people—including Christians—to struggle with feelings of rejection and inferiority, which leads to an inability to receive God’s grace and acceptance in Christ (Eph. 2:8-10). Simply being aware of this influence helped us focus our prayers and preaching during the two weeks of meetings. If we are open to God and listen for his voice we can be confident that he will speak to us (John 14:26; 16:13-15)—through dreams, visions, as a “still, small voice,” and, of course, through Scripture. In other words, he is a *living* God who reigns over the earth and talks to his children. All we have to do is listen.

Second, we ask God to *prepare our hearts and minds* to do the work of the kingdom, and to *prepare the people’s hearts and minds* to receive the kingdom. Paul frequently interceded that the early Christians might have discernment:

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. (Phil. 1:9-11)

The twofold strategy behind Paul’s prayer is easy to follow. If we are filled with the knowledge of God—and for this to be so we must remain free from sin—then we will recognize the lies of the devil and reject them. And if the people to whom we minister have their spiritual eyes opened to receive God’s truth, they will be freed from bondage to deception.

Third, we pray that *God may anoint our preaching and teaching*, and then we preach the truth with boldness. This was what Paul asked the Colossians to do: “And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery

of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should" (Col. 4:3-4). The proclamation of the word of God is the key to winning the hearts and minds of men and women. We demolish Satan's strongholds by living in the light of Scripture and manifesting the wisdom of God (Matt. 12:29; Eph. 3:10). Our prayers, therefore, should focus on asking that the knowledge, insight, and wisdom of God's truth might be proclaimed through us. That is exactly how I prayed for Australia. "Lord, shed the light of the truth of your word wherever we go. Demolish the stronghold of rejection through the clear teaching and the reception of grace."

Finally, the goal of our preaching is that the *people pray, repent, seek God, and humble themselves*. Long ago the Lord told Solomon:

"... If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place." (2 Chron. 7:14-15)

These words, spoken to God's people in Old Testament times, apply equally to us. Spiritual battles are won when we act on the truth of the word of God and turn our hearts to him.

Territorial Spirits

Brent's dream points to another aspect of spiritual warfare that Christians are now becoming more aware of: territorial spirits. Territorial spirits are powerful fallen angels—principalities, powers, dominions, thrones, authorities, rulers—who exercise influence over cities, regions, even nations (Eph. 1:21; 6:12; Col. 2:15). They influence every aspect of a culture much as soil types determine which crops can be grown in different regions.

Daniel 10:12-11:1 offers remarkable insight into territorial spirits. It describes two territorial spirits that exercised authority over Persia and Greece—"the prince of the Persian kingdom" and "the

prince of Greece" (10:13, 20). Daniel learned of their presence while praying and fasting. Earlier he had received a disturbing revelation about a "great war," and he was seeking further understanding.

In answer to his prayer, God dispatched a messenger—described as "a man" (perhaps a high ranking angel)—who appeared to Daniel in a vision. Daniel was so terrified by the vision that his "face turned deathly pale" (10:8) and he "fell into a deep sleep" (10:9). A "hand" then touched Daniel and "set [him] trembling on [his] hands and knees" (10:10). The messenger told him to stand up and said, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them" (10:12).

The messenger fought for twenty-four days against the prince of Persia. Twenty-one days into the fight the messenger required help from the angel Michael to overcome what most likely was a demon that exercised influence over the Persian realm.

This passage offers two important insights into how we should pray about territorial spirits. First, it teaches that it is *God*, not us, that deploys angels to do spiritual battle. The messenger told Daniel he had come in response to Daniel's prayers to the Father; the Father dispatched the angels. Second, it teaches that God won the battle. On the cross, Christ disarmed the powers and principalities (Col. 2:14-15). In the end, Christ will destroy them (1 Cor. 15:24). When I prayed about Australia I asked *God* to come against the spirit of rejection. If he chose to deploy angels or send his Spirit to bind the territorial spirit, that was his business. My trust is in God and his strategy, not my ideas and efforts.

Our Ultimate Enemy

Cosmic warfare is between fallen and unfallen angels. However, Ephesians 6:12 indicates that *we* engage Satan in combat as well: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

But I believe that our combat with Satan takes place in a particular way. Paul is describing a struggle in which Satan is our *ultimate* enemy, but not our *immediate* enemy.

Perhaps a brief description of how armies in Paul's day conducted warfare will shed more light on how to interpret this passage. In ancient Near Eastern conflicts, opposing foot soldiers faced each other on a battlefield, with their generals in the rear, overseeing and directing the armies. The generals led through messengers and various signals (flags, hand signals, horns). Everybody fought, but each fought in his own way—foot soldiers, archers, horsemen, messengers, and generals. Now, the ultimate enemy of every foot soldier was the opposing general. But their immediate preoccupation in the midst of battle was with the opposing soldiers.

This is analogous to our situation. We are foot soldiers on a cosmic battlefield, and our ultimate enemy is the evil general, Satan. Under Satan are commanders such as territorial spirits. But we are most likely to have spears thrown at us by his foot soldiers—low-level demons. To deal with these attacks we need, in Paul's words, weapons with "divine power to demolish strongholds" (2 Cor. 10:4). What are these weapons, and how are we to use them?

Defensive Armor

Fortunately, the word of God provides specific instructions about how to fight the war. Ephesians 6:10-18 describes six pieces of armor as analogies for spiritual weapons (plus one other that has no counterpart in Roman armor).

The belt of truth. Putting on God's truth means living out his word—being honest and sincere in our faith, and not full of religious hypocrisy. So the "belt of truth" refers to Christian character and integrity, a life-style that conforms to Scripture.

The breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate protected the soldier's heart. Righteousness is first of all a condition of the heart, and the heart is what determines the course of our lives. The starting point of righteousness is remaining free from sin.

Feet fitted with readiness. We are to be prepared to share the gospel of peace at any time, which means knowing how to tell others about Christ and being open to the Holy Spirit's leading in specific situations.

The shield of faith. The shield protected the soldier against dangerous incendiary missiles. When we take the Great Commission seriously and go on the offensive in challenging Satan's realm, he fights back with flaming arrows. He attacks us and everything associated with us: our church, spouse, children, business—everything. Our shield against these attacks is faith, a belief in God and in his ability to protect us, having confidence in his word.

The helmet of salvation. The helmet, of course, protects the head, the seat of our thought life. Satan bombards us with fear, hatred, suspicion, depression, mistrust, false doctrines, and a host of mental distractions. Thinking Christianly means much more than merely holding right doctrine; it means cultivating the mind of Christ. Our helmet, our protection, is salvation—deliverance from evil and sitting with Christ in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6).

Truth, righteousness, readiness, faith, and assurance of salvation grow and mature as we live devoted and obedient lives that are marked by worshipful hearts, prayerful spirits, and minds conformed to the word of God. This is the defensive armor of spiritual warfare, and without it we are vulnerable to Satan's attack.

Offensive Weapons

Of course, we've been called to more than defense. The last piece of armor—the sword of the Spirit—is designed for both defense and offense. The sword of the Spirit, Paul writes, "is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17). Clearly he is referring primarily to Scripture. But Paul uses language that also can be interpreted to mean a word that is received directly from God and spoken by us. I believe he is referring also to words spoken in the power of the Spirit to assist us in defending ourselves against Satan and in inflicting harm on him.

David Watson points out that the spoken word may come through preaching, teaching, witnessing, or prophesying.¹ To be

authentic all words must be in accordance with the written word, and all must glorify the living Word, Jesus. A primary purpose of Jesus' coming is to destroy the work of the devil (1 John 3:8), and he accomplished it through exposing him as the fraud:

In him [Jesus] was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. (John 1:4-5)

Jesus is the truth, the living Word of God; he is light and there is no darkness in him (1 John 1:5). So whatever he came in contact with he exposed—good as from God, and evil as from Satan. This is how he defeated Satan.

In another place Jesus told the disciples, "How can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house" (Matt. 12:29). For the gospel to bear fruit, Satan must be bound. And Satan is bound by exposing his darkness to the light of God's word! We employed Jesus' "expose-and-conquer" strategy in Australia. Our team went into the enemy's domain in order to begin to take back what the devil had stolen. One of the first things we did was bind the strong man through preaching the truth about God's grace and acceptance and thus exposed the spirit of rejection.

Spiritual Boldness

Paul also mentions another weapon, one that has no counterpart in Roman armor: praying in the Spirit. I mentioned earlier in this chapter that Paul regularly interceded that the believers be filled with the knowledge of God and discernment, for the word of God is the key to destroying satanic strongholds in Christians' lives. But there is another element to intercession that is critical to the defeat of Satan—prayer that God's word may be spoken with boldness and power.

A closer look at the apostles' prayers reveals much about intercession and spiritual warfare. One of the best examples is that of Peter and John in Acts 4. After preaching to the Sanhedrin and

receiving threats, they returned to the Jerusalem church and reported what happened to them. Then they called a prayer meeting. They prayed that God might anoint them to "speak your word with great boldness . . . [and] stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders . . ." (Acts 4:29-30). God answered their prayers: "After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly" (Acts 4:31). This is the kind of intercessory prayer that will overcome Satan: appealing to God for boldness to fill our mouths with his words and anoint our hands with his deeds. In other words, praying for power evangelism.

Paul continually prayed for boldness, clarity, and opportunity to preach. He also asked others to pray that he would have ample opportunity and clarity in his preaching:

Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel. (Eph. 6:19)

Paul's prayer captures the heart of how our team interceded for Australia: "Lord give us opportunity and boldness to preach your word, that we might unmask, disarm, and render powerless the evil lies of the spirit of rejection that have built a stronghold in the hearts and minds of the people."

The Lord answered our prayers for Australia. We preached the gospel with an authority that I have rarely experienced before. Over eighteen thousand people attended the meetings, with hundreds being saved, healed, renewed, and delivered from problems of rejection and defeat. God does truly answer prayer.

We also demonstrate the kingdom of God as we care for the poor and homeless. How we do that is the topic of the last chapter.

bores" as those in need and for whom we may have to cross hostile racial barriers (Luke 10:25-37).

Jesus also gave his disciples a clear mandate to act for social justice: "I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20). Obedience to God requires private righteousness and *standing for righteousness in the world* (Matt. 25:31-46).

Justice and Revival

The call to social justice is not "adding to the gospel." It flows from the heart of a God who hates iniquity. The core of the gospel is not concern for social justice, but it certainly provokes that concern. Without that concern, the gospel has not been grasped. That is why social justice goes hand in hand with revival. Great leaders in the history of the church have understood the relationship between the gospel and justice. Consider these examples:

- John Chrysostom (347-407), one of the most powerful preachers in church history, devoted more time and energy to the poor than to preaching. He established many Christian charities, hospices, and hospitals for the destitute.
- Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), the founder of a great monastic movement, led many people to Christ. He also established a network of hostels, hospices, and hospitals that survive today.
- John Wyclif (1329-1384), who translated the New Testament into English, led a grass-roots movement of lay preachers and relief workers who ministered to the poor.
- Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899), best known for his evangelistic ministry, also established more than 150 street missions, soup kitchens, clinics, schools, and rescue outreaches.

Caring for the Poor

Social justice is at the very heart of the gospel. Jesus stated his mission in Luke 4:18-19: "to preach good news to the poor, . . . to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." In the Old Testament the "year of the Lord's favor" was the year of Jubilee, in which debts were to be remitted, slaves freed, land redistributed (Lev. 25). Jesus announced the impending establishment of an eternal Jubilee.

This was fulfilled in the kingdom that Jesus brought. It is a kingdom in which "justice roll[s] on like a river, [and] righteousness like a never-failing stream" (Amos 5:24), a kingdom that "upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry" and "sets prisoners free" (Ps. 146:7).

Jesus saw the people he preached to and healed as "harassed and helpless" victims of injustice who were powerless to help themselves (Matt. 9:35-36). He linked his healing ministry with ministry to the poor, because he saw both as "bringing justice" (Matt. 11:5; 12:15-21). In the Sermon on the Mount he pronounced blessing on those who hungered and thirsted for justice (Matt. 5:6). Jesus also drew a connection between the kingdom and the command to "love one's neighbor as oneself" (Mark 12:28-34), describing our "neigh-

Seeking social justice is a mark of true discipleship. But how are we to work for social justice while living under political systems and within social institutions that are so resistant to justice? Here are some of the principles that can guide us.

The Lamb's War

1. *Our primary calling is to a spiritual, not a social or a political, justice.* Before we can go out and fight injustice in the world, justice must personally and corporately live in our hearts. Conquering greed, lust, pride, hate, envy, and fear begins in *us*. Peter writes, "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" (1 Pet. 2:12).

Jesus died on the cross to conquer all forms of injustice *in the world* (John 3:16-17). He left specific instructions for living in a hostile environment: to love our enemies (Matt. 5:43-48); to look after the welfare of others, even those who do evil to us (Matt. 5:39-42); to pray for God's will to be done on earth (Matt. 6:10); to wait for the final judgment in which God will separate believers from non-believers.

He did not, however, direct us to form a "Christian state" (Matt. 13:24-30). We may fight to preserve justice and peace in the political order—such as in fighting against poverty or racism—to make the world a more tolerable place in which to live. But we should not confuse the correcting of societal ills with the implementing of the kingdom of God.

Pentecostalism has been one of the greatest forces for social justice in Central and South America in this century. However, David du Plessis, the late Pentecostal spokesman, pointed out that the changes came as a *by-product* of the gospel. Pentecostal missionaries are primarily concerned with correcting spiritual problems, and in doing so social injustice is addressed.

2. *When we fight for justice and peace in the world, evangelism remains our primary mission.* Jesus released the captives by preaching and demonstrating the good news of the kingdom of God wherever he went (Luke 4:18, 43). If our efforts to overcome injustice are detached from spiritual transformation, we are on the road to being taken over by the agenda of the world, for only spiritual transformation addresses the root cause of oppression. The pulling down of evil structures is only a by-product of the presence of the kingdom of God. When people receive the gospel of righteousness, peace, and joy and turn from their injustice, greed, and hate, then—and only then—do we fulfill our call to free the captives.

Ultimately, the most effective way to strike a blow against abortion is to win abortionists to Christ; to fight drug abuse is to win drug dealers to Christ; to combat crooked politics is to win politicians. Then *they* will be salt and light in the world, preaching the gospel and testifying to the spiritual causes of abortion, drug abuse, and crooked politics. In some instances they will change laws that condone abortion, alter social conditions that foster drug abuse, and transform governments that oppress the poor and deny basic civil rights.

Mark Buntain's ministry in India illustrates this principle. In 1953 he started the Calcutta Mission of Mercy, because of the people's initial response to his preaching: "Don't try to give us food for our souls until you give us food for our stomachs." Today their mission feeds twenty-two thousand people a day; it is run by a thousand Indian nationals. The mission also runs a hospital, a school of nursing, village clinics, a hostel for destitute youth, and twelve schools. It has also produced an evangelistic harvest. Four thousand people attend Buntain's church—the Assembly of God in Calcutta—and he preaches to a potential audience of 145 million listeners three times a week over the radio. His work on behalf of the poor is remarkable, but evangelism remains the focus of his ministry.¹

3. *Seeking social justice is spiritual warfare.* Evil powers, authorities, and institutions are committed to spreading injustice, oppres-

ever since. Susan still has a lot to overcome, but with God's grace and the church's support she has an excellent chance of living a productive life.

Love and Sacrifice

The greatest weapon of all, love, is also our motivation for social justice (1 Cor. 13:13). All of us are familiar with Mother Teresa. For forty-five years she has lived in the slums of Calcutta, ministering to the poorest of the poor. While few of us will ever be called to such sacrifice as Mother Teresa has been, we can learn from her motivation for reaching out to the poor.

Mother Teresa received her calling on September 10, 1946, during a train ride to Darjeeling, India. However, it was not a vision of the poor that motivated her. It was her love of Jesus and obedience to his word. "[Her calling] was a flash of light on the road to Damascus," writes her biographer Edward Le Joly, "a meeting with Jesus, injecting a new spirit and direction to her apostolic life."² Jesus is the source of Mother Teresa's motivation. "She obeys His promptings, His direction, without questioning. She does not think of herself, she does everything for Him. And she does it with such complete trust in His power that nothing seems impossible to her. It is all done for God."³

At times our sacrifice for the poor means literally losing our lives. This was illustrated to me recently by the death of a Tasmanian missionary to the Philippines. On March 1, 1989, I preached in Melbourne, Australia, on ministry to the poor. As I spoke I sensed that some who answered the call to go out and serve the poor would be martyred, so when I invited them to come forward I mentioned that it might mean their deaths. Some observers report that five hundred young people responded. Two weeks later a woman from Tasmania listened to a tape of my talk and was anointed by the Holy Spirit to minister to prison inmates in the Philippines. She had been preparing for three years, but she did not sense God's anointing until listening to the tape. Her sister later wrote that during the three

sion, hatred, bigotry, cruelty, tyranny, brutality, and anything else that stands against the kingdom of God (Eph. 6:12). People seeking kingdom justice should expect supernatural conflict.

The conflict is intense, but we are equipped with powerful weapons. To understand our weapons we must understand that at the cross Jesus introduced a different kind of warfare. He died for his enemies, to create a people who love their neighbors *and* love their enemies (Rom. 3:21-26; 5:6-11).

We are waging the Lamb's war, a war that Jesus—the Lamb of God—won on the cross. In sacrifice he triumphed over evil. So the cross is the basis for fulfilling Christ's call to justice.

Our weapons have "divine power to demolish strongholds" (2 Cor. 10:3-6). But they are not like modern weapons of military power, political force, or social activism. They are truth, righteousness, readiness, faith, salvation, the word of God, prayer, sacrifice, and love (Eph. 6:10-18; Matt. 16:24; James 2:8).

Powerful weapons are needed to overcome powerful forms of evil. This was illustrated to me by the story of a young girl who attends the weekly Vineyard Lamb's Lunch, a meal and ministry time our church sponsors for over two hundred homeless and impoverished individuals. A few months ago twelve-year-old Susan (not her real name) showed up with a dozen kids in tow. They all lived in a run-down motel. Their parents were in desperate straits. Susan's mother was a heroin addict who disappeared for days at a time.

Susan told Monte Whitaker, the pastor responsible for the Lamb's Lunch, that in the past year nine of her friends had died. "How?" he asked.

"Overdose. Suicide. Shot. Knifed. And . . . you know what rape means?"

"Yes." "Well, they died as a result of being raped. But not me. I've lived."

That week Susan received a warm meal, God's love, and the gospel. She trusted in Jesus, was filled with the Holy Spirit, and has been coming back to the church with other kids from her motel

years of preparation the young missionary had learned the way of the cross, "the way of brokenness so that she was empty of self and full of God."

"Two people," her sister added, "even had visions, one in Sydney, one in Tasmania, that were of her death, yet each did not know the significance of them." In August 1989 the Tasmanian missionary was taken hostage and martyred by inmates in a Philippines prison. Just as Abel "still speaks, even though he is dead" (Heb. 11:4), the suffering of that young missionary remains a powerful witness of the love of God for the hungry, for prisoners, and for the disadvantaged.

It is appropriate that we end *Power Points* with this young missionary's story, because her life sums up the goal of spiritual growth, that we may lose our lives for the glory of God. Her life was not wasted, for, in Paul's words, "to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21).

AFTERWORD

Last Days Ministry

Could we be entering the period of time immediately preceding the return of Christ? I believe that we could be. According to Scripture, only the Father knows the exact time of Jesus' return (Matt. 24:36). But the conditions for knowing the general time that Jesus taught in passages like Matthew 24:1-51 and Mark 13:1-37 have been met.

Yet despite these clear signs, much of the Western church is not ready for Jesus' return. There are Christians running around who are saying, "Oh, great. Jesus is coming!" But they do not understand that when he returns they will have to stand before a holy Father, a righteous Judge. Their hearts are not ready; they have made no preparations; they have not kept their vows. They have no fear of God.

The nation of Israel was in a situation similar to ours when Amos prophesied back in the mid-eighth century B.C. During this time the Israelites were enjoying great prosperity, military victories, and political success. They were secure and smug, confident that God was pleased with them. They thought of themselves as the people of God, the chosen ones. But they were deceived, for they also practiced idolatry, immorality, oppression of the poor, corruption, and materialism. Because of Israel's sin, God sent Amos to warn

POWER POINTS

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Submit to Christ • Take up the Cross • Depend on the Holy Spirit
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