



RAMBO CHRISTIANITY

There is an arms race taking place in the Christian camp today; a quickly escalating competition to accumulate the most potent spiritual arsenal. Anyone with access to a TV studio or a printing press is hawking the latest spiritual weaponry to the people of God.

Some insist that you need an explosive experience of the Spirit, complete with all the glossalalic accouterments, and "holy hand grenades of healing" to blow up Satan's strongholds of addiction and illness. Some tell you that what you need is the newest techniques to rocket your requests to God, the most advanced spiritual radar to pick up God's message back to you, the latest word on spiritual tactics and strategies. Some will even offer to send you ("for a small gift to support this vital ministry") a picture of Jesus to rally the troops around.

*Finally, be strong in the Lord
and in his mighty power. Put
on the full armor of God so that
you can take your stand against
the devil's schemes. For our
struggle is not against flesh and
blood, but against the . . .
spiritual forces of evil in the
heavenly realms.*

Eph 6:10-12

In the face of this nuclear/spiritual inventory, Paul's offer of a sword and shield and helmet seems feeble and antiquated. Yet, perhaps we should not be too eager to trade in our breast plate for the spiritual equivalent of a laser blaster. Paul promises that the simple armor God provides is all we need to stand firm against our enemy.

But what a fearsome enemy he is! Not a "he" either; a "they." There is an entire army of demons, rulers, authorities, powers arrayed against us under the leadership of the malignant general Satan. He is a powerful, wicked, cunning commander and Christians must be on their guard.

Paul wants us to "take our stand" against this foe. To do so successfully, we need to arm ourselves with God's weapons.

THINK ABOUT IT:

- Why is it so hard for Christians to remember that they are locked in a desperate, life-and-death battle with real enemies and real weapons and real casualties?
- While we are called to peace, we are always at war. While we are called to be saints, we are also enlisted as soldiers.



**LET THE CHURCH
BE THE CHURCH**

SERMON 29

- ◆ *The idea of a devil, a very real spiritual entity, is unpopular today. Perhaps we have lampooned Satan for so long, drawn him with a tail and pitchfork, that even Christians find themselves embarrassed to talk about the devil. Paul is not embarrassed. He might say, "If we do not talk about him, how can we fight him?"*
- ◆ *Satan does not fight fairly. He is a back-stabber, a kick-and-gouger, a master of stealth and subterfuge. What kind of tactics are justified in fighting such an enemy?*

There are two basic rules for waging successful warfare: 1) know thyself, and 2) know thy enemy. Let's start with the second one.

More wars have been lost from underestimating the enemy and failing to measure his strength than from any lack of courage or weaponry. Yet "underestimating" is a chronic problem with God's troops. We convince ourselves that the enemy is flesh and blood: an antagonistic boss, an unbelieving spouse, a disagreeing brother. We substitute tangible and visible opponents for the less substantial but very real enemy. Paul reminds us that we deal with spiritual foes — powers of darkness and forces of evil.

These forces bring their considerable power against us on a daily basis. As Christian author John Stott says, "If we hope to overcome them, we shall need to bear in mind that they have no moral principles, no code of honour, no higher feelings. They recognize no Geneva Convention to restrict or partially civilize the weapons of their warfare. They are utterly unscrupulous, and ruthless in the pursuit of their malicious designs."

What kind of soldier does it take to war against a foe like this? By knowing our enemy, we understand some important things about ourselves. *We* — relying on our own strength or cunning or strategy — are not going to win this war. Paul doesn't focus on the soldier at all, but on his commander-in-chief. God has everything we need to fight this battle. We are to "be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power."

That power is channeled to us through the weapons God gives his people: the confidence that comes from truth; the protection offered by righteousness; the footing given by the gospel; the defense faith provides; the assurance that comes from salvation; the power of God's word and Spirit; the communication found in prayer.

God is looking for a few "Rambo Christians" among his people today. Soldiers who are always ready and prepared, who do not shrink from hand-to-hand combat, who fight bravely and skillfully with the weapons God provides.





RAMBO CHRISTIANITY

Small Group Member's Guide

ICE BREAKER

This is the last study in our series on Ephesians. What have you thought about this great book? Any new insights from our study together? Any questions raised that you plan to go back and study further? Is there any passage or thought that really sticks with you? How about the Apostle Paul...any new appreciation for who he was, or new insights into his character? Finally...do you know Christ better from this study?

TAKING A STAND AGAINST SATAN

There was a time in recent history when it was common for Christians to speak of ourselves as *strangers in a strange land*. We recognized that though we owed allegiance to some temporal government, our real citizenship was in Christ's Kingdom. Singing "This world is not my home, I'm just a'passing through," we reminded each other that this world that seems so real and lasting is really quickly fading away--and is just a shadow of the real world to come.

It is, perhaps, not as fashionable now as it once was to speak of ourselves as pilgrims. We are all caught up in the here and now. Possibly because we've become so comfortable in this world we are not inclined as we once were to think much about heaven. Many of the great old songs that we sang that looked so longingly for that peaceful home were "Negro spirituals"--written by people who knew precious little comfort in this life.

There is another reason we have lost sight of those far shores. We are, after all, a modern people. A people of science and logic and understanding. We are not inclined to put much stock in that which we cannot prove to exist. It was all right for the ancients to believe in spirits and demons and other planes of existence. They lacked the benefit of our scientific understanding. The entire world was a mystery to them--they needed such ideas to explain the inexplicable. Now we're beyond that.

Continued Next Page...

*Finally, be strong in the
Lord and in his mighty power.
Put on the full armor of God so
that you can take your stand
against the devil's schemes.*

Ephesians 6:10,11



**LET THE CHURCH
BE THE CHURCH**

SMALL GROUP 27

I'm not suggesting that we don't believe in heaven. Or that we have formally denied the existence of the spirit world. I simply note that our emphasis on the empirical has caused many of us to ignore a reality that seemed never far from Paul's mind.

Already in this letter he has revealed a great secret to his readers about the scope of God's work in the church. The church exists for us, to be sure. But, its purposes are much larger, grander than we imagined: *His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms....* God's purposes in the church reach into unseen worlds. Our faith and obedience to Christ is teaching lessons to beings not only beyond our perception but beyond our understanding.

And now as Paul finishes his letter to these troubled Christians he reminds them that there is more here than meets the eye. *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.*

Two truths must not be missed from what Paul says here. First, after all the talk about unity and harmony and peace and mutual submission, he jerks his readers back to reality: as Christians we are engaged in a tremendous battle against the forces of evil. Much is at stake here--even more than just our individual souls. A real Satan with real soldiers carrying real weapons has set out to destroy us--and God. He cannot and will not win, but until the final act is carried out we will be engaged in a vicious struggle against an enemy that gives no quarter.

And second, Paul would caution us against striking out against the "enemy" we see--our human opponents. They are not the real enemy. And further to do battle with them we may play directly into Satan's hands. For when we fight against flesh and blood we fight with weapons and resources that are completely inadequate to deal with the dark forces truly arrayed against us.

Paul would have us remember who we are: finite, fallen creatures, limited in perception and understanding. Yet called to do battle against powerful spiritual forces in unseen realms. To fight this fight we must trust God. We must content ourselves to do battle in God's way. We have neither strength nor wit to do it any other way.

Thus we take up the weapons and protection that God provides for this truly cosmic battle: *truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation*, and the only sword that can penetrate the real enemy: *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

To Discuss

- ♦ *Would you agree with me that we often fail to see that there is more here than meets the eye? Have we put out of our mind--without actually denying its validity--the world of the spirit? If you do agree, why do you think this might be so? What are the consequences for such shortsightedness for us individually? For the church as Family?*
- ♦ *What does Paul mean when he says "our struggle is not against flesh and blood"? Aren't we to "buffet our bodies"? Shouldn't we resist those who would do evil?*
- ♦ *Note how the "armor" that God provides us sounds suspiciously like Christian character. Can God's will be done man's way? Why is Paul's imagery of the forces of evil in the heavenly realms a necessary reminder that we've got to trust God on this one? What is likely to happen when we attempt to engage in this battle using the weapons and armor that are "naturally available" to us?*

**LET THE CHURCH
BE THE CHURCH**



Do you believe Satan is as real as Christ? why or why not?

1 Pet 5:8

A LOOK AT THE CHURCH

A CHRISTIAN'S BATTLE

Eph 6: 10-20

April 21, 1996

Lesson Objective: To identify how Satan wants to interfere in our relationship with God and then to discover the power we have to combat this attack on our Christianity.

For the last several weeks we have been looking at our relationships with others. Last weeks lesson led us to the most intimate relationship, that of husband and wife, we have on this earth. Now Paul in these final verses of his letter primarily focuses on man's relationship with his God. Even though what Paul has to say in these final verses can certainly have an impact on our relationships with others, Paul is primarily concerned about the Christian's relationship with God and the danger the evil one presents in coming between that relationship.

Paul set the tone for what he has to say in these verses in the first verse of this section (verse 10) The power to resist Satan is not our own but comes from God. I like how the Living Bible paraphrase reads here. "Last of all I want to remind you that your strength must come from the Lord's mighty power within you." Phillips says "Finally then, find your strength in the Lord, in his mighty power."

Paul equates our struggles against the devil/Satan to a war. It is different from most wars -- actually victory has already been obtained by Christ. Paul's admonition is to stand firm and protect the victory that has been won for us by Christ. Notice how many times he uses the word "stand" in these few verses. Paul's readers would have understood the armor terminology and how it related to the Spiritual battle they would be asked to fight for the rest of their lives. The readers of Paul's letter at the time would have had no difficulty in making the transition from the physical protection of the armor to the Spiritual battle with Satan. If Paul was writing to Richardson East today he would probably use a different illustration to get his message across as we are not accustomed to seeing too many people in armor. Paul uses some very key words associated with the victory won by Christ and attaches them to pieces of armor. These words include truth, righteousness, gospel, faith, salvation and Spirit. These are all things they now had and were to use in their fight to keep Satan from coming between them and God.

For Discussion

1. How, who, what and when does Satan attack? (He uses deception and finds our weakness to try and draw us away from our Father. He uses such things as our fear, pride, insecurity, self righteousness and anger to get a foothold in our lives)
2. Identify some possible entry points for Satan in the Richardson East body. What do we need to do to make it more difficult for him to have an influence on this fellowship?
3. How about our own personal lives? Please share with the class any individual struggles you may be having in fighting the devil.
4. What was Paul's suggestion for our fight against the evil one?
5. What seems to be Paul's number one concern at this time in his life?