



Who Do We Fight?

The Battle #2 | Feb 11, 2024 | 8:00, 9:30, 11:00 AM | Preached by Steve Howell

Opening



There's a movie scene from the sci-fi film **Men in Black (1997)** where a brash, streetwise cop from New York City is placed in a training scenario with some other recruited military officers. The recruits are all given a weapon and then the room goes into motion.

The whole room flashes strobe lights, while an urban landscape rolls out in front of them. Human and alien cardboard cutouts appear, each presenting a new target. The recruits take aim, and everyone but Edwards (the cop) shoots. A few seconds, he fires a single shot. The lights come down, the simulation stops, and the door opens. Light pours in, and the head honcho (Zed) walks in, straight at Edwards.

Zed asks, "Edwards, what happened?"

Edwards: *Hesitated, sir.*

Zed: *May I ask why you felt little Tiffany deserved to die? (we see the target Edwards shot - it was a school-age white girl in pigtails, holding some books)*

Edwards: *She was the only one who actually seemed dangerous. At the time.*

Zed: *And how did you come to that conclusion?*

Edwards: *First, I was going to pop this guy hanging from the streetlight, but I realized he's just working out. How'd I feel if somebody came in the gym and busted me while I'm on the treadmill?*

Then I saw this snarling beast guy, and I noticed he had a tissue in his hand and realized he's not snarling, he's sneezing he's got tissues in his hand. Ain't no real threat there.

Then I saw Tiffany. I'm thinking, eight-year-old white girl, middle of the ghetto... bunch of monsters at night with quantum physics books. She's about to start something, Zed. She's about eight. Those books are way too advanced for her. If you ask me, she's up to something.

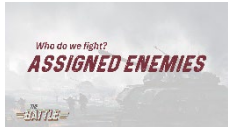
...Or, do I owe her an apology?



When it comes to conflict, one of the biggest challenges is knowing your enemy. Who do we fight? Who poses the most danger? Who deserves my attention? Who deserves my action?

It's an important question to answer, because if we get it wrong, we'll either fail to act when we should or we will mistakenly act when we shouldn't.

Assigned Enemies



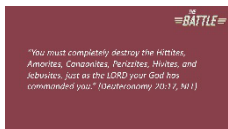
When we kicked off this sermon series ("The Battle") last week, we began with a crucial question: *Should we fight?* We explored some of the pros and cons of answers like *Always, Never, and Sometimes*. And while we said our first move should always be to *ask God* about our position, we did reach a basic conclusion that there are times when fighting is permissible or even necessary.

What we didn't do was **clearly identify the enemy**. And there are some cases where we are explicitly told who is the enemy – where our enemies are assigned.

Chosen by God

In wartime conflicts, sometimes the choice of enemies is made for us.

In the Old Testament, there are stories where God tells His people to fight against a certain group or nation.



"You must completely destroy the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, just as the LORD your God has commanded you."
(Deuteronomy 20:17, NLT)

For Israel, there was an assigned list of enemies right there!



Why them? Well, God has His reasons for commanding his people to fight. There are **practical** reasons related to the survival of Israel, there are **theological** reasons demonstrating the impotence of the false gods these nations worshiped, and there are reasons related to **justice** for the evils they had committed. In this conversation, though, I want you to focus on the simple fact that the enemies are **chosen by God**.

No Israelite had to question who to fight. They were told. And in those cases, the burden of evaluation was lifted. They didn't have to think; they just trusted and obeyed the sovereign, all-knowing, perfect God of the Universe -- the One who (according to Acts 20) numbers our days and determines the allotted periods and boundaries of nations.

But the historical situations in which God specifically directs one nation to fight another are tiny and infrequent. In fact, they are so rare and specialized that for all practical purposes we can dismiss them as irrelevant to our discussion.

God isn't likely to list nations for us to fight. Instead, that task is up to us.

Chosen by Us

And we've gotten good at it!

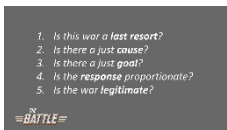


Ex: Who has the United States of America labeled an “enemy” over its history?

The British, the Cherokee, the Mexicans, the Sioux, the Germans, the Russians, the Apaches, the North Koreans, the Viet Cong, Iraq, Iran, the Taliban, ISIS, pirates...and the list goes on and on.

In those cases, no American need question *who* to fight. We have been told by our government.

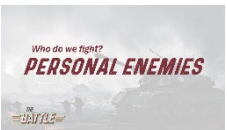
However, as we discussed last week, Christians can't blindly fight just because a government says so. We should consider whether it is a “just war.” So, in the process of choosing and identifying our own enemies, we must prayerfully ask:



1. **Is this war a last resort?** Have we reasonably exhausted all our options (diplomacy, boycotts, negotiations) before firing a shot?
2. **Is there a just cause?** What is the moral reason for going to war? Who or what are we protecting (the innocent, the defenseless) or punishing (the evil, the aggressors)?
3. **Is there a just goal?** Where will it end? Can we achieve victory *and* a just peace in the end? Or will it devolve into endless conflict?
4. **Is the response proportionate?** Are the gains worth the cost? Is the destruction we cause necessary for the just goals we have?
5. **Is the war legitimate?** The state bears the sword (Romans 13:4), not the individual. Is this private revenge, or authorized action?¹

These criteria have been used for centuries to help Christians choose whether to engage an assigned enemy in battle. Before picking up a weapon, Christian soldiers should seek wisdom to make sure they aren't *failing to act* when they should, or *mistakenly acting* when they shouldn't.

Personal Enemies



Those criteria aren't only for war, though. They also apply when Christians face enemies in other areas.

Not every conflict involves the military. Not every weapon fires bullets. Not every enemy wears fatigues. And in these civilian, day-to-day, personal conflicts, we must be quick to identify our enemies, so we know how to act towards them.

¹ [War and the Christian Worldview: What Is Just War Theory? | GCU Blog](#)

Historical Example

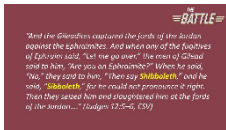
In the book of Judges, we have an anecdotal story of how one group identified enemies.

Note: Old Testament history often shows stories that describe events that happened without encouraging us to repeat them. They aren't necessarily a command or a positive example...they're just history. This is one such story!



Judges 12 deals with a conflict that arose between Israel and another nation to the east, the Ammonites. As Israel had fought Ammon, not all the tribes were invited to participate (...I mean, they were, but since they didn't fight earlier they weren't invited now...it's a stupid fight, in my opinion!). As a result, all the men got "puffy-chested,"² and there was in-fighting as the men from the region of Gilead fought with men from the territory of Ephraim.

The men of Gilead gained control over a strategic crossing – the fords of the Jordan River – and decided to use their position to confront their enemies.



“And the Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan against the Ephraimites. And when any of the fugitives of Ephraim said, “Let me go over,” the men of Gilead said to him, “Are you an Ephraimite?” When he said, “No,” they said to him, “Then say Shibboleth,” and he said, “Sibboleth,” for he could not pronounce it right. Then they seized him and slaughtered him at the fords of the Jordan....” (Judges 12:5–6, ESV)

It's like trying to catch people escaping Boston by making them say the phrase, “Park the car.” If they say, “Pahk the cah,” they're the enemy!

Modern Examples

We use the word “shibboleth” now to indicate a custom or usage that distinguishes one group from another. And while the stakes may not be as high as “instant murder,” there are still consequences when we identify and mark people as enemies.



Today is the Super Bowl. I know we're not a formal church when it comes to attire, but it looks a little more casual than normal today...and a lot more red and yellow! The team colors are a “shibboleth” to show that you belong to the Chiefs Kingdom. And woe be to anyone wearing the wrong colors!

Most of you aren't childish enough to allow your fandom to impact your love for your brothers and sisters in Christ. But sometimes it does promote an “us vs. them” mindset where we defend bad behavior just because it wears a Mahomes jersey, or we lash out with insults because someone is wearing the zebra stripes of a referee.

² Deb's phrase, not mine!

That’s an example of the “shibboleth” mentality. We are quick to spot a person and label them an enemy...



- if they have a rainbow patch on their backpack.
- if you hear her TV tuned to Fox News.
- if she has a yard sign for the *other* candidate.
- if you see his tattoo.
- if she does concealed carry.
- if “they” shares “their” pronouns.

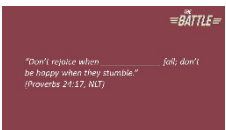


We can spot “enemies” quickly and without even trying! But how should we treat them? We don’t want to **fail to act** when we should, nor do we want to **mistakenly act** when we shouldn’t.

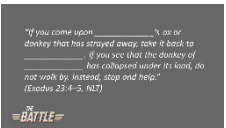
Scripture gives us more specific guidance in these personal cases. And as I read them, I want you to think about a person that has been a thorn in your side – a person you view as an enemy, or who thinks of you as an enemy.

[PAUSE]

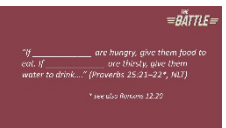
You have a name? OK...now fill in the blanks with me as we read the following verses:



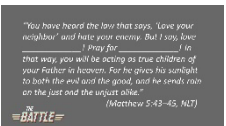
“Don’t rejoice when _____ fall; don’t be happy when they stumble.” (Proverbs 24:17, NLT)



“If you come upon _____’s ox or donkey that has strayed away, take it back to _____. If you see that the donkey of _____ has collapsed under its load, do not walk by. Instead, stop and help.” (Exodus 23:4–5, NLT)



“If _____ are hungry, give them food to eat. If _____ are thirsty, give them water to drink....” (Proverbs 25:21–22, NLT; see also Romans 12:20)

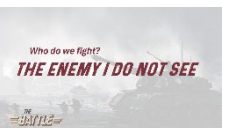


“You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. But I say, love _____. Pray for _____. In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike.” (Matthew 5:43–45, NLT)

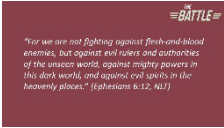
We are commanded to love our enemies and do good to them. It’s terrible battlefield advice, but it’s a divine directive in our personal lives. When we identify personal enemies, this is the approach we are to take. Vengeance isn’t ours to deliver; love is.

Why?!?!?!?

It’s because your enemy isn’t *THE* enemy.



The Enemy I Don't See



“For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 6:12, NLT)

Pull this verse apart and look at the pieces here, because this is important truth as we face the battle in our own lives.

- **“We”** – you and I
- **“are not fighting”** – struggling, wrestling
- **“flesh-and-blood enemies”** – physical, human adversaries.
 - *The British, the Cherokee, the Mexicans, the Sioux, the Germans, the Russians, the Apaches, the North Koreans, the Viet Cong, Iraq, Iran, the Taliban, ISIS, pirates...not even the person you listed when we were filling in the blanks.*
- **“rulers//authorities//cosmic powers //spiritual evil”**
 - *There are numerous enemies listed...all of them SPIRITUAL, all of them POWERFUL*
 - *These words refer to the demonic forces that still hold sway over this world and its events. They have been defeated by Jesus, but the losers still fight.*
 - *They are tied to the previous verse and the “schemes of the devil” – they battle enact his sinful ideas.*
- **“unseen world//this dark world//heavenly places”**
 - *The war isn't on the earth. It doesn't use bullets and bombs; it doesn't involve bullies or battlefields.*
 - *The location of our battle is spiritual. The war takes place in the heavenly realms. The fight is spiritual.*

We are not fighting people. We are fighting spiritual beings and evil ideas. We brawl with sin. We clash against darkness. The Victor is already known, and these forces know their fate:



“For Christ must reign until he humbles all his enemies beneath his feet. And the last enemy to be destroyed is death.” (1 Corinthians 15:25–26, NLT)

The Enemy That Isn't



If this is the battle, then the people we try to view as enemies aren't enemies at all. They have just been caught up and lost in the enemy's schemes. They are men and women created in the image of God, loved by him yet damaged. But not damaged beyond hope!

Lately I've been watching restoration videos, where an old tool or toy is cleaned up and repaired...changing from a rusty, broken mess into a beautiful,

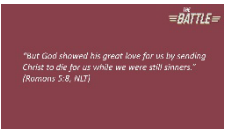
functional work of art. Old paint is peeled or blasted off. Rust is dissolved and scrubbed away.



One was an old French fry press, where potatoes were instantly cut into fries. The machine was filthy! There's no way you would want to eat a fry cut from it, assuming you could even get the lever to move. But piece by piece it was taken apart, cleaned, polished, repaired, painted, and reassembled until it looked as good as new.

Is the problem the item? No...it's the damage that has been caused by years of neglect and abuse.

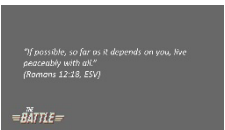
Are our enemies the problem? No. They've been damaged, neglected, abused, and complicit in their sin. But their restoration is God's plan. He can do it for them, because He did it for us.



"But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners." (Romans 5:8, NLT)

We don't want to **fail to fight** against those we should fight, nor do we want to **mistakenly fight someone** when we shouldn't. But we must remember that the real Enemy is spiritual, and our fight is not against enemies here. Rather it is a fight *for* our enemies here.

That's why we love our enemies. That's why we pray for them. That's why Paul says:



"If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." (Romans 12:18, ESV)

Application for the Church

Let me encourage one specific application of this.

If we can identify the real enemy, we have an amazing opportunity to make Tonganoxie Christian Church a shining example of peace.



If you can remember that your enemy is not flesh-and-blood, then you can more easily eliminate the gossip, the factions, the backbiting, the grumbling that plague so many churches! You can pour your energy into fighting the real spiritual fights – praying against Satan's attacks, asking the Lord of the harvest to send out workers, asking for the Jesus to draw more men and women to himself.

We can skip over the internal politics and the concerns over trivial matters. We can pursue unity and peace with our brothers and sisters – the people in this room!

- Will we agree with everyone? No.
- Will we like every decision? No.
- Will we enjoy every person equally? No.

But we'll remember that we aren't now and never ever will be enemies. We're on the same team! We share the same Jesus and the same call to holiness. We can be a real-world demonstration of Hebrews 12:14.



“Work at living in peace with everyone, and work at living a holy life, for those who are not holy will not see the Lord.” (Hebrews 12:14, NLT)

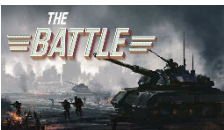
We don't need to identify more enemies in here – we don't need to mistakenly fight each other when we shouldn't! Instead, let's be united and work to fight the real Enemy – let's not **fail to fight** him!

Let me end by reading from Ephesians 2:1-7. I think it is a fitting conclusion to what we've discussed today.



“Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger, just like everyone else.

But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.”
(Ephesians 2:1–7, NLT)



Prayer

Invitation

As we prepare to sing our invitation song this morning, we invite anyone who needs prayer to come forward and share.

And we invite anyone who wants to respond to God's mercy and grace by accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior, being baptized into Christ to come forward and make that desire known.

Let's stand and sing!

Prayer Requests:

Notes

Assigned Enemies

Chosen by God (Deuteronomy 20:17)

Chosen by Us

1. Is this war a last resort?
2. Is there a just cause?
3. Is there a just goal?
4. Is the response proportionate?
5. Is the war legitimate?

Personal Enemies

Historical Example (Judges 12:5-6)

*Modern Examples (Proverbs 24:17; Exodus 23:4-5; Proverbs 25:21-22;
Romans 12:20; Matthew 5:43-45)*

The Enemy I Don't See (Ephesians 6:12)

The Enemy That Isn't (Romans 5:8; Romans 12:18)

Application for the Church (Hebrews 12:14; Ephesians 2:1-7)

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

- Did you ever get into a fight in your younger days? What is the biggest lesson you learned from the conflict?

Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters

- Which wars in your lifetime would you consider to be “just wars?” How did they meet the following criteria: *Is this war a last resort? Is there a just cause? Is there a just goal? Is the response proportionate? Is the war legitimate?*
- Are you more likely to support a conflict on a national level or on a personal level? What is the difference between the two?
- Look up the following passages: Proverbs 24:17; Exodus 23:4-5; Proverbs 25:21-22; Romans 12:20; Matthew 5:43-45. Which treatment of an enemy would be hardest for you? Why?
- How do personal enemies react to kind treatment? How does their response impact your willingness and/or your commitment to “turning the other cheek?”
- Read Ephesians 6:12. Who are our real enemies? List some examples of their presence or influence in today's culture...and in your own experience.
- If Jesus has already won the victory, why do you think these spiritual forces continue their battle? Does their ultimate defeat make them more formidable or less scary? Explain your answer.
- Read Romans 5:8. When you encounter someone who still aligns with the real Enemy, how can this verse adjust your attitude? How can you demonstrate Christ's love to them in person?

Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God

- Prayer for the discernment to see the real source of evil behind people's actions. Pray for a current victory over these spiritual enemies that already face future defeat.