Spiritual warfare is real! You would think that this statement is so obvious that there is no need to even say it, however, if we are honest, in our secular, materialistic, and humanistic society at large, it is easy to rationalize away malevolent powers from the unseen realm. Due to the Fall of humankind, we have an inherited sin nature that has marred the image of God in which we were originally created. Very early on, selfishness and disobedience are manifested in the lives of children. **Proverbs 23:13** reminds us not to withhold discipline from a child because the pain of physical chastisement, appropriately administered with restraint and self-control, and with an attitude of love, is a powerful tool to train and protect children from patterns that can lead to spiritual rebellion. Not only that, but a couple of chapters earlier in **Proverbs 21:16**, we also learn that foolish patterns of choices can be deadly (in the most literal sense).

Those warnings from Old Testament wisdom literature set the stage for the New Testament clarification that has direct implications for us today. In the Apostle Paul's letter to the Church in Corinth, he writes in **2 Corinthians 4:4**, "In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." This passage gives us insight on how to pray for the lost. We cannot "force" or override

their wills (and in His Sovereignty, God chooses not to either) but we can ask God to remove the blinding influences. The satanic/demonic realm is, according to Scripture, the “god” of this world who blinds the minds of unbelievers. If that barrier is removed, at least they can see the light. NOW, how they respond to the light is a different matter. If they respond positively to the light, God will give more light. If they reject the light consistently, God will turn them over to their desires. That may be described as strengthening their volitional resolve, or in other terms "harden their hearts." This turning them over to their desires (as described in Romans chapter one) sounds bad if taken out of context, but in reality, if people reject the One True God and make themselves or something/someone else their God, then God will give them what they want. All of us know someone who suffers from spiritual blindness of truths central to salvation. We live in a culture where an anti-Christian worldview is spreading like a cancer, as we watch whole segments of society implode in real time. So, let us pray for the blinders of unbelievers to be removed so that they can see the light, beauty, grace, truth, and salvation that is only found in Jesus. Let us remain hopeful, because Christ STILL changes lives (like the encouraging news of many Iranians coming to Christ from Islam).

Now for the hard part… It is easy to recognize the spiritual blindness of those who have not yet come to faith in Jesus, however, it is much more difficult to recognize how the enemy attempt to “blind the minds” of Christ-followers through lies and deceptions. This can come in many different forms. It can be expressed by fatalistic indifference… “what can I do,” or “what difference can I really make.” It can be expressed by ill-informed activism… “something has to be done.” While it is often true that something has to be done, it can become an ill-informed distraction if correct information is lacking or if a benign or even a “good cause” is drawing our time, energy, and resources away from our primary calling as Christians to be witnesses for Jesus. Finally, those distracting spiritual blinders from the enemy that keep us from focusing on the Light of Christ and His mandate to His children, can be expressed through bickering and fault finding. This is the middle ground strategy, between passive indifference and excessive activism, where pride produces internal conflict over personal preferences. If something (a word, an action, a methodology, or a decision, is not sinful, then is can become the context for sin IF I grumble and complain about it. May the Lord help me not to be blinded by my pride or Satan’s lies.

Blessings! Jeff