



SPIRITUAL CHESS

In today's sermon, we will look at how the strategies used in playing chess or any board game are similar to those we need to use in our Christian lives.



You start a chess game with a board and some pieces. The board looks a bit like this, doesn't it – a calendar. Our Christian life is played out on this board – the board of time – day by day, over a lifetime. Each square represents a day. And each of us has different abilities to start with, different gifts and talents.

In chess, everyone has exactly the same pieces to start with, so maybe a better example is a game of cards, where different people are dealt different cards and no one has the same hand.

That's very much like the game of life, where we all are dealt different hands – different gifts, skills, talents and abilities. We all have to do the best we can with the hand we have been dealt. It's no use wishing we had the talents someone else has – just as it's no use complaining about our hand in a game of cards. (Unless there are no picture cards at all, then we ask for a re-deal – some of us feel like doing this in the game of life – but you can't! The sooner you get comfortable with and accept the way you are, the better!)

But in many ways we all have the same pieces, as in Chess. We all have the same Holy Spirit to guide us, the same Bible etc. Jesus gave a couple of parables about talents and pounds. In one of them different people were given different amounts of talents (as in cards), and in the other they were all given the same number of pounds (as in chess). Both of those situations reflect different aspects of life.

Let's move on. One of the aspects of a game of chess, or any other game, is that we have an opponent. And so it is in the spiritual realm.

1 Peter 5:8 (NIV) "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

He's our opponent, our adversary, and he wants to win the game! He wants to swallow us up spiritually and he is always on the prowl, watching our every move. He is very subtle about the way he does this, though. If he looked like a roaring lion, you would always hear him coming and get out of the way. But he can appear to be just the opposite.

2 Corinthians 11:14 "And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light."

He can look like an angel of light – very attractive to us, speaking smooth things. We have to be very careful what we believe!

2 Cor. 2:11 "in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes."

We need to be aware of the devil's devices, his schemes, ploys and conspiracies. In playing chess, you need to think not only what your next move is going to be, but to consider what your opponent is likely to do. That's a great thing about chess, there are so many options for each move. Sometimes

players sit for ages trying to work out their next move, which involves thinking 5 or 6 moves down the track of what the opponent might do.

Rugby teams look over the videos of the games, and try to analyse the opponent's strategy. So we need to be aware of Satan's underhanded subtlety, and not be caught by surprise. In this example – 2 Cor.2:11, the way Paul used to outwit Satan's schemes was to forgive someone.

See Verse 10 – “Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake.”

Failure to forgive is one of the ploys and schemes Satan uses against us – making us bitter and unforgiving.

A really important thing to remember with board games is that each game has its rules. The rules are really important! If they weren't there, the game would turn into a free-for-all and totally lose its structure.

What are the rules in our Christian game of life?

Matthew 19:16 “Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” i.e. How can I get across to the other side of the board?

Verse 17 “Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.” The rules are set out in the law of God.

Verse 18-19 ¹⁸ “Which ones?” he inquired. Jesus replied, “You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, ¹⁹ honour your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbour as yourself.’

Verse 20 “All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?”

He thought he had kept them all. Had he really done so? Is it humanly possible? I don't think so. But it didn't matter to Jesus. Jesus didn't say – you haven't kept them. Even if he had, that wasn't enough, because Jesus added something to them!

Verse 21 “Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

He had kept the commandments, but his attitude still wasn't right. He was keeping things for himself and not giving to the poor.

You can keep all the 10 commandments and still be mean, dishonest, cruel, unkind, proud. These are inner attitudes that aren't prohibited by the 10 Commandments – at least the way they are recorded in the Old Testament.

That's why Jesus magnified them to bring out the spirit behind them.

In Matthew 22:36-40 He said something important about the 10 Commandments.

³⁶ “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and greatest

commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

All of the commandments are summed up in the word LOVE. If we would truly show love for God and man in everything we do, we will automatically keep all the commandments, and not be mean, unkind, proud – all of our inner attitudes would be right too!

Jesus said the same thing another way in Matthew 7:12:

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

Rather than debate and nitpick over all the intricacies of the law, Jesus makes it so SIMPLE – in everything we do, we are to live a life of LOVE. Then we would automatically keep all the commandments, and receive eternal life. If only the Jews had understood this, their life would be so much easier!!

So the rule we need to follow in our spiritual game of Chess is to make every move we make in LOVE! Then our opponent won't have a leg to stand on, won't be able to make inroads and undermine our position and beat us. Every move Satan makes, we will respond in LOVE – that's something he can't overcome!

The object of chess is to move our pawns across the board until we get to the other side and capture the other person's king. As we march across the board there are perils and trials to face. We can be caught by a bishop that moves diagonally, or a rook, or a knight. But we have our bishops, rooks and knights to counteract the enemy's. We have to be alert and on guard constantly, and do the best we can with each move.

When a pawn reaches the other side of the board in chess, it is promoted to the royal family – it is “queened”, and can turn into a powerful queen, rook, bishop or knight. (Queens are the most powerful, so people usually change their pawns to Queens.) When a piece reaches the other side in a game of draughts, it is crowned and becomes a king.

The comparison with us becoming “Kings and Queens” in God's Kingdom when we reach the other side, or eternal life, is pretty clear.

Revelation 1:6 “and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father—to Him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen.”

We are spiritual Kings and Priests now, but even more so in the consummation of the Kingdom of God when it takes over the whole world in the future.

The ultimate goal in chess is to force the opposing King to surrender. You can't actually capture him. When he has nowhere else to move, the other player surrenders or gives up and the game is won. This is called “checkmate!” Every time you attack the King, you say “check” and he has to move into safety, until he can move no further, which is “checkmate”.

We can't capture Satan, the King of the Demons, but we can force him to flee from us and surrender to us. How do we do that?

James 4:7 “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

1 Peter 5:9a “Resist him, standing firm in the faith”

2 Cor. 10:3-5 ³“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵We 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.”

This refers to the spiritual warfare we have been comparing to a game of chess. “Chess resembles war in that it consists of attack and defence and has as its object making the King surrender.” (The World Book Encyclopaedia.)

(I guess in war Kings can be killed for victory, but generally it is better to capture them and bring them to account for their crimes. That will happen with Satan.)

It’s interesting that in chess we have our own king living with us all the time, and he is always on our side. Just as God is always with us and Jesus is our King dwelling amongst us. Satan can attempt to checkmate God, but God always has one more move up His sleeve. The king can only move one space at a time in chess, and as long as he can make one move more he can’t be checkmated. God always knows an extra move to make!

David faced Goliath in what appeared to be a checkmate situation. But the king had one more move. Daniel was thrown into the lion’s den. Checkmate? No – the king had one more move. Pharaoh’s army was right on the heels of the fleeing Israelites, who were stalled at the Red Sea. Checkmate? No – the king had one more move.

Towards the end of a chess game there aren’t many pieces left. Gradually, one by one they are attacked by the enemy and removed from the board. Does that sound a bit like the situation in the Church today? Even though there are only a few pieces left at the “endgame” in chess, they still have the king with them and they are still supporting and fighting for him.

Matthew 18:20 “For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

Remember always that quality is more important than quantity in God’s eyes. He doesn’t look on the physical appearance but on the heart.

Something always happens at the end of every chess game. Guess what it is. The pieces all go back in the box. You might have heard of the book written by John Ortberg, “It all goes back in the box.” When our life finishes, we end up in a box. It doesn’t matter what material things we have collected along the way, how much we have earned or gained – we lose the lot!

Remember the parable of the “Rich Fool.” The guy had some good crops so he built bigger barns to put them in and kept everything for himself. But then he had a heart attack and died, so what good did it all do him?

We can’t take anything with us when we die, but our character, what we ARE, will still be us in the resurrection. And of course in the resurrection we’ll have access to any physical riches that we want. But somehow I don’t think that will matter then – spiritual riches is where it’s all at – that’s what gives fulfillment and satisfaction.

So I hope it has been interesting to consider the way our Christian lives compare with playing a game of chess. And the important lesson to remember at the end of it all is that whatever material riches we have obtained in life won’t be worth anything when we die. When we get to the other side of the board what will matter most is not what we have gained, but the way we have played!

But we can be thankful with the knowledge that in the Chess Game of Life we will win. God will make sure of that. The game is described in 2 Cor. 2:14:

“But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ’s triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of Him everywhere.”

So let’s resist the enemy and cause him to flee, let’s stay close to our King, play by His rules of love, and with God’s help we can all be winners in the great Chess Game of Life!