

Soldiers of Jesus Christ

“Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.”

—II Timothy 2:3,4

The Apostle Paul evidently had in mind our “good fight of faith” when he penned the words of our text.

The basic lesson of the soldier illustration as applied to our life is that of loyalty and devotion to the Heavenly Father and his son Christ Jesus. Obedience, courage, faith, sacrifice, suffering, and death all enter into the life of being a soldier. *Moffat’s* translation of our text emphasizes some of these points: “Join the ranks of those who bear suffering, like a loyal soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets

AS CHRISTIANS, WE should be peacemakers, and so far as possible should seek to live peaceably with all men. Yet in many respects our life as a follower of Christ may be compared to the life of a soldier, and the Bible employs this illustration to teach us important lessons of obedience to the divine will.

The Apostle Paul evidently

entangled in civil pursuits; his aim is to satisfy his commander.”

A basic and essential quality of a good soldier is obedience, so we as followers of Christ must learn to obey. The success of any army in battle depends in no small measure upon the obedience of each soldier to the directions of the commanding officer. Those in God’s army are made up of those who are willing to obey to the greatest degree possible the commands of the “captain” of their salvation. (Heb. 2:10) Christ is our commanding officer, commissioned by the Heavenly Father to be the leader of this company of soldiers, who through trial and hardship are forging ahead to victory and to glory. The victory of this army is certain, but our victory as individuals in God’s army depends upon our obedience to orders.

OF THE HEART

There is much more to obedience than one might at first suppose. In the case of Christ’s followers, it should reach down into the secret recesses of our hearts. The divine commands by which we are guided are stated very explicitly in the Bible, yet the slightest degree of insincerity or disobedience on our part will result in a misinterpretation of those commands. Only the spirit of full surrender to God will safeguard us against the hazard of disobedience. Certain disciplinary measures may be employed by the Heavenly Father for a time to remind us of the terms of our enlistment. However, if we choose continually to disobey, we risk eventually being dropped from the ranks, and at great personal loss.

A soldier has both pleasant and unpleasant duties to perform, and so it is with us. It is the doing of things which by nature we would rather not do that tests our obedience to divine commands. Sometimes we render only partial obedience. The human heart can also be very deceitful. If our allegiance to the will of God is not complete, we may endeavor to convince ourselves that we are obedient to all the divine commands governing our warfare when, as a matter of fact, we are obeying only some of them—those which appeal to us the most, or which seem the easiest to carry out.

In such cases, where the spirit of full consecration is lacking, the commands which we ignore, or those which we obey, depend largely upon our likes or dislikes. An ideal soldier, however, is not guided by his personal preferences, but only by the commands of his captain. In the army, there are times for rest, exercise, training, study, and engaging in battle. The faithful soldier will participate in all these activities as directed—and without question.

NOT OURS TO CHOOSE

How easy it is at times, however, for us as soldiers of Christ to pick and choose with respect to the particular phase of soldiery we undertake. If we are of an active, aggressive nature, we will delight in carrying out those orders which have to do with being busy in the Lord's work, but we may overlook the fact that there are other things that he expects as well. If, on the other hand, we are of a more studious nature, we will find it much to our liking to spend a great deal of time in "rightly dividing the word of truth," but we may not fully

realize that one of the objects of our study is that we might be properly equipped for the ministry, or service of the truth.—II Tim. 2:15

We might be of a combative nature and well trained for exposing popular error, and in this way “battle for the Lord and for the Truth.” However, we may overlook the fact that we should also use our combativeness against our own fleshly weaknesses. If we are a meditative follower of Christ, we may spend long hours in prayer, because this phase of the divine will is especially to our liking. Yet, we may fail to realize that one of the objects of prayer is to keep the armor of the Lord bright, that we might be better prepared do battle for our captain.

LOYALTY

Loyalty is much akin to obedience. It is a word that is used to describe one’s allegiance to another, or to his country, in contrast to an attitude of partial sympathy with, or friendliness toward, the enemy. As soldiers of Christ, we cannot fraternize with God’s enemies and remain pleasing to the captain of our salvation. We must be completely for the Lord, and for all the principles of righteousness involved in our warfare. We must know of what country we are citizens, and for what government we are fighting, and give no place to the influence of other issues in our lives which would undermine our loyalty to Christ.

Christ Jesus our captain said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” (John 18:36) This means that as soldiers we cannot ally ourselves with this “present evil world.” (Gal. 1:4) We need to always be on the alert against the subtle efforts of “the prince of this

world” to entice us into joining his ranks—if not openly, at least to partake of the worldly spirit and fraternize with his soldiers. The forces of the great Adversary, which oppose the army of the Lord, frequently appear as angels of light to deceive. (II Cor. 11:14) If not on guard, we may be induced to lay down our arms and go over to his side. If as faithful soldiers, however, we keep ourselves well-informed concerning the enemy’s tactics, we will not be “ignorant of his devices,” and will not be led astray by them.—chap. 2:11

Our citizenship is in heaven, and it is to assure an abundant entrance into the heavenly kingdom that we are fighting. Nothing positive can be gained by a compromising attitude toward any of the allurements of the great Adversary. We are to seek first and always the kingdom of heaven. To do this we must avoid entangling alliances with any of those things which belong to the passing empire of Satan.

Loyalty to our Heavenly Father and his son, our captain, must be voluntary and complete. We have learned to know them, and upon the basis of this knowledge we have full confidence in the integrity of their cause. Our loyalty should be complete because we love our God and our captain, and are pained at the thought of displeasing either of them or being out of harmony with their plans and purposes for man’s salvation.

COURAGE

Courage is also an essential quality we must develop as a soldier. There is no room in the Lord’s army for the fainthearted. However, our courage should not be the sort that is born of self-confidence.

“When I think of self, I tremble,” should be our attitude as a soldier of Jesus Christ. When we thus realize our own weaknesses we can be courageous by putting our trust in God and looking to him for strength to help in every time of need. When we look to God, and to Christ, our captain, and realize that we are made strong by their strength, then we can indeed be courageous.

To be a good soldier requires confidence in the cause for which one is fighting. Upon the basis of this confidence, one can be fully devoted to that cause. This is especially true of soldiers of Christ. Our faith and confidence in the righteousness of the cause which we are serving should be so complete as to call forth all of our powers and abilities in a freewill, self-sacrificing effort to cooperate with the captain of our salvation.

As Christ’s soldiers we should have no mental reservations as to the propriety of that which our captain asks us to do. Our faith in God and in Christ should be so complete that even though we may not always understand just why we are called upon to do certain things, nevertheless we will have full confidence in the fact that we are being guided by heavenly wisdom. Although we may err in carrying out the commands of our captain, he cannot make mistakes.

Because of our implicit faith and confidence in the righteousness and final victory of the divine cause, we will be glad to make any sacrifice that is asked of us while fighting under the banner of the Lord. Not only will we be sure of victory over all enemies, but our hope in a glorious “homecoming” after the “fight of faith” is over should stimulate us

to even greater efforts in pressing forward in the battle.

Our “homecoming” as a soldier of the Lord will not depend upon our escaping death in battle, for we must continue in the warfare until we have finished our course in death. In order to have the “captain of our salvation” bestow honors upon us at the conclusion of our warfare, we must be faithful unto death, for this is the term of our enlistment in the Lord’s army.—Rev. 2:10

OUR PERFECT CAPTAIN

One of the things which gives us confidence in the commands of our captain is our knowledge that he has himself given battle even unto death. Jesus received his commission to be the captain of this army because of his own faithfulness in suffering. It was through suffering that he was trained for his present high office. Concerning this, Paul wrote, part of which we have earlier quoted, “It became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”—Heb. 2:10

The full objective of our warfare is not only the present conquering of enemies, but also a glorious future service beyond the current conflict. This “good fight of faith” is in preparation for that service. If we are to be a joint-heir with our captain in the future kingdom of service and blessing, to be one of the “many sons” mentioned by Paul, we must be made like Jesus. Like our captain, we also must be made perfect through suffering. In all things we are to become like him—conformed to his image.

Concerning this, Paul wrote, “Whom he did fore-know, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”—Rom.8:29

CONDITIONS OF ACCEPTANCE

In joining an army there are certain conditions of enlistment with which the applicant must comply, and so it is with God’s army. Soldiers must be physically and mentally fit. A weak heart will disqualify. In fact, physical disability of almost any sort disqualifies one for enlistment in an earthly army. However, in God’s army it is different. To join, all that is needed is a perfect “heart”—not a literal heart, but that for which the heart is scripturally used as a symbol, namely, the affections, desire, and determination to do God’s will.

To have a perfect “heart” means we must desire and strive to do perfectly, and to render all that we have to God. If the spirit of our consecration is undivided, then the Lord makes up for the unwilling imperfections of our flesh. It is essential, however, to recognize our own weaknesses and that these would stand in our way of full acceptance except for the loving provision which God has made through Christ—the provision of Christ’s righteousness to cover our imperfections. We must be humble enough to accept this provision and to rejoice in it.

Based upon our confidence in the covering merit of Christ’s blood, we must make a full consecration of ourselves to God and to the doing of his will. Nothing short of a full dedication of heart, mind, and being is acceptable. Only thus can we enlist in his army. This complete dedication means full-time

service, and the pledging of all that we are and have to the holy cause of God, to be used as he deems best. No measurement is taken of anything except our heart intention to devote all to God, and if that measure be full and complete, we are accepted, taken into his army, and the warfare begins.

LEAVING HOME

Very seldom is a soldier permitted to remain at home during the period of his enlistment, and this also is true of us as soldiers of Christ. Sometimes enlistment in the Lord's army means a literal breaking away from what we call home. The terms of our enlistment require that we are willing to go anywhere God directs us, and that we be what he wants us to be. Even though we may not be required by our captain to literally leave our present home, yet, in a larger sense, we do have to leave our "own people," and our "father's house."—Ps. 45:10

As soldiers of Christ we must love our captain more than we do father, mother, children, or friends. We must please him, as well as our Heavenly Father, even though it may mean the loss of all our earthly friends and relatives—and frequently it does mean just this.

Then, too, we must leave our "father's house"—that is, father Adam's house. For the world of mankind in general there is the divine provision of restitution, which means that all will have an opportunity to enjoy the blessings of the restored paradise—that glorious home which the Creator provided for his human creatures. However, enlistment in the Lord's army means the giving up of

the hope of restitution—the giving up of a place in father Adam’s house.

WHO ARE CALLED?

Those whom God calls into his army would not, for the most part, be considered ideal material for a worldly army, because he does not call those whom the world considers noble, wise, and strong. The Apostle Paul wrote, “Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.”—I Cor. 1:26-29

Even the noblest and wisest of the world come far short of the standards of divine righteousness, hence even these would not be qualified for enlistment upon the basis of their natural endowments or attainments. How wonderful it is that those far less qualified by nature can be acceptable to God through the merit of Christ’s righteousness. It is the nobility of heart that is important with the Heavenly Father, and one of the qualities of a noble heart is humility, a willingness to learn and to follow the instructions of the captain.

THE SOLDIER’S ARMOR

Like the soldiers of ancient times, we as “good soldiers of Jesus Christ” are provided with armor. It is because of this divine provision that we are

able, successfully, to combat our enemies. One of the secrets of full victory in our warfare is to put on and keep on “the whole armor of God.” There must not be any picking and choosing as to what piece, or pieces, of the armor we shall wear, nor can we substitute armor of our own making. It is “the armor of God,” and our implicit confidence is manifested by the enthusiasm with which we take and wear the armor he has provided.

The Apostle Paul described this armor as follows, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”—Eph. 6:10-17

All these various parts of the “armor” represent the Truth, each from its own standpoint. The “helmet” symbolizes our knowledge of the Truth—not only of the divine plan, but of God’s love and care for us; we “know” that all things work together for our good. (Rom. 8:28) The “breastplate of righteousness” represents a personal application of the

Truth, particularly those truths pertaining to our righteousness in Christ.

The “shield of faith” pictures our use of the Truth to protect ourselves from the fiery darts of the Adversary. The sandals of “the gospel of peace” symbolize our peaceful walk in life, and our efforts as ministers of reconciliation. (II Cor. 5:18,19) The “sword of the Spirit,” Paul explains, represents the Word of God. We are to use this to slay the uprisings of sin in our own bodies, and to fend off the attacks of the Adversary, but never to injure others.

The girdle of truth is that part of the armor which suggests the necessity of our serving the Truth. No matter how faithful we may be in other respects, if we do not serve the Truth we do not have on the whole armor of God, hence will not be able to stand as faithful soldiers. We must hold the Truth in unselfishness. If we think of the Truth merely as something with which we alone are concerned, or through which we alone are blessed, and do not employ it in the service of others, we have failed to capture its true spirit. Sooner or later we will fail if we do not have the spirit of service illustrated by the girdle of truth.

OUR ADVERSARIES

As soldiers of Christ, we have enemies to battle against. The leader of these enemies is our “adversary the devil.” (I Pet. 5:8) He operates through the world, and through our fallen flesh, hence we speak of our enemies as being threefold—the world, the flesh, and the devil—Satan. Allied with Satan in the spirit world are the fallen angels. Additionally, in the material world there are many agencies of

selfishness and superstition through which the Devil is able to strike against us. (Eph. 6:12) Although our enemies are formidable, threatening, and wily, our victory is sure if we continue to put our trust in God, and make use of all the means of grace which he has provided for us.

HELP CERTAIN

Our Heavenly Father has given us many assurances of grace to help in time of need. Some of his promises are:

“I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”—Heb. 13:5

“Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.”—I John 4:4

“If [Since] God be for us, who can be against us?”—Rom. 8:31

“My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in [your] weakness.”—II Cor. 12:9

“No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper.”—Isa. 54:17

The Lord’s protection over us as members of his army does not mean that we will be free from suffering and trouble. A soldier cannot expect this. We should expect and be prepared to endure much suffering, hardship, and weariness. If we do not have these experiences we may well question how faithful we have been to the terms of our enlistment.

If the pursuit of being a soldier of Christ is merely a side issue in our life, to be worked at when convenient, or when we are not too tired, or when there is nothing more interesting to do, the chances are that we will find it possible to lead a fairly quiet life. However, if we are of those who are being

consumed by the zeal of God's house, and if we are not satisfied unless we are actively engaged in the business of being a faithful soldier, we will encounter hardship and suffering, even as did Peter and Paul and the other apostles, and even as did the captain of our salvation.

If we are good and faithful soldiers of Jesus Christ, we will rejoice in the privilege of suffering in the great cause of our captain. Hence, we will endeavor to follow faithfully in his footsteps of loving service in the divine cause. While doing so, we will rejoice in the blessed promise of our Captain, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."—Rev. 3:21 ■