

Fighting the Good Fight

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | July 27, 2023



Near the end of his life, seeking to encourage his student, the apostle Paul wrote,

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing (2 Timothy 4:7, 8 NIV84).

What an encouraging and beautiful promise for all those who fight the good fight—a crown of righteousness bestowed by Jesus Himself! But what does it mean to fight the good fight?

The Bible often uses the language of warfare. For instance, we are to “put on the full armor of God” so that we can stand against the devil’s schemes, for we are “fighting” against “wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly worlds” (Ephesians 6:11, 12 NIV84). We are also challenged to wield the “sword” of the Spirit, which we are told is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12).

But the Bible tells us that,

Though we live in the world, we do not **wage war** as the world does. The **weapons** we **fight** with are not the **weapons** of the world. On the contrary, they **have divine power** to **demolish** strongholds. We **demolish arguments** and every **pretension** that sets itself up against the **knowledge of God**, and we take captive every **thought** to make it obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:3-5 NIV84, emphasis mine).

We are in a war, but the war is not external; it is internal. Paul wrote:

When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my **inner being** I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work **in the members of my body, waging war** against the **law of my mind** and making me a prisoner of the law of sin **at work within my members** (Romans 7:21-23 NIV84, emphasis mine).

We are warring against the power of sin, selfishness, fear, lies, deception, propaganda, lusts, and the evil methods of this world. The primary focus of our fight is internal, against our own fears, hurts, disappointments, doubts, the inherited desire of selfishness, and the dysfunctional and destructive habits that we have developed along the road of life.

Sometimes, we might not realize that our battle is internal and not external, because of a superficial reading of Bible statements like this one:

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:12 NIV84).

This could be perceived as saying that our fight is outside of ourselves, as in a physical fight. But our battle against demonic and satanic forces occurs *within our hearts and minds!* Notice how, in Ephesians 6:13-17, Paul describes the armor of God that we use to battle these various demonic powers:

- The belt of truth—truth is internalized, understood, believed and, when accepted, transforms our mind, destroys lies, and restores us to trust in God. The impact of truth is upon our own hearts and minds.
- The breastplate of righteousness—this is a heart, a character, that is reborn to be like Christ. We have had the stony, cold, hard heart removed and a tender, compassionate, merciful heart recreated within us by the power of God. Again, the battleground is internal.
- The gospel of peace functions like track shoes gripping the ground—it gives our hearts and minds a solid grip on reality so that we don't lose our confidence, our security, our peace and so that we don't emotionally fall down and give up when assaulted with the accusations, misrepresentations, and injustices of this world. Again, the gospel of peace fights against fear and doubt within our hearts to maintain our connection with Jesus.
- The shield of faith—this is our trust in God, trusting Him with how things turn out, the future, and not allowing fear of the unknown to control our actions and lead us to act selfishly. The war is still being fought in our own inner world.
- The helmet of salvation—this is a mind renewed to be like Jesus; "we have the mind of Christ" (1

Corinthians 2:16). It is being an understanding friend of Jesus (John 15:15), developing by practice the ability to discern right from wrong (Hebrews 5:14). This is, again, a growing up to bear the image of God more perfectly in all that we do.

- The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God that we wield in our thinking; when we are confronted with temptations; when we are faced with external attacks, questions, doubts, and uncertainties. Every day, we are to wield the Word of God as Jesus did to live out and advance the truth of God in all we do.

Our battle, our fight, is against the infection of sin, against fear, selfishness, guilt, shame, lies, distortions, all of which undermine our love and trust in God. Through the weapons God has provided,

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have **crucified the sinful nature** with its passions and desires (Galatians 5:24 NIV84, emphasis mine).

We have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit **you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live**, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God (Romans 8:12–14 NIV84, emphasis mine).

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ... You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now **you must rid yourselves of all such things as these:** anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator (emphasis mine, Colossians 3:5–10 NIV84, emphasis mine).

We fight the good fight by using divine weapons, not earthly weapons, in the choices we make in governance of self when confronted with the pain, heartache, mistreatment, and abuse of this evil world. We have a different goal than the world. The world wants the “justice” that makes the perpetrator pay, that uses force to inflict punishment, that seeks to control others to make self feel safe.

The kingdom of God wants the justice that loves our enemies, that blesses those who persecute us, that controls self in order to win enemies to Jesus and turn them into friends.

As God’s people, we fight for a different outcome than the world. The worldly fight against others in order to empower self. We fight against sin and selfishness in our own hearts in order to eradicate evil’s corrupting principles from our inmost being so that we can be free from sin’s control. Then we fight to faithfully live out the principles of God in how we govern ourselves and in how we treat others; we live to be lights in a dark world, demonstrating in word and deed that we belong to a kingdom that is distinctly different than the kingdoms of this selfish world. While the world pursues power to conquer others, the followers of Christ are empowered by God to conquer self.

- We fight by loving God and others, not by self-seeking.

- We fight by speaking truth, not by spreading lies, propaganda, deceit, or falsehood.
- We fight by giving, not by selfish taking.
- We fight by forgiving, not by punishing.
- We fight by disciplining those we love, not by fearfully indulging.
- We fight by saying no to evil, not by giving in to get along.
- We fight by showing mercy, not by retaliating.
- We fight by blessing and praying for our enemies, not by seeking to destroy them.
- We fight by being useful in our communities, not by neglecting our duties.
- We fight by seeking to serve, not seeking to be served.
- We fight by being kind, not by being cruel.
- We fight by being patient, not by being easily angered.
- We fight by rejoicing in the success of others, not by being envious.
- We fight by being meek and humble, not by being arrogant and prideful.
- We fight by standing for the truth, not by colluding with falsehood.
- We fight by sharing the good news of God's kingdom of love, not by promoting politics and worldly divisions.
- We fight by surrendering self to Jesus, not by promoting self.
- We fight by being faithful to our spouse, not by betraying their trust.
- We fight by talking with God, not by gossiping about others.
- We fight by being honest, not by being deceitful.
- We fight by distributing wealth to help others, not by accumulating wealth to aggrandize self.
- We fight by controlling self, not by seeking to control others.
- We fight by crucifying self, not by crucifying others.
- We fight by being respectful, not by being rude.
- We fight by taking responsibility for our own mistakes, not by blaming others.
- We fight by keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, not by being engrossed with life's problems or entertainments.
- We fight by persevering through trials, not by compromising to relieve the burden.
- We fight by trusting God, not by trying to make life go the way we demand.

It is my goal to fight the good fight—every day of my life. I have found that this battle with myself is the biggest battle I have to fight and that victory is possible only through daily surrender to Jesus, through daily partaking of God's grace, and through daily empowerment by the Holy Spirit. So I encourage you: Do not fight like the world fights, but to fight the good fight of faith, wielding the weapons of God in the warfare against the infection of sin in your own heart and mind.