

# Take A Stand!

By Mark Jarvinen

Have you ever had a day when everything seemed to go wrong? Perhaps you oversleep. You find that one of the kids is too sick to go to school. You go to start your car and the battery is dead. You get to work and the hard drive on your computer crashes. Your boss throws a fit when you lose a major client to a competitor. That's not all, your late afternoon dental appointment runs an hour overtime, causing your son to miss his important soccer game. On your way home, someone rear-ends you at a stop sign. A person can deal with one or two setbacks a day, but how about a half dozen? Is this just a series of coincidences? Murphy's Law in effect? Or is someone out to get you. The apostle Paul would say in terms of the Christian life, "**Someone is out to get you.**" Let me explain.

Throughout the book of Ephesians, Paul teaches Christians that there is a spiritual dimension operative while we live on earth, in which life's ultimate questions and concerns are dealt with. This dimension Paul refers to as the "**heavenly realms**," mentioned five times in Ephesians.

Notice **Ephesians 1:3**, for example, where Paul writes –  
**"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."**

In other words, as Christians, we are not merely one-dimensional beings. There is a reality for us on a spiritual plane that goes beyond our flesh

and blood existence in this world. There is an ultimate purpose for our lives and a spiritual identity that we possess in the here and now by virtue of being in Christ that is unseen and unrecognized by those outside of Christ. Furthermore, **1:3** says that those who believe **in Christ** have already received **“every spiritual blessing,”** e.g., a status with God, a purpose for living, a clear conscience, an inheritance in heaven, etc. This life, for the Christian then, is the process of living out who we already are from God's perspective, and learning to experience more in this life of what we already have as our eternal inheritance, which we refer to spiritual growth.

Another similar reference is **Ephesians 2:6**, which says that **“God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms, ....”** This verse implies that the rest of our lives on earth are spent living out what is already ours in Christ, realizing that it won't be fully ours until we reach glory. In theology we refer to this as the **“tension between the already and the not yet.”**

This is lofty and elevated theological reflection on the part of Paul. In other words, Christians, even in their earthly existence, share in Christ's exalted status, won by virtue of His death and resurrection. However, in **Ephesians 3:10-11**, Paul also introduces the idea that **“the heavenly realms,”** or the spiritual dimension of life, also include the forces of darkness arrayed against God and His purposes. He writes there -

**“His (God's) intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God would be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** (NIV)

Paul's thinking here, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is that there is a **titanic conflict between God and the powerful spiritual forces arrayed against him**, which is cosmic in scope, yet which manifests itself in the natural dimension of everyday life. The church's role, then, is to continually remind the forces of darkness that God has already defeated them in Christ. Paul is setting up for the Ephesians the subject of **spiritual warfare**, which is the subject matter of the concluding section of his epistle, found in **Ephesians 6:10-20**. It is here where we'll spend considerable time during the next couple of months, letting Paul speak to us about how to stand firm in the face of this spiritual opposition we face as believers. We begin with today's introductory message, entitled "**Take A Stand!**"

## **I. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS A FIGHT**

The late, **Warren Wiersbe**, well known pastor and author who passed away in May of 2019, once said, "**The Christian life is not a playground - it's a battleground** " (**The Bumps Are What You Climb On**). It's true that anyone who chooses to be on the side of the Lord Jesus Christ will face severe opposition from Satan and his followers. The Christian should never assume that confusion, doubt, and disruption among genuine believers are strictly phenomena with human or natural origin. The battle is not merely against "**flesh and blood**," as Paul writes in **Ephesians 6:12**, "**but against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places**." The Bible frequently uses the images of war to depict the Christian life. Paul exhorts Timothy to be "**a good soldier of Christ Jesus**." In **I Timothy 6:12**, Christians are admonished to "**fight the good fight**."

There is a sense in which just to be alive is to be engaged in a struggle. There is a fight involved even in the birth process. I've been directly involved in the births of 3 human beings. Those first seconds after birth are critical. The fight for that first breath, the kicking and flailing, are all signs of struggle, yet they are so important. If a baby is born with no ensuing signs of struggle, it is assumed to be in trouble and not simply that he or she was born with a laid back temperament. Even as physical life involves a fight, from the moment of birth onward, the same is true spiritually. **You might say, if there's no fight, there's no life.**

How does a person know that he or she is a Christian – a child of God? Well, certainly by the assurance that the Word of God gives, such as in **John 1:12 – “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”**

But there's also that sense of inner peace, right? It's a peace that passes all understanding. Some call it **“the witness of the Spirit,”** in which, **“the Spirit himself testifies (or bears witness) with our spirit that we are God's children” (Romans 8:16).**

But let's not forget about one more reality we need to consider. We can also say that genuine Christianity is marked by a sense of spiritual conflict. Jesus himself said in -

**Matthew 11:12 - "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it."**

As the Kingdom advances, conflict is inevitable, because Satan's goal is to thwart the kingdom advance. He doesn't take lying down the fact that the

kingdom of heaven is advancing. I **Peter 5:8** says -

***“Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.”***

This is serious business. There is reason for genuine alarm if there is no sense of spiritual struggle in your life. Or, having been baptized into Christ, and having received the gift of faith, have you simply taken yourself out of the game?

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians breaks down into two parts. In **chapters 1-3**, Paul looks at the Christian's **wealth in Christ**, and in **chapters 4-6** he speaks of the Christian's **walk in Christ**, and how knowing Christ affects our relationships with others, in the church, family, and workplace; and finally, in **6:10-20** he concludes with this discussion on the Christian's **warfare**. Our text for today assumes that the Christian life involves a fight in which we are called to ***“take a stand, (v.11) against the devil's schemes”*** with the ***“full armor of God”*** in place. In upcoming weeks, we will look at each piece of armor and its importance for spiritual warfare. Yes the Christian life is a fight, but ....

## **II. CHRISTIANS DON'T FIGHT ALONE.**

As Christians we must remember that we do not fight alone. It was God's fight before it became ours. Another way to say it is **we do not fight for victory, but from victory**. Ephesians teaches that Christ has already won the victory for us, and we have already entered into our spiritual inheritance in Him. Thus, our role in the battle with the devil is that of claiming and holding on to the territory and inheritance won for us by the Lord Jesus Christ by His sinless life on earth, culminated by His death and resurrection.

There's a beautiful illustration of the fact that God's people don't fight alone found in the Old Testament Book of **Joshua**. The Children of Israel were preparing to enter the Promised Land - their inheritance having been promised first to Abraham some 500 years earlier.

God told Joshua, in **1:2-3** –  
***"Now then, you and all the people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them .... I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses."***

In other words, God was saying, "**Start walking. You already have the inheritance; now claim it by faith.**" In other words, "**Possess the land and make it your own.**" They didn't have to conquer any new territory but merely claim what was already there's. Yes, it's true that along the way to claiming the **promised land** they had to move some **squatters** off. But they weren't conquering any new territory, they were simply claiming by faith what had been promised to them by God, which was therefore already theirs. They weren't fighting for victory, but from victory.

Friends, in our battle against Satan and his forces, the battle is the Lord's. Satan is already a defeated foe. Jesus said of Satan in **Luke 10:18**, "***I saw Satan fall like lightning from the sky.***" Sometime in eternity past, the angel Lucifer was cast out of heaven for wanting to usurp God's authority. Then the events of Calvary and following, finalized his defeat. **Spiritual warfare is merely claiming and holding what is already ours.** Satan is a foe to be reckoned with, but there is no need to fear Satan. The faith walk requires that we take our positions, wearing his armor, but let's not forget that the outcome is not in doubt.

**Why does God require us to take our battle positions?** Why doesn't

He just take care of business for us? I'm not sure of all the answers but it has something to do with the fact that God is **“a faith honoring being”** who is predisposed to honor faith whenever He sees it. **Hebrews 11:6** says that **“without faith it is impossible to please God....”** He delights when people demonstrate their trust in Him. His desire is to lead us into a mature faith relationship with Himself. Placing us in the fight is a way of producing maturity of faith. Spiritual warfare is more than just going toe-to-toe with the enemy. It is fundamentally learning to appropriate what is ours in Christ.

I have had the privilege of both being a parent of young children and observing parents of young children over the many years of my pastoral ministry. Many end up carrying their children at their hip until they're several months old. You get out of bed in the morning in the fervent hope that there will come a day when you can put this child down and she will walk on her own. I haven't noticed any moms carrying around their sixteen-year-olds lately have you? That's a good sign! Maturity is happening. **Our Lord wants us mature in faith, appropriating what is already ours in Christ. That's why we're involved in the fight of faith.** Even though the fight is His, in the sense that He has already won the victory over Satan; it is still true that the fight is ours in the sense that we must take our stand, wearing the full armor of God.

The devil is a crafty foe. His strategies and wiles are subtle and deadly. He is well organized; having a whole army of demonic forces at his command. Therefore, we must know our enemy, and use the armor God provides. Someone once said, **“Our trust and confidence must not be in the armor of God as much as in the God of the armor.** Through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, He has already won the victory, and in

that victory we can stand firm. **A-men.**