



When Do We Stop Fighting?

The Battle #3 | Feb 18, 2024 | 8:00, 9:30, 11:00 AM | Steve Howell

Opening



Early in the week, my wife Deb and I had a moment of disagreement. Like most marital conflicts, this one was based on a misunderstanding – namely, I was right, and she wouldn't agree with me! It was a small situation that prompted it (the pace at which I threw away my Taco Bell wrappers), but it became representative of other attitudes and/or behaviors that seemed more significant.

Even today, I contend that I was right! I believe that my actions were both pure and good, well-intentioned, and perfectly reasonable.



But, in the words of Pastor Joby Martin:

“Bro, you can be right or you can be married...And I get that from Jesus and His relationship with us. He could have chosen to make sure everyone knew he was right and it was not his fault. But, instead of it, he took responsibility for things that were not his fault, for the sake of the relationship.”¹

To solve the situation requires the ability and the willingness to **fight no more**. (I'll involve you in the sermon soon – right now I'm stepping on my own toes!).

I keep coming back to the words from Romans 12 as I think about my actions.

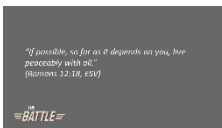
“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”
(Romans 12:18, NIV)

But peace doesn't always happen easily or quickly or on our terms. Sometimes, there must be a resolve to stop fighting. And that applies at every level, whether the fight is internal (inside your own head), external (with people who live under your roof), local (caught up in community politics), national (tied to global conflicts), or spiritual (the unseen realm).

When do you stop fighting?

In our current sermon series, we've been talking about some of the battles we face as Christians, both in the physical realm and in the spiritual realm.

- We've explored a couple of questions, like **“Should we fight?”**



¹ <https://www.facebook.com/reel/402589715773939>

- While our answer must come only after asking God for guidance, there are times when we may be permitted (or even required) to stand against evil.
- We also asked about “**Who we should fight?**”
 - The answers reminded us that our primary enemies aren’t the people we see around us; our enemies are spiritual.

We’re well on our way to developing a more biblical position about conflict with those two questions alone. But today I want us to explore this third issue as we develop a theology of war. If we are going to wage a righteous battle, then it is natural to ask, “How long should we fight?” Put differently, the question is, “**When do we stop fighting?**”



Some of you might bristle at this question. It seems weak, the kind of question that a *loser* asks. Your motto is more like, “Never give up. Never surrender!”² But, *bro*, you can be right, or you can be a follower of Christ. There are times when Jesus calls us to accept defeat, call it a loss, exhibit restraint, quit, surrender, take a tactical pause...or, yes, “be still.”



Today, I’m not talking in the broader sense of “trusting God.” A few weeks ago, we were in a sermon series where we said we needed to “be still and know that He is God” (Psalm 46:10). We talked about patience, waiting on God, and trusting Him for spiritual success instead of paving our own way.

Today, though, I’m being more specific. As we trust God and go through life *untroubled* and *still* in spirit, the battles around us rage on. How do we decide when it’s right to keep battling, or when it’s time to set down our weapons and stop fighting?



“Be still” is like trusting your GPS as you’re driving through a new, unfamiliar city. You have no stress, no doubt that it will navigate you to your destination correctly. The question of whether to “stop fighting” is related to the local traffic. You see a big accident ahead and have to make the choice whether to fight through the traffic snarl, or whether to bail at the next exit. In either case, you are trusting guidance from above, but you must choose whether the battle in front of you is worth your effort.

When do you stop fighting?

That question is of critical importance for *any* conflict. But it is a broad question! So, I’m going to try to pare it down to a few big answers that apply to our situations.

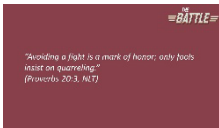
² Catchphrase from the movie *GalaxyQuest* (2009)



Stop Fighting... When the Fight is Flawed

The first answer is to stop fighting when the fight is flawed.

"Avoiding a fight is a mark of honor; only fools insist on quarreling."
(Proverbs 20:3, NLT)



Bringing War to an End

If we turn to current world events, who is insisting on quarreling? For example, **when will they stop fighting** in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict in Gaza?



[Israeli PM, Benjamin] Netanyahu said a lasting peace could only be achieved through a "total victory" of the Israeli military against Hamas, arguing that anything short of that would only embolden Iran-backed militias across the region.

"Without total victory, Iran and its terror proxies — Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis and others — will be emboldened to subvert moderate states in the Middle East; they'll threaten the entire free world," he said.

"Only total victory will prevent that. And total victory is within our reach," he added, saying such a result was a matter of months, not years.³

This conflict has already dragged on longer than we expected, as has the war in Ukraine. And these are relatively short conflicts! Other wars have taken decades or longer (ex: the Korean War that took place in 1950-1953 which declared a cease-fire between the warring parties, and yet the war is technically still awaiting a peace treaty 70 years later!). US troops continue to be deployed across the globe in the aftermath of conflicts that are technically over...yet we're not quite ready to leave the room, just in case fighting flares up again.

In developing our theology of warfare, we talked about the idea of a "just war." Last week, we covered five criteria that must be met for a war to be considered "just" and therefore permissible for the Christian to fight. If any of these criteria fail or change, we should stop...or call for a stop.

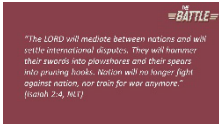


- **Is this war a last resort?** If negotiations succeed, a ceasefire or peace can stop the fighting.
- **Is there a just cause?** If the innocent we are defending all of a sudden become more evil than the ones we are fighting, our involvement loses the moral high ground and should end.
- **Is there a just goal?** If there is no hope of ending on acceptable terms, we must consider moving on and leaving the situation responsibly.

³ <https://www.npr.org/2024/02/07/1229823811/israel-hamas-war-netanyahu-rejects-hamas-ceasefire> (2/14/2024)

- **Is the response proportionate?** If we outrageously outpace our enemy in violence, our tactics can't be defended.
- **Is the war legitimate?** Is it valid or is it vengeance. If the motives change, so should our stance.

I look forward to the day when wars will end. God has promised a future peace when He is in full control.



"The LORD will mediate between nations and will settle international disputes. They will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will no longer fight against nation, nor train for war anymore." (Isaiah 2:4, NLT)

But until that day, we have a responsibility to judge wisely, to support policies that promote peace and that call for fighting to stop when it deviates from a godly, "just war" position.

Stopping Daily Strife

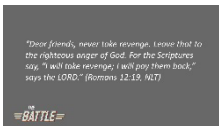
We can do the same in our daily lives. When we end up in conflicts in marriage, at work, with our kids, we need to recognize when our own fight is flawed...and if it is, we need to be humble enough to stop.



"An angry person starts fights; a hot-tempered person commits all kinds of sin. Pride ends in humiliation, while humility brings honor." (Proverbs 29:22-23, NLT)

Humbly ask yourself:

- **Is this fight a last resort?** Did I try listening, reasoning, finding a trusted person to mediate our differences?
- **Is there a just cause?** Is there more at stake than just being right? Am I really bringing the other person closer to godliness by my actions?
- **Is there a just goal?** Do I want to win? Or do I want peace?
- **Is the response proportionate?** Am I more of a jerk in my reply than the other person was when we started?
- **Is this fight legitimate?** Is this mine, or is this God's?



"Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the LORD." (Romans 12:19, NLT)

If you find yourself on the wrong side of these questions, it is time to stop fighting. Rein in your anger, pause from the yelling. Turn the other cheek and quit.

When you're wrong – when your fight is flawed – it's time to stop fighting.



Stop Fighting... When God Says Stop

Another time to stop fighting is when God says stop. Regardless of any other criteria, if He says stop, then it is time to stop.



In hockey...

[Side note: I am legally required to talk about hockey when bringing up fighting]

... there are certain rules when it comes to fisticuffs. It's always been part of the sport as a method for players to police the game themselves. The threat of retaliation keeps bad behavior in check, especially when everyone is carrying a weapon and has blatant disregard for dental integrity! Fights are far less common today than they once were, but players still drop their gloves and go at it. And when they do, the referees stand back and let them go!

To a point.

In the "code" of hockey fighting, players can fight as long as they are both upright and swinging (it takes a lot of energy, so the punches don't last too long). But as soon as one person falls to the ground – even if it's just a loss of balance, not a KO – the refs jump in and separate the players, who then calmly(?) skate to the penalty box to take their 5 minutes for fighting.

When the ref says stop, it's time to stop!

An Example: Paul

If it works in hockey, how much more so in real life? I think it is helpful to pull up the example of Paul as we discuss the role of our Heavenly Authority in ending fights.



Who was Paul? Paul was a Jewish religious leader who persecuted followers of Jesus. However, God had other plans for Paul. He miraculously intervened in Paul's life, turning this persecutor into a proclaimer! As a saved and transformed man, Paul dedicated his life to telling others about Jesus. He was called by God to take the good news of Jesus to those who hadn't heard, specifically the Gentile (non-Jewish) population of the Roman Empire. His church planting activity and his communication to those new Christians made Paul a pillar of the early church. His impact on our faith is second to none but Jesus!

In Paul we find a Christian who was involved in conflict on all levels. Paul was engaged in religious/state-sanctioned conflicts. Paul was involved in social clashes and riots. Paul was in the thick of church politics. Paul faced personal battles and decisions with individuals. If we want a Biblical example to help us answer the question of when we should stop fighting, Paul is worth copying.

*“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”
(1 Corinthians 11:1, NIV)*

Last year we looked in depth at the book of Acts and Paul’s story, so some of this information might still be familiar to you. But we didn’t look at it with this question of fighting in mind, so let’s revisit it today.

Prior to his conversion, Paul was a fierce fighter against “the Way,” as Christianity was called. He was tracking down Christians all over the region to punish their faith, imprisoning them or even putting them to death. But God had other plans. He said, “Stop fighting!”

Listen to Paul’s account of this miraculous intervention as he tells the story to King Agrippa.

“At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’

And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’” (Acts 26:13–18, ESV)

Paul was told by God to “stop fighting.” No longer would he persecute Christians; he would become one himself! He would make converts, not convicts!

How could Paul keep fighting against that word from God?! He couldn’t. And neither can you.

Quitting Conflict

Most of us will never have that kind of direct, miraculous, Damascus-road type of experience. But that doesn’t mean that God is silent. There are times when God tells us to stop fighting, and we must listen.

How does He tell us?

Through the Spirit

Sometimes he uses the Holy Spirit to change us. If you are a follower of Jesus, you know what this feels like. It can be hard to describe to someone who isn’t a Christian,



but there is a real experience as the indwelling Holy Spirit convicts us when we are wrong and guides/equips us to follow God when we otherwise wouldn't. The Spirit empowers us to bear fruit, including the fruit of "peace."

So, there will be times when He prompts and enables us to stop fighting.

Through His Word

God also uses a more generally available method to stop our fighting: His Word.

For example, we read the following instructions in the New Testament letter of Titus:

"But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned."
(Titus 3:9–11, ESV)

If you find yourself embroiled in a theological fight with others in the church, especially one that is getting heated and starting to make people take sides...God doesn't need to give you any special guidance through the Spirit. His Word has already said, "Stop!"

(Note: this is about "foolish" controversies, not "essential" truth. We do have to take a stand against false teaching, but this passage and its reference to quarrels falls more under the opinion category. The ancient truism of the church applies here: *In essentials unity; in opinions liberty; in all things love*)

Getting God's message to stop fighting requires us to have faithfulness to frequently study Scripture so we can hear God's words. And it requires us to have humility to accept those words as they come to us. Most importantly, it requires obedience to put into practice the things He says.

God can tell you to stop audibly, spiritually, or Scripturally.

If God calls you to quit fighting, it's time to stop fighting.

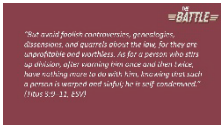
Stop Fighting...When You Die (Don't Stop)

The last point I want to make about when to stop fighting is to stop fighting...when you die. I'll explain what I mean in a second.

Before I do, though, can I be honest with you? **I didn't like writing this sermon.**

Here's what I **wrote** on Thursday evening, typing out my thoughts in frustration, banging away at the keys in a sermon-writing existential crisis:

"Writing this sermon has been problematic all week. I've been trying to write it, but my brain and heart keep having issues. Why? Am I trying to force



*something that I shouldn't? Is God trying to tell me something about this topic?
About this series? About me as a person?*

Do I give up on it now and write something different? Or not?"

Here's what I was **feeling**:

- **Frustration.** I wanted to be finished.
- **Pressure.** I felt the clock ticking because I have deadlines.
- **Uncertainty.** I didn't know what direction to go.
- **Loss.** The time and hours I'd already spent thinking about it were gone.

There was a part of me that was ready to throw up my hands in frustration and quit. To call up Jamie Mayer and say, "Make your communion meditation extra long!"

But of course I wouldn't. I don't have the luxury of giving up on a sermon! You deserve better. God deserves better.

In other words, when do I just give up? When do I stop fighting? I don't. Not just in sermons, but in life.

My example is Peter.

"Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good." (1 Peter 4:19, ESV)

My example is Paul.

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (2 Timothy 4:7, ESV)

My example is Jesus.

"Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted." (Hebrews 12:3, ESV)

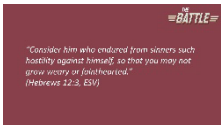
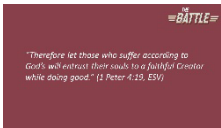
In the battle against sin, in the fight for the eternal fate of our neighbors, in the work of the church, we fight...and we keep fighting...until the very end. We don't stop fighting until our last breath.

Fight the Good Fight

Can't I just quit?

Has anyone else asked that question? I know you have because I've had a lot of those conversations with you. We've talked about marriages. We've talked about jobs. We've talked about dreams. We've talked about kids. We've even talked about life itself.

It's the question that comes up when you're just exhausted. And a lot of you are exhausted.



They're the kind of feelings you face as you hold the white flag in your hand, deciding if it's time to wave it overhead, instead of pulling yourself together and jumping back into the fray. A lot of you are looking at that flag.



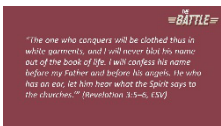
Can't I just quit? Well, if the battle is right, then no. No, you can't.

We can never stop fighting the good fight because victors don't give up. We're on the winning team, up 84-3 with the clock ticking. Why would we walk off the field just because we got tackled?

We can't stop fighting, because when we are on Jesus' team, we are never defeated. I'm with you – I'm ready for the clock to hit zeros and to be done with this mess. I'm ready for heaven!!! But we must keep fighting until He says it's over.

- Don't stop fighting for your marriage to be pure, strong, and God-honoring.
- Don't stop fighting for your kids to become godly, faithful examples.
- Don't stop fighting for your unsaved neighbors to become passionate, devoted followers of Jesus.
- Don't stop fighting for your church to become a place of joy, truth, and holiness.

Don't stop, because you know that Jesus has won...and he is ready to reward those who faithfully conquer those things.



"The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (Revelation 3:5-6, ESV)

Conclusion

When do we stop fighting?

You can stop when the fight is flawed.

You can stop when God says stop.

But in your daily lives, church, keep fighting! Pray for strength, push each other to keep going, encourage each other, and lean on God's Spirit.

"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:37-39, ESV)





Invitation

As we prepare to sing our invitation song this morning, if you are ready to give up, then come forward so we can pray for you and with you...so you are empowered to keep fighting the good fight. There's no shame in needing God's strength!

But if you are ready to surrender, make sure it's to the right side. If you are ready to surrender your life to God's mercy and grace by accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior, being baptized into Christ, then come forward and make that desire known.

Let's stand and sing!

PRAYER REQUESTS:

Notes

Stop Fighting... When the Fight is Flawed

Bringing War to an End (Proverbs 20:3; Isaiah 2:4)

Stopping Daily Strife (Proverbs 29:22-23; Romans 12:19)

Stop Fighting... When God Says Stop

An Example: Paul (1 Corinthians 11:1; Acts 26:13-18)

Quitting Conflict

Through the Spirit

Through His Word (Titus 3:9-11)

Stop Fighting... When You Die (Don't Stop)

(1 Peter 4:19; 2 Timothy 4:7; Hebrews 12:3)

Fight the Good Fight (Revelation 3:5-6; Romans 8:37-39)

Discussion Questions

Use the following questions based on today's sermon as a starting point for spiritual discussions with your family or a small group of Christian friends this week.

Fellowship—Relationship with a Purpose

- On a scale from 1 to 10, how unwilling are you to back down from a fight? Do you wish that your number were higher or lower? Why?

Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters

- What derogatory names are given to someone who surrenders? What role does reputation play in whether we continue in fights?
- Consider Jesus' example while facing crucifixion, especially the words of Isaiah 53:7. Did Jesus need to be silent? What factors kept Jesus from fighting back? What can we learn from His example?
- In a "just war," five criteria must be met to justify continued fighting (last resort, just cause, just goal, proportionate response, legitimate authority). How should a Christian's position change if any of those criteria are violated?
- If conditions warrant an end to a fight, is it enough to stop fighting personally, or do you bear a responsibility to actively push for the end of others' fighting? Explain your answer.
- Why is humility a necessary ingredient for ending conflict?
- Are you more comfortable listening to the Spirit or to Scripture when it comes to God stopping your fights? In what ways?
- What character qualities and/or spiritual qualities do you need to "fight the good fight?" (2 Timothy 4:7)
- What situations make you prone to growing faint in your faith. How can Jesus' example help you? (Hebrews 12:3)

Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God

- Pray for discernment to have wisdom on when to fight and when to cease.
- Pray for strength to continue "fighting the good fight," no matter what.