

WINNING YOUR SPIRITUAL BATTLES

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THE NATURE OF THE BATTLE

In an art gallery in Europe hangs a painting titled *Checkmate*. On one side of a chessboard sits the devil, full of laughter. His hand is poised, ready to make his next move. On the other side of the chessboard sits a shaking, frightened young man. Sweat covers his forehead, dripping down and mixing with a solitary tear on his cheek. The game is obviously drawing to a close, and the winner appears to have already been decided.

One day, a chess champion from a far off country visited the gallery. Naturally, the painting caught his attention, inviting him to examine it for a very long time. In fact, while others had moved on throughout the gallery, the chess champion remained fixated on the game and especially on the devil, who sat eagerly waiting for his next turn, in which he planned to steal this man's soul.

Minutes turned into hours as the chess champion studied the board from every possible angle. The sweat on the young man's forehead urged him to continue.

Finally, as the gallery was about to close, the chess champion found the proprietor of the gallery and asked him, “Sir, would you happen to have a chessboard here?”

After looking around in several of the offices, he located a chessboard and brought it to the man. The chess champion laid the board out at the base of the painting precisely as it was in the painting. He made a move and then countered that move in the only way that the devil could to avoid checkmate. He then made another move, and countered it again knowing that the devil would have to defend himself in his next move as well. The chess champion did this several more times, putting the devil on the defensive each and every time. Eventually, a loud yell was heard throughout the gallery as the chess champion cried out in relief, “I did it! I did it! I did it!”

Turning to the painting, the chess champion lowered his voice and said, “Young man, your enemy miscalculated a very important move. I uncovered it, and as a result, you don’t have to lose! You win!”

This chess champion had discovered a way not only for the young man to escape but also to checkmate the devil himself.

Friend, if you have picked up this book, the chances are that you may have felt like the man in the painting. Fear or anxiety has crept up on you as you imagine the devil preparing to make the final move in your personal life, marriage, home, health, career, finances, or any

number of other arenas. Satan's confident laughter and swift moves have tricked you into believing that he is running the show and calling the shots. He has been toying with your emotions as if you were a puppet on a string.

But as we journey through this study together, I encourage you to wipe the sweat from your forehead and dry the tears from your eyes. You can do this because you have a Champion who knows how to guide your every move. In fact, this Champion has already made the final move on the devil, securing your victory forever. If you will simply play out the remainder of the game according to His directions and underneath the overarching rule of His kingdom agenda, you will claim your victory. That is guaranteed.

The great thing is that you don't have to earn your victory, nor do you have to figure it out for yourself. God has already given you everything you need in order to make your next move on your path to triumph. As we begin, I want you to realize this key principle: You are not fighting *for* victory—you are fighting *from* victory. This battle has already been won!

The History of the Battle

To grasp the truth behind this principle, you first need to understand the history of the battle. It all began when God made the first move by creating the angels. Lucifer, the anointed angel, responded negatively to that

move by rebelling against God and taking one-third of the angels with him in that rebellion. God countered that move by creating man, in His own image, a little lower than the angels. Satan rebelled against that move by enticing Adam and Eve to sin, thus turning earth over to his control.

God then countered Satan's move by providing a redemptive covering for Adam and Eve so they could return back to fellowship with God. Satan made his next move by inciting Cain to kill Abel in order to cut off the godly line.

But God responded to Satan's move through the birth of Seth, making a way for men to begin calling on the name of the Lord again. Satan countered that move by luring Nimrod at the Tower of Babel into thinking he could make himself and his people as high as the heavens.

For God's next move, He turned His gaze onto a man named Abraham, calling out a nation through him to be holy and set apart. Satan, however, countered that move by trapping this nation in Egypt under Pharaoh's rule. But then God grabbed Moses in Midian and placed him in position to knock Pharaoh out of the equation altogether.

Throughout the remainder of the Old Testament, the game went on like this—move, countermove, move, countermove. By the end of the Old Testament, we have reached a time of four hundred years where no move is

recorded by either side as both sit staring at the board in silence.

But when the New Testament opens up, we see God reach for a special piece—His own son, Jesus Christ—and move Him into a new location, from heaven to earth. Satan attempts to counter God's move by tempting Jesus in the wilderness. Jesus overcomes his move through using the Word of God. So Satan then tries what he thinks is going to be his final move of checkmate by orchestrating the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. But Satan miscalculated something very important because he didn't realize that death on the cross was not a checkmate move. In fact, it was just a setup for the final move that God would make to checkmate Satan by raising Jesus from the dead.

The accomplishment of the cross, through the resurrection of Christ, was God's final move and offered each one of us victory over an enemy who is seeking to intimidate, deceive, and destroy us. The ultimate winner of this game has been decided. Victory has been secured. While you and I are on earth and still in play, we need to live in light of the truth of the victory gained through that final move—the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because of that decisive move by God, Satan no longer has authority over you to defeat you. His only means to overcome you is to deceive you—to make you believe that the winner of the battle is yet undecided.

How the Spiritual Impacts the Physical

By illustrating spiritual warfare though a simple game of chess, I don't mean to minimize the severity of the battle nor the enormous depth of pain and number of casualties that have resulted from it. It *is* a battle. We are in a war. In fact, the war we are in is like no other war that any of us have ever known or heard about or could even conceive. If I were to ask you to think of the absolute worst war in human history, it would pale in comparison to the spiritual battle waging all around us.

This war is different from all other wars not only because of its sheer magnitude and scope but also because this war is fought in a place we have never seen. Spiritual warfare is *the cosmic conflict waged in the invisible, spiritual realm but simultaneously fleshed out in the visible, physical realm*. To put it another way, the *root* of the war is something you cannot see, but the *effects* of the war are clearly seen and felt. This is because everything physical is either influenced or caused by something spiritual.

Behind every physical disturbance, setback, ailment, or issue we face lies a spiritual root. Unless we first identify and deal with the root spiritual cause, our attempts to fix the physical problem will provide only temporary relief at best. In other words, everything that your five senses experience physically is first generated by something that your five senses cannot detect.

In light of this truth, you and I need to engage a sixth

sense—a spiritual sense—when doing battle in this war. We must employ that which goes beyond physiology and address the spiritual root before we can truly fix the physical fruit. Here is the key to experiencing and living out on earth the victory that God has already secured in heaven: to learn how to intentionally and effectively do battle in the spiritual realm.

Satan often tries to prevent you from taking the spiritual realm seriously. If he can divert your attention away from the spiritual realm, he can keep you away from the only place where your victory is found. If he can distract you with people or things you can see, taste, touch, hear, or smell, he can keep you from living a life of victory.

The Location of the Battle

This battle is so important and its spoils so costly, it is essential that we start at the beginning and lay a solid foundation for our strategy. The first thing you need to know is where this battle takes place. Paul gives us the answer in the sixth chapter of Ephesians, which is the passage we will be using as the basis for our study throughout this book.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our

struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness *in the heavenly places* (Ephesians 6:10-12).

Paul tells us that our battle is not against flesh and blood. Our battle is not against our neighbor, spouse, coworker, child, or even our own propensities or weaknesses in our flesh. People are simply conduits of the spiritual battle taking place in another realm. Our battle, according to the Word of God, is against the rulers, powers, and world forces of wickedness located in heavenly places. “Heavenly places” simply means in the spiritual realm.

Here’s a second principle I want you to take hold of: Whatever has gone on, is going on, or will go on in your visible, physical world is rooted in the invisible, spiritual realm. If you do not know how to navigate in the spiritual realm, you cannot hope to truly overcome in the physical realm.

This highlights a problem we often run into. We usually try to fix things in the physical realm by using methods of this world even though this world is not where our problems originate. We are like a police officer in his living room shooting his TV because he sees a criminal on a reality show pulling a gun. If the officer shoots at the

television, he will have merely added to the mess that's going on. He might feel better for a moment because he did something, but in the end, nothing has been solved. In fact, things have only gotten worse.

Our battles originate in the spiritual realm—the heavenly places—so the only way to fight them is with weapons that work in that realm.

Heavenly Places

Paul uses the phrase “heavenly places” a number of times in the book of Ephesians, letting us know both the scope and occupants of the location. His first reference to this realm comes in chapter 1, verse 3: “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.”

We learn from this verse that everything God is ever going to do for us, He has already done. Every spiritual blessing is already located in this unseen realm. Every promise God has ever made and plans to fulfill on your behalf, every gift you will ever receive, and every hope that will ever be satisfied has already been deposited in your account in the spiritual realm. God has “blessed us with *every spiritual blessing* in the heavenly places in Christ.” Your blessings and victory are already located there with your name written on them, waiting for you to grab them, use them, and walk in them.

Many believers live defeated lives simply because they are unaware of this truth. Yet Paul makes it clear in this passage that we have already been blessed with *every* spiritual blessing in the spiritual realm.

In spiritual warfare, Satan tries to deceive you into believing that God is holding out on you and that it is up to you to get God to give you both blessings and victory. Satan wants you to think that if you pray more, give more, serve more, sin less, do better, or worship more, maybe God will give you more. This shifts the focus off of God and what He has already done in the spiritual realm and puts the focus on you and what you need to do in the physical realm. Doing those things in the physical realm is good and beneficial for spiritual growth and cultivating intimacy with God and others, but those things are not the keys to accessing what God already has for you in the spiritual realm.

The way to access the power of your blessings is through a biblical understanding and application of grace through faith. In grace, God has made every believer complete in Jesus Christ. Religious “works” that we do in an effort to get something from God actually nullify grace (Galatians 5:1-4) because grace and works can never be mixed (Romans 11:6). Grace is the point of access to God.

The way we enter this point of access is through faith. Faith is acting as if God is telling the truth. It is acting as if something is true even when it doesn't *appear* to

be true in order that it might *be shown to be* true simply because God *said* it's true. The job of faith is to discover what the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places already are, ask God for them, and make life choices in light of that reality. We will look more deeply at grace and faith a little later.

The Occupants

So far we have seen that you are not fighting *for* victory—you are fighting *from* a position of victory. We have also seen that whatever has gone on, is going on, or will go on in your physical world is rooted in the spiritual realm. And every spiritual blessing is located in this spiritual realm. Paul tells us more about the spiritual realm when he writes, “These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and *seated Him* at His right hand in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:19-20).

Paul has already told us that our blessings are waiting for us to access them in heavenly places, and he now tells us that the One who is in charge, Jesus Christ, is seated in these same heavenly places. That means that if you want to get to the One who is in charge—Jesus—you will need to approach Him where He is—in the spiritual realm, the heavenly places. In the next chapter of Ephesians, Paul gives us more details about this.