

# MAKE YOUR STAND

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Many Christians have discovered that we are engaged in a spiritual war—that the Christian life is depicted as warfare: good versus evil, righteousness versus sinfulness, surrender versus rebellion, love versus selfishness, the Spirit versus the flesh, the Church versus the devil.

## Imagined Tranquility

Some might prefer to imagine that life is simply about having peace and being good, but reality shows us that peace and goodness do not come easily—they involve purpose, temptation, resistance, and struggle.

From our vantage point in Marin County, we might imagine today that the world is a relatively peaceful place, were it not for instantaneous information exchange that informs us of gangland crime in American urban centers, corporate graft in international business, governmental corruption, tribal wars, extreme poverty, famine, natural disasters, epidemic disease, family disintegration.

Eliminate all that information from your memory this morning, and then take a fresh look outside your front door—see the sunshine, smell the trees and flowers, listen to the quiet, sip your coffee or tea—you might just imagine that all is well with the world.

“But,” you say, “I know that it isn’t.”

You’re right. Life is not a playground; it’s a battleground. And those who imagine all is well in the spiritual world need a similar awakening.

## Life’s Paradox

The Gospel is *good news!* What God has done for the world through His Son Jesus is amazing and wonderful! Jesus has received authority to forgive sin, cleanse evil, and unite all people! But, as the writer to the Hebrews notes, “we do not yet see all things subject to Him.”

It is so in the heavenlies, but not yet so in the world of humankind. God’s will is clear, but man’s experience is fuzzy. And therein lies the warfare.

## Destined to Win

Let me explain today how God has prepared you for this battle—prepared you to win it—and how you can face each new day with confidence and hope of victory, and rest each night with peace and assurance.

I must confess, Paul’s letter to the Ephesians is one of my favorite books in the Bible. Favorite, not because it is better than the rest, but because I resonate with it more than others. I believe that my life’s message—God’s message for my life—is in that letter, so He speaks to me most emphatically through its pages.

Is there a book in the Bible that you love to return to more than others? Are there certain passages in that book that make your heart sing and your mind sparkle? That’s where you will find God’s message for your life (at least for the present season).

Here is a summary of the bulk of the letter to the Ephesians, as I see it:

We are blessed!

God’s secret plan revealed: to unite all people under Christ

Oh! The greatness of His power to us  
You were once dead, now alive!  
Awesome grace!  
You were once outsiders, now insiders with God!  
Together becoming a holy temple for the Lord  
Jews and Gentiles united – precious story!  
God’s marvelous love, the source of your fullness of life and power  
So, be humble, gentle, patient, staying united  
You are uniquely gifted, so that the whole body may grow  
Walk in renewed thoughts and attitudes, displaying a new nature  
Be honest  
Be self-controlled  
Be generous  
Be encouraging  
Be merciful  
Love sacrificially  
Avoid carnality and carnal people  
Live in the light, rebuke and expose darkness  
Be filled with the Spirit, worshipping and thanking God, and cooperating with each other—husbands with wives, children with parents, slaves with masters

Now, read the conclusion with me from Ephesians 6:10-18:

<sup>10</sup> *A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.* <sup>11</sup> *Put on all of God’s armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil.* <sup>12</sup> *For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.*

<sup>13</sup> *Therefore, put on every piece of God’s armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm.* <sup>14</sup> *Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God’s righteousness.* <sup>15</sup> *For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared.* <sup>16</sup> *In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil.*

<sup>17</sup> *Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

<sup>18</sup> *Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.*

God has given you the life of His Son and His Spirit. He has forgiven you and cleansed you and justified you from all the wrong things you have done. And He has called you to live in love—humbly, gently, patiently, in unity, honestly, generously, encouragingly, and mercifully, with self-control.

Tell me honestly—to try to live that way every day—doesn’t that sound like a prescription for conflict?

That is our Christian warfare. That is the battle you face. That is the conflict you cannot ignore.

And that is why Paul adds his “final word.”

You need God’s mighty power to win this fight! You cannot win it on your own.

## **Deadly Errors**

Most Christians who *do* recognize this warfare make two deadly mistakes:

1. They underestimate their adversary and fall prey to his snares.

That’s why Peter warned:

<sup>1 Peter 5:8</sup> *Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.* <sup>9</sup> *Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your Christian brothers and sisters all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering you are.*

2. They underestimate God and take His help for granted.

They neglect *their part* in the conflict, assuming God will take care of things for them, or (when things don't go well) concluding that God doesn't intend to help them and has left them on their own.

### **God's Provision**

For your success, God has provided a "whole" suit of armor. The soldiers who stormed the beaches of Normandy in World War II, or waded through rice paddies in Vietnam, or walked the dusty streets of Baghdad didn't do it in their "jammies." If they had, the outcome would have been a whole lot different! You're not fighting in your spiritual "jammies," are you?

The armor from God is not like the suit of armor that King Saul once loaned to young David when he offered to fight the giant Goliath. That armor was built for a grown man, nearly twice his size. It was cumbersome, awkward, and unsuited to him. It didn't fit him physically and it wasn't made for the kind of fighting God had taught David to fight.

But this spiritual armor from God suits you perfectly! It is personally designed for you—your personality and your experience. It fits like a glove, and moves like spandex, and it includes everything you need.

### **Know Your Enemy**

Even so, it won't help you if you don't know who you're fighting. Miguel de Cervantes wrote the tale of a confused, self-appointed knight who called himself Don Quixote de La Mancha, who, for the sake of his beloved Dulcinea thought that windmills on the hillside were the enemy soldiers he was sent to conquer. Misjudging his enemy resulted in quite a beating!

How many times has your anger been stirred by the irritating things people have done to you, in malice or in ignorance? How many times have you imagined that they needed to be set right, put in their place, punished, conquered?

Here's the problem with that: even when successful, it doesn't satisfy.

Here's the reason: the people that rub you wrong or oppose you are not your real enemy—the devil is!

As long as you keep grumbling about people, scheming against people, fighting against people, you'll never win this warfare. Even when your fight is successful, you won't have licked your opponent or conquered your enemy!

It's the wrong battle!

Your battle is against evil spiritual forces that influence people to do evil and self-centered things.

### **What's Good for the Goose**

Now, before I continue, I want to ask you: Have you ever done anything self-centered or evil? Have you ever injured another person? I'm sure you have. And do you think of yourself as an evil person? Probably not. Did Jesus die for your sins, too? Has God forgiven your wrongs? I'm sure He has.

So, you've been on the other side of this conflict, too. Yet, God loved you and has been merciful to you. Do you think He could love and be merciful to those who have injured you, who have opposed you? Could you forgive them, too, in His name?

Half the battle of Christian living is simply correctly identifying your enemy, and forgiving those he abuses and misleads.

*1 Corinthians 6:11* Some of you were once like that. But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

## Depending on God

The other half of the battle is learning to depend on the armor God has given for your success.

“Therefore, put on every piece” reminds us that every piece is essential for this fight. Having put it on, leave it on! Since most of the battles you fight are between your ears, and your mind is seldom, if ever, silent, you need to keep the armor on at all times. To “keep it on” means to depend upon it, not to take it for granted.

Truth. Girded with integrity. Speaking the truth, tempered by love. Committed to honesty—with God and with yourself, in family relations, in business relations, and in church relations.

Righteousness. Not the smug, self-righteous variety, but the humble righteousness of a life saved and transformed by faith in Jesus Christ. Ready to make amends and confident that God is for you.

Peace. The assurance that results from embracing the Good News about Jesus Christ. Sins forgiven and a heart that is clean. Guilt and shame washed away.

Faith. The overall shield that extinguishes the burning arrows of satanic accusation and temptation. The faithful responses that grow out of surrender to Jesus in each area of life.

Assurance of salvation. What could be more important than knowing that your faith’s reward is secure? That you have not hoped in vain? The “know-so” experience that Christ is with you to the end.

The Word of God. Our single defense against the enemy. The only one we need, because it’s the only one that really works. Contesting his taunts and suggestions with “It is written.”

These are the pieces of armor that God has provided. Put them on and keep them on. Every day.

## How to Fight Like a Christian

What are you to do with them? Two things:

### 1. Stand firm in your faith.

Your faith. This is your lifeline to God. This is the source of His power in your life. This is the map for His purpose in your life. You must stand your ground in faith. Hold onto your faith. Don’t let the enemy rip it away or dissolve it. Even when you cannot understand the path by which God leads you, you can trust the God who is leading.

*John 10:27* My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, <sup>29</sup> for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father’s hand.

### 2. Resist your enemy the deceiver.

*James 4:7* Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

He didn’t say search him out. He didn’t say attack him. He didn’t say go hand-to-hand with him.

What he did say was this: *stand* your ground in faith and *resist* his attempts to deceive you.

Paul uses the Roman soldier to illustrate Christian warfare, and the Roman soldier's armor to illustrate the armor God has designed.

Roman armor was lighter than that worn by many other soldiers, because there was no armor for the back, giving them the advantage of distance and speed on foot. Of course, it also made them vulnerable if they were running away from their enemies!

Roman soldiers overcame this liability by fighting back-to-back. Four soldiers could hold a small piece of ground or protect an individual or a treasure against a much larger number of combatants by this method.

Christians, too, are not to run from the fight, but to stand together, protecting one another's back against a common enemy.

### **Our Method**

And how do we do this? By praying—on all occasions, with all kinds of prayers, with the Spirit's leading and power. Prayer is the arena of your warfare: resisting the devil's lies and temptations, and declaring the truth of God's Word against the suggestions of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Don't shirk your duty. Don't run from the fight. You cannot win by giving in, and you cannot win by trying to ignore the conflict. Instead, believe God and run to the battle. Trust that He's given what you need, and use it according to His direction.

This week, when tempted to doubt, or to fear, or to do what you know would displease God—put on the armor, pray for courage, and declare God's truth about the matter. If that is your hope and intention, tell God so right now.

His purpose is your victory. Make your purpose His glory!