

The Art of War

Sun Tzu

Reflection on August 1, 2018

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK: Spiritual Warfare from a Military Perspective

Over the years, I have read more than once The Art of War by Sun Tzu. It is a staple at the Naval War College and so quotations from the book are forever showing up in naval presentations and papers. This is pretty remarkable since this Chinese philosopher and military strategist lived 544 – 496 B.C., just after the end of the Hebrew exile in Babylon.

On my walks between home and church, I recently listened to an audio version of this familiar book. It is interesting how the book sounds a little different when I listen to it with my new pastor's ears. The first chapter, Laying Plans, made me reflect on spiritual warfare. Although there are many Bible-based books on the topic of spiritual warfare, I appreciated the clean, clinical thoughts of Sun Tzu as they apply to the art of deception. Since Satan is the Great Deceiver, I believe this writing may offer fresh insights, albeit abstract, on how the Evil One works to ensnare us. To understand the application of Sun Tzu's text to spiritual warfare, it must be understood that "we" is from the perspective of the Evil One (just as in C.S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*) and "the enemy" / "he" / "him" refers to humans.

Sun Tzu writes this:

"All warfare is based on deception.

Hence, when able to attack, we must seem unable; when using our forces, we must seem inactive; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away; when far away, we must make him believe we are near.

Hold out baits to entice the enemy. Feign disorder, and crush him.

If he is secure at all points, be prepared for him. If he is in superior strength, evade him.

If your opponent is of choleric temper, seek to irritate him. Pretend to be weak, that he may grow arrogant.

If he is taking his ease, give him no rest. If his forces are united, separate them.

Attack him where he is unprepared, appear where you are not expected."

We are currently in a sermon series on the Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Spiritual warfare is prominent throughout the letter. When we get to chapter six (6) of Ephesians, we shall look at putting on the full armor of God to successfully stand in battle against the schemes of the Evil One. Much of what Paul has to say in Ephesians and in chapter 6, in particular, seems to be about being prepared, not being deceived, not falling for baits, staying united, and relying on the superior strength of God.

The Art of War is an easy and fun read. The book is in the public domain and available for free on line in pdf form.