

# **09 The Church - Militant and Triumphant**

## **(Part 1)**

### **Definitions**

The church triumphant are those believers who have died and are now reigning with Christ in heaven. This is what John spoke of in Revelation 20:4

Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

These are the people who have lived and died as Christians and now reign with Christ until the second coming.

The church militant, then, are all the believers currently on earth. "Militant" does not refer to aggressive or hard-line people. It does not refer to some extreme kind of Christian in the same way the media uses the term "Islamic militants." Rather, you and I are still engaged in battle. We still fight the good fight. But we struggle, not against flesh and blood, "but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." We are indeed engaged in battle, but it is a spiritual war. With these basic definitions in place, I'd like to talk about two main things: First, what it means to be the church militant. What does that look like? This is where I am going to spend the majority of my time. Second, what the church triumphant means for us. How does that doctrine touch our lives in the here and now?

### **The Church Militant**

#### **The Battle is Spiritual, Not Physical**

Ephesians 6:12 says that we wrestle not against flesh and blood. I think this is where the church has gone so horribly wrong in events like the Crusades. It is complex I know, but at least this much we can say, Christianity does not spread by sword. The old proverb is still true, "a man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still." Christianity comes by way of the mind. Repentance means change of mind. Expansion of territory in the kingdom of God come not in physical territory with physical weapons, but when the hearts and mind of people are captured by Christ and he becomes their all consuming passion. Coercion of any kind - whether physical threats, empty promises or the glitz of entertainment - will make a man a Christian. Only the pure preaching of the gospel can give new life to a man.

## Our Enemies Defined

There are three enemies that the Christian fights against (you may want to write these down):

### The World

Mt 13:22; Rom 12:2; Js 1:27; 4:4; 1 Jn 2:16.

This is the world system and values and allurements. This is the temptation that assaults us on every billboard, in every movie, in every newspaper advertisement, in every commercial. When scripture declares that the wages of sin is death and that what we deserve, therefore is death and hell, the world comes along and says that we deserve a break today. The world say that we deserve a new car.

When the Bible says that all mankind "have turned aside; together they have become worthless," the word presents its goods and says that you are worth it. You are worth that new hair color, that new pair of shoes, whatever it may be. There is a great danger here of misunderstanding what I am saying. There is nothing wrong with cars, hair color, potato chips or anything else like that. The temptation and the battle resides elsewhere. It is the suggestion that you should be discontent. It is the notion that somehow you have been shortchanged in life. Whatever you have in life is not enough. Your marriage is not like in the movies, so somehow your spouse is to blame. Somehow the world owes you a living. It says to us that what God has given to us is not enough. And in so saying, it merely echoes the first lie in the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve could eat from any tree in the garden. But that was not good enough. Why is God being so cruel and withholding the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? God's provisions were not enough and thus mankind fell. The world has been repeating the same lie every since. This is our first enemy.

### The Flesh

This enemy is perhaps the most lethal. This is the enemy that lies within.

**Romans 8:12, 13** So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

**Mt 16:24** Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

**Gal. 5:24** And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Paul urges us in **Colossians 3:5** to "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry."

These fleshly desires live within us. They are a part of us. If you don't watch much TV, the world will not have as great of an influence on you. Satan is a finite being who cannot be everywhere at all times. But your flesh is always with you. You cannot escape it.

You are born with it. This may come as a shock to some people, but children, while cute, are not innocent. Babies, while cute, are not innocent. Their first thought upon waking up in the morning is not, "How may I serve my mother and father this morning?" "I wonder how I can be a blessing

to my brothers and sisters?" Certainly there is no thought of God in their heads. The only thing that makes them seem innocent is the fact that they have no capacity to act out on their sinful desires. But as soon as they can hit their siblings, they will. As soon as they can take toys from their siblings, they will. They are sinful little creatures that grow into sinful big creatures. Our biggest battle as Christians is with ourselves. Observe how you react next time you do not get your way. That is a good gauge as to what your true nature is. We have no problem being nice and cheerful when everything is going our way. Everyone will think you are a saint as long as you keep getting everything you want. But notice the reaction of your heart when you do not get the recognition that you feel you deserve. Notice the condition of your heart when you have to yield to another person. Notice the condition of your heart when the person in front of you is too slow. My goodness, do they not know that you are on the road and that you have places to go and cannot possibly be inconvenienced by delays such as this? And what about those people who ride your tail because they think you are going too slow? Don't they know that your personal space, by virtue of being in the car has ballooned to a 50' radius? Don't they know how rude they are getting in my personal space? Who you are when you do not get your way or when you are inconvenienced is who you really are. That is frightening isn't it? The flesh is an ugly thing that needs to be destroyed. It needs to be put off. It needs to be crucified.

## **The Devil**

The final enemy of the Christian is the Devil and his minions. Now, there are two errors that we tend to make with Satan. First is ascribing too much power to him. We sometimes act as though we were almost as powerful as God. We ascribe near omniscience to him believing that he knows about almost every thought that runs through my head. . . Me and the other 6 billion people on this planet. We grant him omnipresence as if he could be in all places at all times. We give him too much power. Satan is not an evil and slightly less powerful version of God. They are no contest. Satan only continues to exist by the sheer will of God. God does not need to wage war against Satan in order to kill him; God merely has to stop sustaining him.

The Second error is assigning too little power to him. We basically ignore him. Honestly, how many times in the last few days have you really been aware of Satan's possible influence. I imagine that it is pretty rare. We are enlightened people who have grown past trying to blame everything on the devil. Satan has been dealt a fatal blow at Calvary, but he is still alive.

Revelation 12 speaks of the time just after the cross when Satan is thrown down from heaven.

**Revelation 12:12** Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"

He is like a wounded animal. He has been crushed and dominated. He is weakened and his time is short. He has been thrown down. But he is still dangerous as any wounded animal is. He is now thrashing about on earth writhing in agony and eager to inflict the same pain on others. Beware of him for he is still dangerous.

We ought not make too much of him, but neither should we think too little of him and let our guard down. Have you ever wondered why Sunday mornings go so bad so many times? Of the seven mornings in a week, it is Sunday that the most fights occur. People are fussing over how they look, fussing with children to get ready. They are stressed and irritable. Even in the car on

the way to worship there are commands being barked out and resentment building in those barked at. Everyone walks through the doors and the plastic smiles are in place and everyone is not so cheerful and serene - after all the show must go on.

It is in times that we experience the work of Satan. We are selfish all the time, so why should Sunday be different from any other morning? Even the world takes a small break on Sunday. That is the day that we are least likely to be assaulted by all the temptations of the world. The difference maker on Sunday are the spiritual forces that are at war against the church of God.

## **Our Tools for the Fight**

### **The Armor of God**

**Ephesians 6:10-20** Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. 16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, 18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, 19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

## **The Church Triumphant**

The Church triumphant holds much significance for us. These are those who have died and who are now with Christ in glory reigning with him in the heavenly places. That is a fantastic place to be.

**1 Tim. 6:12** encourages us to "Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." As we fight the good fight, we may become weary. The battle is long and the road is hard. But dear Christian, it is not forever.

Some days you may feel depressed, some days you feel like giving up, some days you feel like you can't go on. But take courage, for the battle belongs to the Lord, the war is already won, and in due time he will bring us home.

Think of all the saints in the hall of faith who have died horrible deaths. But now they are without pain and without sorrow. Think of all those who have gone before us. Your parents, perhaps are already there. Their parents also preceded them. Their parents also preceded them.

And so on we go. Hundreds of years, thousands of years, and myriads of saints now crown the halls of God in heaven singing and praising God. Dear Christian, our life is not so long as it seems.

Paul says in **Romans 12:12**, "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer." Rejoice in this hope, that you too will one day be in the church triumphant. No more striving, no more battles, all will be complete! Oh what an amazing day that will be.

Hope is such a big theme in the New Testament. This hope is not the kind of hope we normally think of. It is not a wish for something uncertain such as, "I hope the Broncos will win the Superbowl this year." Biblical hope is not mere wishing. Rather, it is a firm confidence.

**Hebrews 6:19-20** says, "We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, 20 where Jesus has gone as a forerunner." This hope is not mere wishing, it is a sure anchor for our soul. Our hope is in Christ (**Eph 1:12**). He is the author and perfecter of our faith. He is the agent that ensures or brings about what we hope for. Our hope is in Christ, but it is for salvation (**1 Thess 5:8**) it is for glory (**Col 1:27**) it is the hope of the gospel (**Col 1:23**). It is the hope laid up for us in heaven (**Col 1:5**) it is the hope of eternal life (**Titus 1:2**).

**1 Cor 15:9** "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied." But our hope is not in this life. Our hope is in the next. This hope is in Christ "laid up for you in heaven." All of this hoping, this sure confidence, in Christ, through the gospel, for glory and eternal life, is none other than a hope (sure confidence) of one day being part of the church triumphant. This life is but a breath and it will all be through. Take courage, therefore, to fight the good fight knowing that before long you too will stand before God as part of the triumphant.