

Elements of Spiritual Warfare

By Jay Wegter

The great themes in Ephesians are: God's glorious plan of the ages in Christ, who God is toward us in Christ, and who the believer is in Christ. Spiritual victory is tied to knowing and reckoning your resources in Christ and your true identity in Christ. The spiritual fight requires the use of spiritual weapons. "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. *We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete" (2 Cor 10:3-6).

The believer 'participates' in the victory Christ has won over the world, the flesh, and the devil. Christ has won the victory to give it the church. Through Him, we are overcomers (note the promises He makes to overcomers in Revelation—we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us, **Romans 8:37ff.**). "So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (**Rom 8:12-13**).

Our victory in Christ *positionally* is an accomplished fact. But, our victory in Him *practically* is what we fight for—the 'fight of faith'. "This command I entrust to you, Timothy, *my* son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith" (1 Tim 1:18-19; 6:12). Application: why is it called the 'fight of faith'? What are we fighting to believe? How does truth function like a sword in spiritual warfare? Explain how our victory in Christ *positionally* is to be translated into our victory in Christ *practically*.

Our positional status in Christ, or our 'spiritual realm', is designated, 'heavenly places' in Ephesians. "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ" (**Eph 1:3**, 20; 2:6). 'Heavenly places' is the region in which spiritual warfare takes place (note the devil's title in **Eph 2:2**).

The believer has to know his position/riches/resources in Christ. Ephesians is filled with phrases such as: *in Him, in Christ, in Whom*. It is Christ and the believer together, chock-o-block in almost every passage. These prepositional phrases beginning with 'in' describe our union with Christ, so that all that He is, and all that He has accomplished belong to the believer by virtue of being joined/united to Christ.

Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were *aroused* by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter" (**Rom 7:4-6**) (these are blessings found in the new covenant).

Thus, spiritual life, pardon, righteousness, sonship, inheritance, future glory, etc. are ours by reason of these blessings being resident in Christ. “But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, “LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD” (1 Cor 1:30). His obedience, our righteousness; His sin bearing, our pardon. “He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor 5:21).

And when describing our salvation in terms of our identification with Christ’s death, burial, resurrection, and exaltation, the terminology used in Ephesians is: ‘*with Him*’ as in ‘raised *with Him*’ (Eph 2:6). This is because Christ is the region, the sphere, the surety-ship in which our salvation was taking place, since His entire life and ministry was vicarious as our divinely appointed Substitute, Representative, and Mediator.

But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, *namely*, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one *Father*; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, “I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE.” And again, “I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM.” And again, “BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME.” Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted” (Heb 2:9-18).

Because He so thoroughly represents His people in taking their place, His dying is our death to sin; His burial is our burial to our old life, His resurrection is our rising to newness of life, and His exaltation is our future glorification. “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:4-7; Col 2:9-14; 3:3-4).

We tend to evaluate or examine ourselves *in ourselves*, rather than *in Christ*. But, the whole subject of right-standing before God, the reality of our justified status before God is completely resting upon the Father regarding us as *in the Son*. This permeates the subject of God’s grace. For, He contemplates true believers in the Son. This is how the Father sees our true spiritual identity—that we are ‘clothed with Christ’. “For all of you who were baptized into

Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (**Gal 3:27**).

If we only examine ourselves *in ourselves*, there is so much corruption remaining in us, it is bound to push us toward despondency and disillusionment; even exasperation and depression. So, we must go back to the themes of Ephesians which proclaim our union with Christ. In ourselves alone we could not stand before God; we would be consumed instantly (**Jer 30:21**). But, He has provided a Mediator who clothes us in His own righteousness. “I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, my soul will exult in my God; for He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels” (**Is 61:10**).

How do we prosecute the spiritual war? How different our power source is from the Hollywood superheroes who are strong, super-humanly mighty, in themselves alone, but not in another. The believer is strong in Another, in Christ. “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me” (**Gal 2:20**). The Christian abides in Him, and in abiding in Him and dwelling upon our completeness in Him and appropriating all that He is, the believer has fellowship with God in Christ (see John Owen)..

And in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross (**Col 2:9-14**).

The tempter seeks to stir up the remaining corruptions in our flesh, and then accuses us the moment there is any compromise. When the evil one tempts us, the devil and our flesh make overtures to us, suggesting that fleshly, carnal behaviors and thoughts will satisfy us, will fulfill us. Our flesh acts like our friend, we are being tempted to get our needs met by sinning. Thus, Scripture calls for a proactive course in which we mortify the flesh and put to death its deeds. “Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry” (**Col 3:5ff**; Rom 8:12-13). “Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (**Gal 5:24**).

The lusts of the flesh wage war on the soul: “Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul” (**1 Pet 2:11**). And, we are warned that those who are ruled by their sinful passions and fleshly appetites are enemies of the cross of Christ. “For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things” (**Phil 3:18-19**).

Through Christ the believer has complete authority over what remains of the flesh with its sinful passions. “For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, knowing this,

that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin” (Rom 6:5-7).

Romans chapter six gives the spiritual warfare strategy known as *the principle of presentation*: “Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin *as* instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God” (**Rom 6:11-13**).

Just as under the Mosaic covenant, they rested on the Sabbath day after a week of work. But, under the new covenant, the believer rests in Christ on the Christian Sabbath, Sunday, signifying that Christ is ‘Source Person’ for all that is needed for work and for spiritual warfare. Resting in Him as the source of enablement to exert in warring and working. This involves ‘living upon Another’ (**Gal 2:20**). Our call to action involves exertion in the strength of Another, and this involves endurance, stamina, and perseverance: “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord” (**1 Cor 15:57-58**; Gal 6:9-10; Heb 6:10-12).

How wonderful it is that the Lord saves us, ordains our good works, enable us to perform them by the power of His Spirit, then rewards us for the very works He predestined through us. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (**Eph 2:10**).

How different this is from all natural religion which rests upon performance and imagined human ability. The Pelagian scheme of salvation robs Christ of His glory by making the sinner the site and source of salvation. For, in the Pelagian scheme, God looks at the devotee’s sincerity, his decision to live as a Christian, his effort at imitating Christ and being faithful to the church. Then, out of these acts of piety come the basis for the person’s justification.

The biblical gospel is radically different, for it is Christo-centric. The true gospel does not save by directing the sinner to a plan of salvation, or by directing the sinner to rely upon his religious decision and resolve, but instead to recline totally upon an all-sufficient Savior who by His work, saves completely—doing what the sinner had no hope of doing in himself (review the concept of Christ our Substitute as the ‘sphere’ in which our salvation took place).

The principles of prayer in our spiritual warfare chapter indicate that the believer ought to maintain a spirit of prayer so that spontaneous prayer is available at any time. “With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and *pray* on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in *proclaiming* it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak” (**Eph 6:18-19**). A spirit of prayer is central to appropriating our resources in Christ through the Spirit’s enablement. Read Ephesians 6 in the Williams Translation as well as the NASB.

