

Book Review: Spiritual Warfare: A Biblical and Balanced Perspective, by Brian Borgman and Rob Ventura

In the subtitle of their book on spiritual warfare, authors Brian Borgman and Rob Ventura promise to provide a perspective that is both biblical and balanced. The prospect of a balanced approach is immediately appealing, given widespread excesses in various branches of modern Christianity on the subject; and I thought it a successful endeavor in that regard. But what I found more striking, when I dived in, was the “biblical” part of the equation. I say this by way of confession: spiritual warfare is not among my list of favorite theological topics to think about. In fact, whether it's because of the very common imbalanced perspectives a modern reader is apt to encounter, or whether it's simply because I have no military experience, and so the analogy of warfare is a little foreign to my own history, I have to admit a little distaste for the subject. However, by the time I finished the introduction alone, I had to acknowledge that this is no small theme in the New Testament, and that it has roots reaching clear back to Eden. Which means that it allows for a biblical treatment, because it is, in fact, a pervasive biblical motif. And this, further, means that such a study as this book undertakes really is necessary if we are to have a thoroughly biblical perspective on the Christian life at all.

Clearly, then, there is a need for biblical treatment of spiritual warfare; so is this the book to fill that need? Well, a book on spiritual warfare taken primarily from Ephesians 6:10-20 immediately begs a comparison to William Gurnall's classic, *The Christian in Complete Armour*, which attempts the same thing. I've never heard anyone say anything bad about this classic treatment of Christian warfare, and I've heard a lot of good; nevertheless, this review will not give any sort of comparison of the two works because, as long as I'm confessing things, I have to confess that I've never read it. I've frequently thought that I should read it; but there's something daunting about its sheer length and outdated modes of expression. So, while I can't tell anyone how it compares to the classic, I can at least surmise that a book like this one really is needed, Gurnall notwithstanding, because I can't help but think that there are others out there like me, who have never gotten up the resolve to conquer the formidable classic.

There are several things about this book that will make it useful for individual or group study. It's not intimidating, for one thing – it's brief, easy to read, uses real-life examples for application, and has a very straightforward approach: taking one element at a time, it simply explains the text of Ephesians 6:10-20, looking back to the customs of Paul's time to clarify understanding and forward to the circumstances of our time to facilitate better assimilation and application.

In addition, it makes good on its pledge to be balanced and biblical. There's nothing flashy about it. It doesn't tease out complicated tactics for binding the devil or exorcising demons. Rather, it gives the undramatic but scriptural portrayal of the hard, faithful discipline of a soldier holding his ground against spiritual forces that look a lot less like Hollywood than like the mundane troubles and temptations we're all too familiar with. I appreciate the authors' faithfulness to their statement of intent: “Our primary focus will not be Satan, but Christ, who is the Victor over all”.

In short, here is the structure of the book: the first chapter, “Be strong in the Lord,” places the warfare in the midst of the already/not yet realities ushered in by the accomplishment of the risen and reigning Christ. Spiritual warfare is, of course, a predominantly practical theme, but it's helpful to remember that this practical struggle can't be engaged effectively without understanding the doctrinal context in which the fight is waged. If this doctrinal grounding guards against rashly jumping into a struggle that's misunderstood, then the second chapter, on putting on the full armor of God, guards against the opposite temptation of passivity, or emphasizing doctrine to the exclusion of earnestly fighting. The third chapter I found particularly insightful and applicational, as it discussed the real ways Satan wages his war on Christians, with subtlety, deception, and twisting the scriptures. After a fourth chapter, providing a balanced treatment of the nature and reality of the conflict, the central portion of the book, chapters five through ten, explains each item of the Christian's armor in light of the historical function of Roman armor. These chapters briefly provide an explanation of the text of Ephesians six,

and suggest practical strategies for putting the teaching to use. Chapters eleven and twelve bring up the place of prayer in the warfare, with some more insightful and applicational thought in the former chapter, especially. And the final chapter provides a “debriefing,” or concluding summary of the whole.

I think this book will find a niche and be put to good use in that niche. It's brief, which is a positive for those who do not want an exhaustive or closely reasoned study, or a technical commentary on Ephesians six. It also has several questions “for reflection and discussion” at the end of each chapter, which further adapts it to group study. And, even though it may not be as thorough as Gurnall or as detailed as an exegetical commentary, it still takes the scripture seriously, doesn't overlook any part of the passage under consideration, and gives considerable effort to practical application.