

Jeff's Org

WHAT IS THE CHURCH? • THE CHURCH IS AN ARMY • EPHESIANS 6:10-18 • NO DATE

MAIN POINT

God has equipped the body of Christ as an army to do battle against the devil through His power and provision.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What's the first image that comes to mind when you hear the word "army"? Do you have a positive or negative connotation with that word? Why?

Do you tend to think of the church as an army? Why or why not?

What are some of the implications of calling the church an army?

When you become a Christian, you become a part of the family of God. You also become a member of the body of Christ. You also enlisted in an army. This army is involved in a universal and epic battle of good versus evil. The problem is that most Christians not only fail to recognize they are in an army; they fail to recognize there is a war happening at all.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ EPHESIANS 6:10-13.

Do you think most Christians recognize that they are in a spiritual battle?

What kinds of factors might keep us from recognizing the war going on around us?

How is this battle different than a physical battle? How is it the same?

Scripture does not go into a lot of detail about the dynamics of spiritual warfare, but it clearly indicates that spiritual warfare is very real and that believers need to be ready to do battle with Satan and his demons on a daily basis.

Why is it important that we recognize that our battle is not against flesh and blood?

How should that recognition influence how and who we fight?

How do you think you would face each day differently if you were always under attack? What must a Christ-follower do to be strengthened by the Lord?

Victory in spiritual warfare demands strength that is greater than the enemy, meaning it must come from God, not ourselves. Paul called on believers of his day to become stronger through the Lord's strength and then asked them to recognize that God provides what they need to stand against the enemy.

What kinds of tactics do you think the enemy might use against the Christ-follower?

What enemy attacks have you experienced? What makes him such a formidable foe?

We face an enemy who knows our weak points. His attacks aren't vague; they're specific and devious. We must be aware of his tactics and be ready to fight them back. The church serves a pivotal role in bringing that awareness about.

If we are in the middle of a spiritual war, what role does the church play in the battle?

Why is it important for us to recognize that we aren't just individual soldiers, but an army?

How does our church provide tactical instruction for this spiritual war?

When we come together in the church, we remember not only that we are in a spiritual war, but also that we are not alone. We encourage each other in the fight against the enemy, learning from each other about the tactics of warfare. Part of what we learn is how to put on the full armor of God.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ EPHESIANS 6:14-18.

Why is each piece of God's armor so valuable? Which parts are defensive weapons? Offensive?

Which piece of the armor is most meaningful to you right now? Which one might you need some help to put on?

How fellow members of God's army, how might we help arm each other with these pieces of armor?

Look again at verse 18. What else must we do for each other in this army?

In their culture, the Ephesians would have been familiar with armor, as the Roman guards were visible all over the empire. Paul used a familiar sight as an analogy for the Christian life and the

battle we must all fight. When we accepted Christ, we joined an army of Christian soldiers. We can trust that we haven't been sent into battle unprepared. God has given us everything we need, but we must choose to use what He's supplied to keep us safe. In the army of the church, we learn how to do this.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Are you engaged in the battle today or choosing to live like it doesn't exist? What are some ways you can become more aware of the battle around you?

How does being with God's people encourage you? How does it prepare you to go back out and fight the battle?

What can you do to help others in the church be more prepared to go out and fight?

PRAYER

Pray today with the recognition that you are in a battle. Ask God to make you more aware of the battle you are in and to strengthen His army, the church. Pray that you would be strong in the Lord and help others in God's army do the same.

COMMENTARY

| EPHESIANS 6:10-18

6:10. Paul's concluding teaching challenged believers to recognize their spiritual weaknesses and to draw on the Lord. We cannot strengthen ourselves. We need power from outside. The Lord Jesus is the One who supplies spiritual strength. Paul had already used the phrase "His vast strength" in Ephesians 1:19 to refer to God's active power in the lives of believers.

6:11-12. The full armor of God is required not only because we are weak but also because our spiritual enemies are strong. Our strongest adversary is the devil. We should never doubt that the devil is a real, supernatural person. He opposes God and His people with tactics, a term suggesting how wily he is. The believer's responsibility, once clad in God-given armor, is to stand. We need not flee the devil, but rather we are to boldly hold the fortress of our own souls. We do not face a physical army (flesh and blood, human beings). We face a spiritual army. Paul listed some of these evil beings. Evidently there is a hierarchy of evil spirit-beings in hostile opposition to God and His people.

6:13. For the second time, the apostle urged believers to use the full armor of God—the complete kit of spiritual equipment. God the heavenly Warrior-King wears such armor (Isa. 59:17). He has now shared it with His people. In this verse, the verb “take up” is parallel to “put on” in verse 11. Both verbs suggest intentional action. “To resist in the evil day” means during the days until Christ’s return as the conquering King.

6:14-15. Paul likened the three pieces of equipment Roman soldiers put on at the beginning of a day to God-given character traits we believers are to build daily into our lives.

“Belt.” This wide leather strap kept a Roman soldier’s undergarments from getting tangled and also held his sword at the side of his body. By application, the belt stands for truth. Many Bible students believe this refers to a Christian’s sincerity or integrity of speech. For believers to lapse into intrigue or dishonesty is to fall into the devil’s own game.

“Armor on your chest.” The metal breastplate was standard for a battle soldier; it protected his vital organs during combat. For the believer, it stands for righteousness. Since Paul had Isaiah 59:17 in mind, he meant uprightness of character (godliness or Christlikeness). To neglect developing our character according to God’s standard of virtue is to give the devil a gaping hole through which he may attack us.

“Feet sandaled.” The Roman soldier’s hobnailed (cleated) shoes kept his feet from slipping. In the analogy, it stands for a Christian’s readiness for the gospel of peace. The meaning is probably the steadiness that comes to us because we have received the good news of Christ. Without assurance that we have peace with God through the gospel, the devil will gain a great advantage, throwing us into doubts of all kinds.

6:16-17. Paul went on to speak about three more pieces of equipment. Understanding these pieces shows us actions we can take when we face spiritual battles.

“Shield.” The Roman shield Paul had in mind was probably a long, oblong leather-covered device that covered much of the body during active battle. It was effective at dousing flaming arrows. In the analogy, this stands for a believer’s faith—active day-to-day trust in God to provide the strength to resist onslaughts that the evil one sends. Faith looks to the power of God when there is temptation.

“Helmet.” The soldier’s metal headgear provided both protection and decoration. Paul had written to the Thessalonians to put on “a helmet of the hope of salvation” (1 Thess. 5:8). So what is the salvation Paul had in mind? Probably he meant our hope or expectation of future deliverance when we receive full salvation at last. Confidence that we will be with Christ forever and that we

will enjoy a future resurrection with Him provides believers strength to endure all devilish assaults.

“Sword.” The Roman short sword was used for both defense and offense. It was efficient in hand-to-hand combat. It stands for God’s Word. On the one hand, this refers to the entirety of the Scriptures, which has been inspired by the Spirit and is His gift to God’s people. On the other hand, it refers to the specific biblical message that is apt for the need at hand. (Ps. 119:11; Heb. 4:12).

6:18. Four times in this verse Paul used Greek forms for “all” or “every.”

“All kinds of prayer.” There is more than one way to talk to God. Here, the apostle used both a general term (prayer) and a specific term (request).

“All times of prayer.” There is no wrong time to pray! Morning prayers, mealtime prayers, bedtime prayers, and battle-time prayers are all acceptable. Yet they are to be motivated by the Spirit, not just become a ritual or something perfunctory. Believers are to stay alert in prayer.

“All perseverance in prayer.” Prayer is to be continual. Jesus Himself made this clear in the parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8).

“All objects of prayer.” Believers should pray for each other—all the saints—knowing that they are also experiencing spiritual warfare in their own lives.

6:19-20. Paul wanted the Ephesians to include him in their prayers. He too was engaged in spiritual battle. Perhaps as a prisoner he was tempted to be silent about his faith. He did not ask to be set free; rather, he prayed for two qualities that would enable the ministry of the word to blaze forth. First, he wanted clarity. When he spoke, he wanted the right message to be given. Second, he wanted boldness, not shrinking from delivering what God had entrusted to him—which he recognized as the mystery of the gospel. Earlier in the letter, Paul had called himself a “prisoner ... on behalf of you Gentiles” (3:1) and “the prisoner in the Lord” (4:1).

Now he called himself an ambassador in chains. As an ambassador, he was the accredited representative of Jesus Christ; and he would represent Christ before the emperor’s court. Even so great a Christian as Paul wanted prayer that he would be bold enough in Him to speak.