

WHAT ARE YOU WEARING?

MANY OF US, I IMAGINE, ARE FAMILIAR WITH THE VERSES OF EPHESIANS ABOUT PUTTING ON GOD'S ARMOR TO STAND AGAINST THE TRICKS OF THE DEVIL. IT TELLS US THE PIECES TO WEAR AND WHAT EACH REPRESENTS. WE SING SONGS LIKE "ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS", "FAITH OF OUR FATHERS", "A MIGHTY FORTRESS IS OUR GOD", "THE CHURCH IS ONE FOUNDATION: AND MORE. THE WORDS OF THESE HYMNS SPEAK OF BATTLE, THE DEVIL, AND PRISON AND TRIAL.

THE QUESTION ASKED IS "WHAT ARE YOU WEARING?" ARE YOU PREPARED FOR A BATTLE? DO YOU EVEN BELIEVE IN THE DEVIL AND EVIL OR IS THAT SOME OUT OF DATE, OLD FASHIONED IDEA? DO WE BELIEVE THAT THE "STORIES" OF THE NEW TESTAMENT AND JESUS' ENCOUNTERS WITH THE DEVIL AND EVIL WERE STORIES MADE UP BY IGNORANT COUNTRY PEOPLE TO EXPLAIN THINGS THEY DID NOT UNDERSTAND? IF WE BELIEVE JESUS IS THE SAME YESTERDAY, TODAY AND IN THE FUTURE THAN THE SAME THINGS EXIST TODAY AND AS HIS DISCIPLES, WE FACE THOSE THINGS JUST AS JESUS DID!!!

TAKING THAT THOUGHT A STEP FARTHER, THEN **WE ARE IN A SPIRITUAL BATTLE TODAY**. I KNOW IT IS EASIER TO TALK ABOUT LOVE AND ALL THOSE ELEMENTS OF FAITH, BUT JUST ASK OUR AFRICAN BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST, METHODISTS, WHO ARE MORE KEENLY AWARE OF THE SPIRITUAL WORLD. *WHY DO YOU THINK THAT THE CHURCH HAS GROWN SO FAST IN THESE AREAS?* YES, THE LOVE AND FORGIVENESS OF GOD, BUT THE POWER IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST IS SOMETHING THEY UNDERSTAND MUCH BETTER THAN US. WE SING A SONG LIKE "THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT THAT NAME" OR "HIS NAME IS WONDERFUL". **THE SONGS IS "NICE", BUT DO WE PONDER THE WORDS AND WHAT POWER IS IN THE NAME OF JESUS?**

LET'S LOOK BEHIND THE SCENES BEFORE WE PUT ON THE "**WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD**" AND KNOW WHY WE ARE WEARING THIS ARMOR OF GOD.

SPIRITUAL WARFARE, IS IT SOMETHING YOU HAVE HEARD ABOUT, BUT NOT THOUGHT ABOUT, AND NOT SURE WHETHER YOU BELIEVE IN IT OR NOT?

SPIRITUAL WARFARE IS MENTIONED NUMEROUS TIMES THROUGHOUT THE BIBLE FROM THE FIRST BATTLE BETWEEN SATAN AND EVE IN THE GARDEN TO FINAL BATTLES IN REVELATIONS. **IT IS SIMPLY DEFINED AS THE WAR OF GOOD VERSUS EVIL. IT'S BATTLES ARE FOUGHT DAILY BETWEEN GOD AND SATAN; BETWEEN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH AND THE WORLD SYSTEM RULED BY OUR SPIRITUAL ENEMY; AND WITHIN EVERY CHILD OF GOD, BETWEEN THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE LUSTS OF THE CARNAL FLESH.**

THE CLEAR MEANINGS OF GOOD AND EVIL, AS DEFINED BY GOD RATHER THAN MAN, ARE REVEALED WITHIN THE VERSES OF THE HOLY BIBLE AND THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST. ONE OF THE MOST KNOWN STORIES IS WHEN JESUS WENT INTO THE WILDERNESS AND WAS TEMPTED BY SATAN, THE DEVIL,

WITH FOOD, RICHES, AND TESTING OF GOD. WE MAY ALSO REMEMBER WHEN JESUS TOLD SATAN TO GET BEHIND HIM. JESUS ALSO DEALT WITH MANY DEMONS, SOME BY NAME.

IF WE ARE TO BELIEVE IN JESUS AND HIS RESURRECTION THEN THE EVENTS OF HIS MINISTRY ARE TO BE BELIEVED TOO. **WE CANNOT PLAY SMORGASBORD WITH THE BIBLE AND TAKE WHAT WE WANT AND LEAVE THE REST.** *IF WE TRULY STUDY THE BIBLE WE CAN WITH THE GUIDANCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT DISCOVER HOW TO UNDERSTAND THOSE DIFFICULT VERSES IN THEIR PROPER PLACE.* HOWEVER, IF WE NEVER TAKE THE BIBLE OFF THE SHELF OR OUT OF THE DRAWER WE WILL NEVER KNOW THE TRUTH OF GOD'S WORD.

IN THE BEGINNING OF THE READING FROM EPHESIANS WE ARE ENCOURAGED TO "Put on God's armor, so that you can stand against the tricks of the devil. We are not fighting against human enemies, but against rulers, authorities, forces of cosmic darkness and spiritual powers of evil in the heavens. IN I PETER 5:8 "Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour."

CAN WE SIT HERE THIS MORNING AND JUST SHRUG OFF ANY BELIEF IN THE SPIRITUAL REALM OR EVIL THAT EXISTS IN OUR WORLD OR HAS SINCE THE BEGINNING OF TIME? ANOTHER EXAMPLE IS IN DANIEL 10:13 WHEN HIS PRAYERS WERE HELD UP FOR 21 DAYS BY THE SPIRIT PRINCE OF THE KINGDOM OF PERSIA, AND THEN MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL CAME TO HELP DANIEL AND DETAIN THIS SPIRIT PRINCE. THIS IS NOT SOME FANTASY WORLD, THIS IS REALITY.

GOD'S WORD REVEALS TO US HOW TO STAND AGAINST THIS DARK, SPIRITUAL REALM BY PUTTING ON THE "WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD". THERE ARE OTHER THINGS WE CAN DO THAT ARE SCATTERED THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT TO FEND OFF SUCH ATTACKS.

THERE ARE AREAS OF YOUR LIFE AFFECTED BY THIS ONGOING SPIRITUAL BATTLE. THE **FIRST AREA IS THAT OF YOUR PERSONAL LIFE.** NOW ONE THING I WANT TO SAY IS ANYONE INCLUDING US CAN DO BAD THINGS, WHICH GIVE AN OPENING TO SIN TO OVERTAKE OUR LIVES IF LEFT UNCHECKED. LAST WEEK WE WERE TOLD TO LAY ASIDE LYING...THE VERSES ENDED..."do not let the sun go down on your anger and do not give the devil an opportunity" IF ALLOWED ONE SMALL FOOTHOLD THEN OUR REASONING CAN LEAD TO EVEN BIGGER DOWNFALLS.

LOOK AT THE TROUBLE DAVID GOT INTO JUST LOOKING AT BATHSHEBA. THAT EVENTUALLY LED TO MURDER AND BREAKING ABOUT EVERY ONE OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS. IT IS ANOTHER REASON *GOD DESIRES US TO BE IN COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS FOR WHEN TROUBLE STARTS WE CAN ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT EACH OTHER IN THOSE TIMES.* **THAT IS THE VERY REASON WE ARE HERE AS DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST TO SERVE NOT TO BE SERVED.** I KNOW I REPEAT THOSE WORDS OF JESUS MANY TIMES, BUT IT IS TO REMIND YOU AND ME THAT WHEN WE BEGIN TO FEEL SORRY FOR OURSELVES IT IS TIME TO SEEK OUT OTHERS AND NOT TO FOCUS ON ME OR MYSELF.

THIS FIRST AREA OF OUR LIFE THAT MAY BE AFFECTED BY SPIRITUAL WARFARE CAN LEAD TO AFFECTING OTHER, MAINLY OUR FAMILY. LOOK AT THE "FIRST FAMILY" – ADAM AND EVE, THE DEVIL CERTAINLY GOT IN THERE!!!! NOW FOR THOSE WHO DO NOT BELIEVE THERE IS MUCH USEFUL

INFORMATION IN THE BIBLE, I WANT YOU TO THINK ON THIS ONE. IN 1 CORINTHIANS 7:5 "Do not deny yourselves to each other, unless you first agree to do so for a while in order to spend your time in prayer; but then resume normal marital relations. In this way you will be kept from giving in to Satan's temptation because of your lack of self-control." *THE MESSAGE* PUT THAT LAST SENTENCE THIS WAY "Satan has an ingenious way of tempting us when we least expect it" THAT IS ABOUT AS PRACTICAL AND USEFUL AS YOU CAN GET FOR GODLY ADVICE ON SEX AND MARRIAGE. IN THIS SPIRITUAL BATTLE THE DEVIL USES ANYTHING AND ANYWAY TO GAIN A Foothold!

WE CAN WIDEN THE FOCUS HERE AND REALIZE THAT IF IT AFFECTS US PERSONALLY, OUR FAMILY THEN IT IS LOGICAL IT CAN AFFECT LIFE WHEREVER WE CHOOSE TO GO. IT CAN IMPACT CHURCH LIFE. FALSE TEACHING IS A MAJOR HIGHWAY SATAN CAN DRIVE RIGHT INTO THE CHURCH.

I RECALL A CHURCH I WAS IN AND WE WERE FIRING ON ALL CYLINDERS MOVING THROUGH RENEWAL. SOON THERE WERE PEOPLE, WHO OVER TIME BEGAN SPREADING FALSE DOCTRINE AND QUESTIONING MANY FOUNDATIONAL TRUTHS. COLOSSIANS 2:8 "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ." READ ALSO IN 2 TIMOTHY 3:1-7 REGARDING FALSE TEACHERS AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS.

FINALLY THE LAST BUT NOT LEAST PLACE THESE SPIRITUAL BATTLES AFFECT IS THE CULTURE. DANIEL TALKED ABOUT ENTIRE NATIONS BEING INFLUENCED BY THE BATTLE IN THE SPIRITUAL REALM. TO WATCH AN EVIL MAN AS HITLER AND HOW WITH WORDS HE PERSUADED AN ENTIRE NATION TO WAR WITH THE WORLD CAN ONLY BE AN EXAMPLE OF THE SPIRITUAL REALM AFFECTING THE PHYSICAL REALM. WHEN PEOPLE ACT AGAINST GOD'S WAYS, I DO NOT BELIEVE IT CAN BE CALLED ANYTHING BUT A SPIRITUAL BATTLE WAGED BY SATAN AND HIS LEGIONS. HOW ELSE CAN WE, MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE, DO SUCH EVIL DEEDS?

IT SOUNDS AS IF WE ARE OUTCLASSED IN EVERY WAY, BUT THAT IS A WHISPER, A LIE, FROM THE DEVIL. HE IS OUT TO DECEIVE AND STEAL FROM US. PAUL ADDRESSED THE CHURCH AT CORINTH BY TELLING THEM "I am afraid, least as the serpent that deceived eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ."

THERE IS THE KEY TO THE SPIRITUAL BATTLE ANY TIME ANY WHERE – JESUS CHRIST AND THE VICTORY HE HAS WON NOT ONLY OVER DEATH ITSELF, BUT OVER THE DEVIL AND HIS MINIONS. **WE HAVE THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT – TRUTH, RIGHTEOUSNESS, THE GOSPEL OF PEACE, SHIELD OF FAITH, AND HELMET OF SALVATION ALONG WITH THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT – THE WORD OF GOD.**

THESE ARE THE "WEAPONS" TO DEFEAT THE DEVIL WHEN THE SITUATION ARISES. THE QUESTION TODAY IS "WHAT ARE YOU WEARING IN THIS SPIRITUAL BATTLE?"

IN ALL THIS, WHAT ARE THE CHILDREN WEARING? STORY ABOUT BAPTISM.

George Barna wrote *The State of the Church* in 2002. He conducted a survey of self-proclaimed Christians and here's what he found about their knowledge of the Bible. These are Christians.

- 48% could not name the four Gospels.
- 52% cannot identify more than two or three of Jesus' disciples.
- 60% of American Christians can't name even five of the 10 Commandments.
- 61% of American Christians think the Sermon on the Mount was preached by Billy Graham.
- 71% of American Christians think "God helps those who help themselves" is a Bible verse.

George Barna said, "Americans revere the Bible, but by and large they don't know what it says. And because they don't know it, they have become a nation of biblical illiterates."

Just as the people in this Barna poll are woefully biblical illiterate, Christians are far too ignorant of the Word of God. No wonder 21st century Christians are failing to finish their marathon race. No wonder Christians by the thousands are falling prey to the false teachers of our day. They are being feed junk food and don't feed themselves on the Word of God. They are desperately in need of a solid diet of good food, Scripture. We need to get into "spiritual shape"!

Any armor, including the Armor of God is useless without a sword - for the enemy can keep attacking until the armor gives way - how important then is it to be acquainted with the Sword of the Spirit.

AMEN.