

RAMBO RELIGION

By Richard Jordan

Through the heroic feats attributed to him on the movie screen, the name of John Arthur Ramboⁱ has been enshrined in the minds of millions of young and old alike as a “modern day warrior.” “Rambo” has become a cultural symbol of standing against the wrongs that so grievously afflict our world and the strong, direct personal action often needed to right those wrongs. He has come to epitomize the zenith in facing down “the enemy” and gaining victory over evil through direct, powerful personal action. Rambo types have appeared in every area of life. Applied to religion and spiritual things, Rambo Religion is made to represent the curing of the sin problem by reverting to self-effort and legislated standards of righteousness.

While a nation may justly glory in those who have fought and even died in her defense, the Scripture nowhere gives us cause to glory in ourselves or to trust in our own accomplishments. In fact, the Apostle Paul states that *the Scripture hath concluded all under sin* (Galatians 3:22) and declares that it is “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us” (Titus 3:5). Thus while Rambo may be a popular hero, *Rambo Religion* is definitely doomed to defeat.

Could it be that Paul foresaw our modern day Rambo type when he wrote:

“For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

“Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:

“Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, *of* the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;

“Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” (Philippians 3:3-6).

All that Paul could accomplish was to no avail. We, too, are spiritually bankrupt and destitute in ourselves, always destined to failure. But by the grace of God we are not left to ourselves! No. We, as Paul, can “rejoice in Christ Jesus” and have “no confidence” in those things which our flesh can perform.

“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

“Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ,

“And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Philippians 3:7-9).

Rambo Religion never works. Try as we may, by our own efforts we can never gain favor with a thrice holy God. But to be found “*in Christ*”—ah, this is victory assured, for there it is not our righteousness—our right actions perfectly and consistently performed—but, rather, *His* righteousness freely bestowed as a free gift of God’s grace to all who rely *exclusively* on the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour.

This then, is the defect of Rambo Religion. Do any reading these words seek to impress God or to stop sin in their lives by their own wisdom and efforts? My friend, neither ceremonial correctness nor intellectual cleverness will avail—they *cannot* avail. You must be *perfect* to be accepted of Him—and try as you may, you are not. That is why God

Himself has provided the Lord Jesus Christ as a perfect Saviour—and why, if you will but trust Him alone, He will save you this very instant for all eternity.

Nor is Rambo Religion any more appropriate for the believer. Go back and reread Philippians 3:3-9 and remember that it was *as a believer* that Paul wrote those words. Even after being saved for more than 30 years and having served Christ faithfully through them all, his one great desire was simply to be “found in Him.” His one great confidence is similarly stated in Philippians 4:13:

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”

Every believer would do well to remind himself often that even after being saved for many years, yes, and even after serving Christ for years, even then, we dare not trust in our own strength. To be “found in Him” can be our only goal for it is only as we take our stand in the position God has given us in Christ that we can experience success in the Christian life.

Here the glory of the “one baptism” of Ephesians 4:5 rises to the fore. No thanks to Rambo Religionists who would seek to force a water baptism ceremony in here, scriptural fact is that “by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body” (1 Corinthians 12:13). This and this alone qualifies as the “one baptism” for the “one body.” And it is this one baptism *by the Spirit* that is the basis of positional truth—the source of our oneness with Christ in His death and resurrection life, even with His present position in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6).

Victory in the Christian life is more than a doctrinal concept; it is a functional reality. The believer is not called upon to go out and achieve victory over sin, self, Satan and the world. Rather, we are called upon simply *by faith* to joyfully participate in the victory Christ has already won for us and bestowed upon us by His grace.

“As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so* walk ye in him:

“Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught,abounding therein with thanksgiving” (Colossians 2:6,7).

The religious system about us, in true Rambo fashion, seeks to compel us to work for ourselves in order to *get* saved and/or to *stay* saved. But even the simplest believer in Christ is *at once* “blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3) and there-*in Christ*—made permanently complete:

“And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power” (Colossians 2:10).

What more could ever be added to our blessed position in Christ? Ours is not to seek to add to this completeness with Rambo Religion but rather to experience and enjoy our “all spiritual blessings” as we by faith appropriate them and thus make them living realities in the details of our daily lives.

God is equally rich to each believer *in Christ*. The level of our *enjoyment* of these riches, however, is directly proportional to the amount of time we spend in study of the Scriptures, rightly divided. Our daily walk is effective only as we by faith appropriate this sound doctrine into our lives.

We are “strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man” (Ephesians 3:16) as the Holy Spirit takes the Word that is “hid in our heart” and energizes our lives to service for the Saviour. Thus *He* brings forth fruit in our lives, filling them with “*the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God*” (Philippians 1:1).

ii

ⁱ 1. In real life John Arthur Rambo was killed in Viet Nam. His name appears in the Viet Nam Memorial in Washington, D.C.