

BELIEVING UNTO FEAR OR INTO FREEDOM

Recently I was in my home, my wife and I were in our bedroom relaxing and talking. I had arrived from work not too long before then and we were catching up on the day's happenings. It was early in the evening. She was lying on the bed while I was moving around doing little things here and there, when she suddenly jumped and pointed out that there was a bat in the room. A bat? Then I saw it; a small bat flying across the room. At that point it flew into the open wardrobe. My wife was closer to it and I asked her to simply close the wardrobe door on it, that I would tackle it later. At that same time we had visitors arriving, so we left the poor lost little bat in the closet while we went down to attend to our guests.

When we returned to the room later, I got an empty clothes basket, opened the wardrobe door, guided the bat into the basket, closed a lid on it and sent it out to be thrown away. After this was done, I joked with my wife that she is lucky she didn't attend one of those churches, that the night would have been an all-night prayer session.

While the bat was resting trapped in our room, I had joked with my wife and our guests that we had a witch upstairs. We all had a laugh about it. We discussed a bit about the biology of bats and how that one may have gotten into our room. We reasoned that it missed its way and possibly was trying to hide in a space near the AC fitted into the wall when it fell into the room. Since it was now lost in strange surroundings, it was flying aimlessly around in the room. My wife confirmed that she saw it fly from near the AC inside the room.

Now, notice that we entertained no more concern than for simply getting the bat out of the room. We didn't even bother killing it. We just trapped it and sent it out in a basket.

Why was that? Because we recognize that it was just a bat, and there was no chance that it was a witch. When I joked I had a witch upstairs, I was making mockery of the typical Christian reaction one sees these days. Why did I joke that my wife was lucky that we didn't attend certain kinds of churches? Because the common 'Christian' these days would have entered into a tirade of prayer born out of fear.

Holy Ghost fire! The blood of Jesus! Back to sender! You will not get me. In the name of Jesus!! All because they saw a bat.

Like it has been said, we do not see with our eyes but rather we see *through* our eyes. We see with our hearts according to what is therein. Notice this truth as spoken by Caleb.

*I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the land, and I brought word back to him **as it was in my heart.** Josh 14:7*

What was he talking about? He was reporting what happened at Kardesh-Barnea when twelve spies were sent into the Promised Land. They all saw the fruitful land and also the giants who lived therein. Ten of them said the land could not be taken because the giants were too big, but Caleb

(together with Joshua) reported what was inside his heart. He saw according to what was inside his heart. It is not what is outside but what is inside the heart.

What we see in life is according to what is inside our hearts. A bat-in-the-room will be seen as different things depending on what you have as background in your heart. I imagined if we were the typical so-called Christians I see these days, that bat couldn't have been anything but a witch, an agent of Satan that would have needed to be destroyed. We would have noticed that it come 'out of the wall.' We would have used all the weapons in our arsenal to spiritually attack a poor misled creature. We would have killed it, anointed the corpse with oil for total destruction, and burnt the carcass while the whole family would dance around it singing songs of victory like American Indians. I imagine the shock in heaven among the angels.

Why would we have reacted this way? It is because that is what so-called churches teach these days as spiritual warfare. Everywhere there are enemies and witches who want to kill you. Every bat, owl or cat is a transformed witch. Everything is seen as an attack of 'agents.' The truth is that these are the common fears of an African which has been Christianized (I read that Europeans had those fears too at a time).

One of my friends was analysing this one day. He was concerned about how his sister-in-law was leading another of the sisters-in-law in prayer. The younger woman was due to deliver her child and she had gone for prayers with the pastor of the older one. His issue was not the prayer sessions but the topic of the prayers. He pointed out that the church and that their pastor would raise prayer points against every human agent that is against the pregnancy and the delivery. He would specifically pray against everything that the girl had been given to eat by any auntie and any uncle. According to him, the poor young woman may have come for prayers with a clean mind, but she would leave the place full of suspicion concerning what who was giving her what to eat. She would become paranoid all of a sudden. My friend wondered whether the prayers would have liberated her or sent her into bondage. That is why I captioned my sermon "believing unto fear or into freedom." That is not the gospel; that is the preaching of fear. When the prayer session leads you into paranoia rather than freedom, that is *not* the gospel.

As my friend was speaking and I was agreeing with him, his wife pointed out that indeed there are enemies and that we must never forget that). We agreed with her, but remarked that they do not deserve these kinds of prayer sessions, and that indeed the real enemies of the Christians are not aunties and uncles, but spiritual forces of Satan, and they are handled in a totally different way.

By the way, someone asked me recently if I believed in curses and spells, or jazz, like we say in Nigeria; I said I did. He was surprised to hear that. His surprise I guess was because of my level of 'professional enlightenment' and my general demeanour towards people who blame everything on such things. I told him that as a Christian I necessarily must believe in spiritual things, and that I have seen tangible answers to prayers. If the positive exists there must be the negative, so it is reasonable that curses and spells do exist today. I have seen situations which we had to help people tackle with prayer, and beyond this I have the testimonies of credible people and solid

men of God who know the truth and who have seen these spiritual forces in operation. But at the end I explained again, that though curses and spells exist, they are not the causes of most problems in people's lives and they are powerless against the believer in Christ, and that is why it often appears like I am saying they don't exist. Only sinners need to fear these things.

I was invited to preach in a fellowship some time ago. I taught there for about 3 days, and I spoke partly on the spiritual warfare thing. Good enough I wasn't briefed about what had been going on in the fellowship before my arrival so no one could rightly accuse me of bias. I simply preached the word of God as it was laid in my heart. I will relate some of the things I taught in the course of this short write up, but I want to point out what was said by someone later after the programme was over. A lady walked up to one of the fellowship leaders who was a main proponent of my coming and she said to her, "Sis Ebele (not her real name), the fear level has come down."

The fear level has come down! Where was the fear level before I came?

The people had been led into fear by all kinds of teachings. They were acutely aware that witches were after them; close relatives and distant ones were envious of their progress and may be raising altars (O, those altars) against them. They were taught that they needed to pray.

While speaking I rebuked a practise taught in certain circles in which Christians are encouraged to wake up to pray between the hours of 12 midnight and 2 am. The reason they are told is that this is when satanic activity is most intense and Christians must wake up to modulate these activities. What I didn't know was that someone had come to that same place to teach that same thing and the people had started complying. Let me say right off that it is nonsense. Where in the bible did you ever see that taught? People have formed doctrines on the testimonies of former occultists (I have read some of the books), and that is not right. Doctrines are to be formed from the word of God. What the Bible teaches is that "in peace I will lie down and sleep, for the Lord alone makes me dwell in safety." What God teaches us is that we are seated in heavenly places with Christ Jesus, far above all satanic and occultic powers (Eph 1:20; 2:6). The word of God also teaches that our lives are hidden with Christ in God (Col 3:3). The prayer said before bed is potent while you sleep. The God you prayed to "neither sleeps nor slumbers." He does that so that His children can sleep at the appropriate times.

People pray not out of faith but out of fear. They are told that altars are being raised up against them and they can't afford to sleep (Believe me, you will die faster if you don't sleep). They are admonished to pray against all altars, those raised before they were born and those raised by enemies. And people love these pointless exercises. It feels good to the flesh that they are doing something. They call it spiritual warfare, but it is like punching the air. They are fighting imaginary enemies while leaving the real ones alone.

I like to ask people, 'are these enemies new?' Did they not exist in the days of Jesus on the earth? How come neither He nor any of the apostles ever gathered people to pray these kinds of prayers? All Jesus ever did was gather people to teach them the principles of the kingdom. The

only prayer he taught his disciples to pray said nothing about enemies but about being kept from temptation. The only time he wanted them to pray with Him, we see, was that they should help Him pray till he would have the boldness and the confidence to enter into the will of God. When he asked them to pray with him we are told what he prayed about. That must have been the issue he wanted them to pray with him about.

*"My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me." And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; **yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt.**" And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "So, you men could not keep watch with Me for one hour?" **Keep watching and praying, that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.**" Matt 26:38-41*

What do we see? The prayer was to do the will of God and to not fall into temptation dictated by the weakness of the flesh.

Where did we learn all these strange warfare prayers from? I will tell you. It is the native fear that Africans have for gods and spirits. Every problem the African man has must be caused by his adversary. No one says 'where is God my maker?' 'What have I done to break the blessing of God away from my life?' We carried these African mind-set into the church and decided to misappropriate the power of God in fighting them. The other day I saw a bill board in which a church was advertising their annual killing conference. What are they killing? Witches! Jesus is my Lord! People gather annually to kill witches. That is not the gospel of Jesus. No wonder the church of Christ is making little advance. The people who attend to those things are afraid. I have never, at least in the last 25 years, ever since I started studying the word of God, prayed about witches. What would I do that for? Am I saying they don't exist? No. I am only saying they can't do me anything, and I have more important things to pray about. The witch that wants to die should try casting his or her spell on me. I do not need to attend a killing conference for that to happen; all I need is to know the triumphant word of truth and keep it in my heart.

So you see why that bat would have been thought of as a witch, because we are confused in our African minds. We see owls at night and we start prayers. If a cat mews near our window, that is a cause for prayer. Oh, if we have a bad dream, that is it, prayers all over again. Prayers of fear, and not of faith.

Different kinds of prayer

There are different kinds of prayer. The only prayer that counts is the prayer of faith. All prayers that make sense in the realm of the spirit must be prayers of faith. It can manifest as intercessory prayer, or thanksgiving or whatever, but they must be motivated by faith for them to be anything. Unfortunately, most of these prayers against witches are prayers of mythology and prayers of fear.

Let me quickly state some spiritual facts.

Yes there are enemies but they are not those witches people often fear. The enemy of your soul are the devil and his demons, but they do not have any power to do anything to you unless you hand yourself to them. The only powers they have are the powers to tempt, to deceive and to accuse. The power of accusation is used against your ignorance of the word of God and when you have fallen for their temptations.

The main weapon of the devil against you is temptation. That is why Jesus emphasized, "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from doing evil." When we fall into temptation, we do evil and we come under the power of the devil to accuse and to afflict. Our energies must be spent on gaining the knowledge of God and our personal prayers must have a lot of elements of praying for the strength to overcome temptation. All these prayers to modulate the midnight activities of the devil are a total waste of time.

Witches and occultic power do exist but they cannot do anything to the child of God. It does not require any prayer on your part. Just live your life! Notice something here:

Instead, he turned and looked out toward the wilderness, where he saw the people of Israel camped, tribe by tribe. Num24: 1,2

That was Balaam, observing Israel. They were just camped, relaxing in their tents, not praying or doing anything special. Yet Balaam was seeing things about them. What did he see?

No curse can touch Jacob; no magic has any power against Israel.

For now it will be said of Jacob, 'What wonders God has done for Israel!' Num 23:23 NLT

Any child of God in covenant relationship with Him by the power of the shed blood can relax in peace and not worry his or her head over who is casting spells and who is raising altars. Those preachers who preach these altar-against-you messages rightly observed that sometimes those who want to harm you may be raising altars, as we can see here that Balaam did that severally, but they seem to overlook that they altars were useless against the people of Israel as testified to by Balaam who himself raised the altars. The people did not pray against the altars, neither did they raise contrary altars. They did not give any special offerings or make any special sacrifices. They were just resting under the shadow of the almighty. In fact they were not even aware of Balaam's altars.

So you understand why I threw the bat away without any thoughts, and why I will throw any other bat, figuratively speaking now, away without worrying my soul. Why did I do that?

Because I'm a believer in Christ Jesus, and greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world. All powers of the devil are inferior to the power of Christ in my life.

I can throw any 'bat' away because the word of the Lord to me, and it is the same to every believer, is that "no evil shall befall me, neither will any plague come near my dwelling."

He said, "though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for the Lord is with me."

I know that I am seated in heavenly places with Christ Jesus, far above every power of the wicked one.

Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you. Luk 10:19

Yes I have seen according to all these things as they were in my heart, so I knew that it was just a bat. No witch that wants to live comes near my window. I am too much in Christ for them all!

The Christian's warfare

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Eph 6.10-13

Yes I know that Christians have a war to fight. But what is the nature of that war? As you can see, it is to be able to stand firm in faith. Satan is always trying to derail us from the way of the Lord and from our walk in faith. He wants us to walk away from the will of God. The day of evil for the Lord Jesus was that day in the garden. He had to overcome the temptation to stray away from the plan of God. Satan tried to persuade us that the word of God is not true. Our warfare is so as to keep in faith. Notice that we are not fighting witches and the joke called spirit-husbands or spirit-wives. We are fighting the tempter and the accuser of the brethren. We are wrestling both for our faith and that of our brethren. We do pray for people that their faiths may not fail. We wrestle the devil also with the preaching of the word of God so as to rake territories from him.

Please read the prayers of the Lord Jesus and those of Paul and you will not see these fear-ridden prayers that we see these days there.

Because I do not have all time and space here to teach in details on these things, please let me recommend 2 series of teachings I gave at different times in which I taught in details the things about spiritual warfare. These are "The Christian's Warfare" and "We have overcome." They are many hours of teaching which are all available free from the ministries website (www.kwm.com.ng). The titles are listed below.

Also please I wish to recommend the book “The Triumphant Church” by Kenneth E Hagin. This is a book that will help you to keep away from many of the excesses that are often practiced by people with little understanding.

Please get those messages, listen to them; get the book and read it. Remember if you do not know the truth you cannot be set free. Knowledge is what leads to freedom for you.

Live free continuously in Christ Jesus.

Pastor Bankie



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Titles on spiritual warfare and victory over the power of the devil by Pastor Bankie

1. THE CHRISTIAN’S WARFARE (series)

- Satan is only a schemer
- What Satan wants to get from you
- Defeating the prince of the power of the air
- Using the shield of faith
- Demonstrating God’s wisdom
- The sandal and the breastplate
- Defending what God has given
- A safeguard in the word
- Loving the Word of God
- Meditating in the Word

2. WE HAVE OVERCOME (series)

- The fight of faith
- The schemes of the Devil
- The teaching of Balaam
- What the devil wants in your life
- Overcomers indeed
- Doors of Satan
- Resisting the devil
- Taking it by force
- Exercising authority