

“BORN FOR BATTLE”

(II Timothy 2:3-4)

“You, therefore, endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man at war entangles himself with the affairs of this life: that he may please him who has chosen him to be a soldier.”

Years ago, Evangelist Dwight L. Moody prohibited his crusade singer from singing “Onward Christian Soldiers” in his crusades, because he said he knew no church whose members looked or acted like an army of Christian soldiers. It is noticeable today that, even in evangelical churches, this song is seldom sung. Was/is Moody right?

Every culture is replete with stories of its military heroes and their celebrated exploits. The very names of Alexander the Great, Napoleon Bonaparte, Genghis Khan, Lord Horatio Nelson, George Washington and Dwight Eisenhower are renowned in history because of great exploits of military conquest. When I visited Abbotsford, the home place of Sir Walter Scott, the Scots novelist who broke down the hostility between England and Scotland by his massive volumes of historical romance novels, I was completely intrigued by the aura of the place, and most of all by the rooms full of weapons and military artifacts Scott had collected from the great battlefields of Great Britain and Western Europe. My visit was an historical reminder of great military leaders and their recognized conquests.

It is somewhat shocking to focus on the many military metaphors that are used in the Bible for God, His people and His or their action in history. I will mention only four of these “army analogies”, four which will form the foundation of this study.

First, every Christian is a *soldier*. We need go no further to see the problem of the connection between *revelation* and *reality*. The Christian community has so glibly departed from God’s clear revelation of this point that hardly any Christian today is truly recognizable as a reasonable facsimile of a soldier. Indeed, there is something about the *modus operandi* of the typical local church that neutralizes and negates the very possibility of emerging the passion and performance that befit a soldier.

Second, the Christian’s character and community are the *battleground* for the waging of the Christian warfare. However, we must sadly admit that, measured by impact and product, there is little evidence of much real “waging of Christian warfare” in the character of Christians and in the communities in which they live.

Third, the Church is an *army*. But how can a sedate group of passive listeners (the profile of a typical assembly of believers in a local church) who seldom break that mode be called an army?

Fourth, Christ is the *Conqueror* of sin and death, the *Captain* of our salvation, and the *Commander* of God’s Army. At last we have reached an analogy which we can clearly

trace, acknowledge and honor! In Christ, the Ideal is intact, but what about the fulfillment of the military role of His followers? We will look at each of these concepts in more detail as we approach the Biblical picture of the intended Christian soldier.

Truly militant Christianity is extremely rare today. Most Christians have retreated into the “comfort castles” that we call “churches”. The local church should be like the huddle in a football game—a strategic gathering which leads to purposeful and powerful execution on the line of scrimmage, the battle-line of a football game. Have you ever heard of a football player being hurt in a huddle? Has one ever made a touchdown run, or thrown a touchdown pass, or laid a crunching block, from the huddle? To follow the much more replete Biblical analogy, that of soldiers, armies, battles, victories, defeats, etc., do soldiers spend their lives only in the barracks and simulated battlefields of *boot* camp, or is that training for bludgeoning, burgeoning, brutal reality on a violent battlefield? True bruises, celebrations of victory, regrets over defeat, the emotional highs of participation, the emotional lows of casualties and losses, can only be experienced as fierce struggle occurs. In military terms, this fierce struggle will be attended by danger, firefights of immeasurable magnitude, battle cries that will summon maximum effort from every participant, and *rest* and *recovery* only when the enemy is conquered or quieted on the battlefield. This militant mentality penetrates the pages of the New Testament, and must be restored to the Body of Christ or it will wither, wrinkle and die of passive inactivity.

Why has the church hidden this metaphor and failed to redevelop this mentality? Has the ugliness of war dulled our senses to our responsibilities and opportunities? Has our inbred and excessive cultural hedonism, emerging in the church as rugged individualism, self-curl, self-addiction, self-intoxication, and self-piety (in short, “comfort-first” Christianity), aborted for the Church any *possibility of marching again as His Army, banners flying, and celebrating His victories as the enemy is routed through us in every nation on earth?* Could it be our cultural desire for tolerance, mildness and moderation in all things, what someone called “the worship of the happy mean” (our unwillingness to go to the radical extremity of true self-denying, cross-bearing, Jesus-carrying Christianity), avoiding extremes even in goodness and Godliness, and aiming above all at a mild, civilized, undisturbing, innocuous and non-impacting discipleship? Please note my use of the word “discipleship”; I believe that every evident failure in the Church begins with a failure to adjust to the New Testament Model, Method and Mandate concerning “*making disciples.*” The only way I can imagine to restore the militant mentality (indeed, *any* true Christian mentality) to today’s Western Church is through full-blown pursuit of that Model, Method and Mandate of Jesus and the New Testament. Indeed, I believe that **great doses of love for Christ and others, balanced by this militant mentality and a militant strategy for world advance**, accounted for the world-tackling, world-changing impact of the early church as chronicled in the Book of Acts. And I do not think we can see a recurrence of such advances again without a restoration of this balance and the action stimulated by it.

Now, to the message at hand. Jesus Himself equated conversion with *a declaration of war*. Beginning with His general term for personalizing a truth, “For

which of you...”, He then added this illustration, “What king, *going to war against another king*,” (to paraphrase) does not carefully count his resources to see if he can finance this war? Note that this leader is *going to war; that he has an enemy and a goal, and that he must own and use adequate resources to achieve his goal*.

Let me pursue the New Testament doctrine. *Preceding conversion, a sinner is at peace with Satan and at war with God. Following conversion, he is, by nature of his new birth and the “contract” of the Christian life, at peace with God (!) and immediately at war with Satan*. Satan does not easily abandon the lifetime control he has exercised over or within every lost sinner. He instantly declares war on the new-born believer, and seeks to neutralize and negate the effects of his new birth. Here is another reason that full-blown disciple-making should be practiced as quickly as possible with every new believer, and a mere institutional reduction of formal teaching will not work in implementing in him all of the dimensions of his new life in Christ. Do mothers abandon the raising of their children to short-time training in institutions? The question contains its own answer. All true care for new-borns is hands-on, close-up and long-term. The same is true in disciple-making. Look at Jesus’ “training of the Twelve”!

It is from Christ’s lips, also, that we hear the startling declaration, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” Let’s pursue the ideas of the military metaphor more closely, using the text recorded above and the analogy of Scripture in other texts.

I. The CHRISTIAN is a SOLDIER

The first idea I want to explore is that, Biblically, *every Christian is presented as a soldier*. In the II Timothy text printed above, he is called “a soldier”, a “good soldier”, and “a man at war.” Ponder these words carefully, and question yourself about their validity in your life.

A. The Establishment of the Christian as a Soldier

Since our text is found in the flagship Second Timothy letter of the Apostle Paul to his younger disciple, let me stay a moment (only) in First and Second Timothy to establish this truth that in the New Testament, *every Christian is pictured as a soldier*. In I Timothy 1:18, Paul wrote, “Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction . . . that you might *war a good warfare*.” In I Timothy 6:12, Paul exhorted Timothy to “*fight the good fight of faith*.” The words of the text recorded above simply repeat and amplify this call.

In Paul’s First Letter to Timothy, he used a military term five times in exhorting Timothy. The term is *parangello*, which according to the Greek lexicon means, “to issue a military order which must be obeyed.” In I Timothy 1:3, Paul told Timothy to “charge (issue an order to) some that they teach no other doctrine.” Here we see how exact and careful disciples and teachers must be to be doctrinally sound, and how a discipline like military discipline must be enforced to guarantee this. In I Timothy 4:11, Paul said to Timothy, “These things command (issue an order) and teach.” Can you hear the

crispness of a Commander's order in these words? No wonder they had a militant mentality in the early Church! This text exemplifies a leader (in this case, *a discipler addressing his disciple*) in the early church realizing that he was expected to give to his disciple "God's Marching Orders". In I Timothy 5:7, he wrote, "And these things give in charge (issue an order)"; i.e., *pass God's marching orders down through the ranks of the frontline troops*. Timothy, do everything you can personally do to enlist and activate every believer as a *soldier under orders*. "I give you charge (issue this order to you)", Paul said to Timothy (I Timothy 6:13), and then he told him to "Charge (issue an order to) those that are rich in this world" (6:17). Paul was marshalling the soldiers! He was assembling the Army and issuing the Commander's orders! He was prepping those who are Born to Battle! Where is this in today's Church?

B. The Enlistment of the Christian as a Soldier

Now, let me address the specifics of the soldier's assignment and resources. The text mentions the soldier's *enlistment*. According to the text, he has been personally "chosen" by the Key Recruiter in the universe to participate in the Most Important War this world has ever known. Recruiting in this warfare is the Joint Effort of Jesus the Commander and the Holy Spirit, the Chief Executor and Enlistment Officer of this Army. By virtue of his salvation, every born-again believer in Christ is a soldier in this Army.

C. The Endowment of the Christian as a Soldier

Then, think of the soldier's *endowment*. The first verse in the chapter that specifies the assignment of the soldier also reveals his enablement. Paul said to Timothy, "My son, be strengthened (a passive voice verb, which means that the entire enablement of the Christian soldier comes from Someone Else, and not himself) in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." This verse alone could command the attention of this entire message, and still we would leave much unsaid. Note the word "grace". This is the all-inclusive shorthand word for our total reservoir of resources as Christians. What is grace? It is *God's Help given freely to those who do not deserve it*. And faith is our *taking*, our *receiving*, our *appropriating*, our *using*, of all of the available resources to be employed through us *on the terms of the Commanding Officer* (not on our poor limited self-piety course). Christian, take heed—you will never fulfill your assignment as a soldier without *taking in massive daily doses of the grace of God!*

D. The Enlightenment of the Christian as a Soldier

Think, too, of the soldier's *enlightenment*. What "light", what orders, does he follow? Again, disciple-making is the prominent feature in the total text. One of the flagship verses on disciple-making in the Bible is II Timothy 2:2, which says, "And (a connecting conjunction; note the succession with something preceding the verse) the things which you (Timothy) have heard from me (Paul)..., exactly the same things (this is minor emphasis in the Greek text) deposit into the lives of faithful men, who will be enabled in the Process (again, minor emphasis) to teach OTHERS, ALSO (according to one scholar, these two words are major emphasis, which would mean they are *the Holy*

Spirit's loud shout from the page).” All of the terms in parentheses in this quote are my additions. So Timothy’s enlightenment came from personal communication from his faithful disciple-maker, the Apostle Paul. Read II Timothy 1:13-14 *very, very carefully*, and you will see the personal communication between Paul the discipler and Timothy the disciple, as well as the substance of the communication. It was this communication that provided Timothy’s enlightenment, and should provide the illumination for every soldier of the Cross.

E. The Entanglements of the Christian as a Soldier

Consider, also, the soldier’s potential and dangerous *entanglements*. The text says, “No soldier at war entangles himself with the affairs of this life.” A soldier’s life is one of consolidation of interests to “this one thing I do”, and concentration of mind and action upon all the dimensions of being “a good soldier”. If he divides his lifestyle between soldiering and socializing (in any of its dimensions), he will likely go AWOL and will sooner or later be court-martialed as a traitor. The soldier’s devotion to his regimental leader and to that leader’s assignment is to be total and undivided. He must not allow business interests, back-home demands, social enticements, pleasure and entertainment, to interfere with his consuming commitment to be a soldier. The same is true of the Christian soldier. “A double-minded (*dipsukos*, literally, ‘two-souled) man is unstable in all his ways” (James 1:8). Christian, clear away the entanglements that prevent all-out loyalty to Christ.

F. The Equipment of the Christian as a Soldier

Finally, think of the soldier’s *equipment*. On a battlefield, the unequipped or ill-equipped soldier will not match the soldier with full and adequate battle clothing and weapons. The New Testament is clear about the equipment of the Christian soldier. In fact, it is called “the whole armor of God” (Ephesians 6:11, 13), and that armor is itemized one piece at a time—the belt of Truth, the breastplate of righteousness, shoes which picture serene and settled readiness, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. Thus, the believer’s integrity, purity, serenity, certainty, mentality, and victory are secured by God Himself—if he will fully employ his equipment.

Note that some of this armor is for offensive action, some for defensive action, some for covering and some for wielding, but *not a single piece is for retreat*. There is no provision of armor for the backside! Every piece must be used or there will be vulnerable and indefensible gaps in the believer’s exposure to the enemy.

I will leave the full discussion of this “whole armor of God” for another time and another study. You will notice that I omitted a discussion of the two main battle weapons, “the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” (Ephesians 6:17), and “praying always with all prayer...” (Ephesians 6:18). I will reserve them for another study.

Let me conclude this point with an historical illustration that warns of carelessness and looseness about “putting on the whole armor of God” (Ephesians 6:11).

On November 22, 1963, the President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, was gunned down by a hidden assassin while riding in the Presidential motorcade in Dallas, Texas. Several shots rang out, and the fatal bullet crashed into the President's head, killing him. As the motorcade began its short trip down the Dallas streets, the Secret Service agents who were responsible to protect the President urgently requested him to put the protective bubbletop which was available over the Presidential limousine, but Kennedy vehemently refused their advice. So the path to his skull was unguarded when the assassin fired the fatal shot. Christian, the assassin of souls, Satan, has you in his crosshairs, and acts with steady determination to neutralize or negate you as Christ's soldier. You must not ride heedlessly into the Devil's ambush without putting on your protective armor.

I read this happier illustration in the daily newspaper of my city. A Pittsburgh man named John Old had escaped two brushes with robbers while working at a gas station. Forewarned by these close calls, he forearmed himself for future emergencies. He secured a bullet-proof vest and wore it to work every day. It proved to be the right choice. Just before Christmas that year, a man robbed the station where Old worked, shot him at least twice, and escaped with about \$110. Old walked away with bullet dents in his vest, but unharmed. His "armor" had saved his life. Christian, take heed; far, far more is at stake than your one life.

G. The Assignment of the Christian as a Soldier

Finally, consider the *assignment* of the Christian as a Soldier. A man came upon a person playing a cello, but he noticed that he was playing the same note over and over, and that he did not vary from that one note. At a lull in the incessant sound of the one note, the observer said, "You play strangely. Everybody else plays the entire instrument, but you play only one note." The player retorted, "Yes, but *they* are *looking* for it; *I've found it!*" I often feel this way when I strum the string or play the note of disciple-making. No Christian as aware as I am of the gigantic place this strategy played in the Bible could ever separate this strategy from any assignment or activity of the Christian life!!!

This assessment bears the giant seal of Jesus' attention and endorsement in making it *the only command* in His Great Commission. Look at His overwhelming example. In His eternal pre-existence, Jesus modeled being a disciple of His Father (see Isaiah 50:4-8, NASV). In His early life on earth, He was discipled by His mother (in such things as learning the Scriptures), and by His foster father, Joseph (who tutored Him to become the village carpenter of Nazareth). In His adolescent years, He was discipled (as was every Jewish boy) by the leaders of Judaism of that day. Then, to cap it all, He built His public ministry around the aggressive discipling of twelve men. He filled His teaching with concepts of being disciples and building disciples. Finally, He funneled His total Mandate into the command to "turn people into disciples in all nations". *With regard to the product, I simply echo Jesus, "Come and see"; the product speaks loudly and clearly for itself, for the eternal good of multitudes of people, and for the eternal glory of Jesus Christ.*

Here, we must acknowledge another “warfare danger” of a Christian. It is the easiest thing in the world, with all of the pressures of training and performance, for a soldier to relax his focus on his main assignment. Just this morning in my “morning watch” with God, I read an illustration that highlights this danger. Let me cite the story. In 1948, General Dwight Eisenhower published his memoirs on World War II entitled Crusade in Europe. He testified that as commander-in-chief of the Allied Forces, he faced many pressures to give up his primary goal, to use the beaches of Normandy for an all-out invasion of the Nazi empire at the earliest practical moment. Two sentences on page 48 of his book sum up his struggle: “History has proved that nothing is more difficult in war than to adhere to *a single strategic plan*. Unforeseen and glittering promise on the one hand, and unexpected difficulties or risks upon the other, present constant temptations to desert *the chosen line of action* in favor of another” (The italics in the quote are my addition). Our Supreme Commander did not waver in His teaching and practice of disciple-making, nor in His one supreme command to His followers to “make disciples”, and neither may we waver in this assignment. *This is our warfare, and it must be waged against all odds and opposition. Furthermore, the gratification, present rewards and promised rewards are greater than anything I have ever seen or heard in any other field of endeavor in the Christian mission.*

The Christian is a soldier, and his career is both prescribed and proscribed by the New Testament.

II. THE CHRISTIAN’S CHARACTER IS THE BATTLEGROUND

Let me abbreviate my discussion of the second point. The Christian’s character and community comprise the *battleground* in this soldier’s warfare. Every Christian has three consistent and continual enemies in the warfare between good and evil. One is the *external* enemy, the world. We might call this the “social” enemy. Another is the *infernal* enemy, Satan. We will call him the “spiritual” enemy. But the worst enemy of all is the *internal* enemy, which the Bible calls “the flesh”. We will call this the “sensual” or “selfish” enemy. To understand the word “flesh” as it is used in the teaching of the New Testament, spell out the word, remove the “h”, and turn it around—SELF. The “flesh” is the self-curl, the self-addiction, that remains through a believer’s conversion, and supplies his training ground for his most necessary victory. “He who conquers and controls himself is mightier than he who takes a city.”

The main battles in the believer’s warfare are fought in “the Castle of Mansoul”, that is, within the believer himself. He who wins the big battles within himself will not need to fear the external and infernal enemies. But beware, the flesh is the “handle” that we extend to Satan, inviting him to reassume his forfeited control over our lives, and the world’s most alluring enticement to the Christian is through his self-life or his “flesh.” Just as the Wall of China was breached four times through betrayal to an enemy from someone inside the wall, so the Christian can only be conquered by the world and the Devil if he gives permission in favor of his own self-indulgence. D.L. Moody often said, “My biggest and worst enemy is the man who wears my coat—and I don’t mean after it has been stolen!” Satan is a master of the opportune time for making his “hit” on you,

and he generally does it when you are weak, troubled, already struggling with temptation, or hard-pressed in the give-and-take of battle. The poet said it well:

“Set up Your standard, Lord, that we, Who claim a Heavenly birth,
May march with You to smite the lies That vex Your groaning earth.

We, fight for Truth? *We*, fight for God? We poor slaves of lies and sin!
He who would fight for You on earth Must first be true within.

Then, God of Truth, for whom we long, You who will hear our prayer,
Fight Your own battle in our hearts And slay the falsehood there.”

Christian, this is a Tag Match, and there is an undefeated and invincible Champion in our corner! Tag Him by the touch of faith, invite Him to fight for you, and you will be free to fight and win His battles. “Be made strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might” (Ephesians 6:10).

III. THE CHURCH IS AN ARMY

The third point is ideally true, but practically, the church is a caricature of this truth. The hymn opens with these words, “Onward, Christian soldiers, Marching as to war...”, but a bystander would be hard-pressed to see any evidence of this claim in the typical church. In fact, he would find such a claim laughable.

“Like a mighty army, Moves the church of God,
Brethren, we are marching, Where the saints have trod.”

A mighty army? And “moves” is its definitive action word? Friends, an incredible adjustment would need to be made within the ranks of this “army” if it is ever again to justify this ideal.

May I say again, and firmly, that only disciple-making will ever produce this profile in the lives of believers. I work daily and perennially with disciples in all kinds of settings and activities. I spend a lot of time overseas with teams of incredibly well-trained disciples who are also disciple-makers and world-impactors, and we teach large numbers of pastors and ministry leaders the strategy of Jesus and the New Testament of building disciples. This year, we will have at least 45 teams of these trained laymen (!) in many nations of the world, training pastors and ministry leaders there. One of these in-the-know laymen recently estimated conservatively that all of the disciple-making teams of teachers will have at least 9,000 pastors in front of them overseas this year.

The spirit of these team members is incredibly optimistic and opportunistic, and their impact is continual after they leave “the field.” All of this is strategic and intentional. How can this be? Simply because they know how to train local leaders (pastors and ministry leaders) in any setting, and they leave behind them upon departure leaders with equipped and motivated hearts who can “deposit” exactly the same things

into the lives of faithful men, who in turn will be enabled by the continuing process of disciple-making to teach others, also (II Timothy 2:2). Furthermore, contacts are maintained with representative leaders in each field, and regular correspondence is received from them and answered by us, and curriculum passes almost daily from us to them, further encouraging and equipping them to fulfill in their setting the strategy modeled and mandated by Jesus. Thus, movements of multiplying disciple-making are occurring all over the world as God continues to build and deploy His Great Commission Army. Again, I would not highly evaluate any ministry that does not have the endorsement of Heaven upon it, and the attending power of the Holy Spirit—and in my experience, the ministry of disciple-making certainly does.

Christian, why don't you sign up today, enlisting in the Greatest Army in the world, joining the Lord's Host of soldiers who are committed to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus in "all nations"? This year alone, I have been in one Central American country and four African countries and am scheduled to return to two more African countries and to travel to two Asian countries during the remaining months of 2010. After many happy years in productive pastorates, this is by far the most gratifying and productive ministry I can imagine, no matter what other plan is followed.

This, then, is the Christian's battle plan, and because the Church is simply the composite of all members who make it up, this is to be the Church's primary battle plan. However, I personally do not believe that this is a corporate assignment, loosely spread over a varying group of Christians who differ widely in commitment, obedience, loyalty, etc. I challenge anyone to show an exception to this statement: when the process of disciple-making is institutionalized instead of individualized, it is almost totally neutralized and even negated. I have never witnessed an exception to that rule. An army is only as strong as its weakest regiment or soldier, and untrained, unequipped, disloyal soldiers will make the entire battle plan vulnerable to enemy assault and corporate defeat. Disciple-making will largely correct that shortfall on an individual (and thus responsible) basis.

IV. CHRIST IS THE CONQUEROR OF SIN AND DEATH, THE CAPTAIN OF OUR SALVATION, AND THE COMMANDER OF GOD'S ARMY

The last military analogy in our list is the most important of all. *Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the conqueror of sin and death, the Captain of our salvation, and the Commander of the Lord's Army.* We cannot adequately express this point, and certainly cannot make an exhaustive statement of it. It is the source and secret of all of our understanding of the warfare and of all of our victories. Again, it is the supremacy of Christ that guarantees all things Christian, and this is no exception.

One Mighty Man of Valor excels all others in vitality, valor and victory. He always and only draws His Sword on the side of what is right and righteous. Who is He, and how may we identify Him? Let the Bible provide its ringing answer: "The Lord is a Man of War. JEHOVAH is His name" (Exodus 15:3). Much has been written historically about the skill of one general, the bravery of another, and the brilliance of yet another.

But the trophies and crowns and medals of Immanuel, “God with us”, will outdo them all, and with no real contest. “Behold, I have given Him for a Leader and Commander to the people” (Isaiah 55:4). God has committed to His people (you and me) a great work to do. It is variously described as “warring a good warfare, fighting the fight of faith, wrestling with principalities and powers, and keeping the body under and bringing it into subjection.” Each of us is called to glory and honor on this battlefield. But *the road to the palace of our King and the path to His final rewards runs through the heart of the enemy’s country, and furthermore, our assignment as we fight is not of our own choosing—it has already been planned for us before we were enlisted in the Army.* We have too many soldiers operating by human traditions, and thus they have abandoned Jesus Christ in His Biggest Assignment. In ourselves and by our own ideas, we know not what to do; we need much instruction and direction. So He has provided for us an infallible Battle Manual, His Holy Word, the Bible. And He has given us a matchless Commander. He has Almighty power, wonderful skill and knowledge, and He is full of compassion and love.

Does a Commander deserve the title if he issues no commands? What is a Commander who sits in the comfort of the fortress while His soldiers enter the intense and dangerous battlefields to wage war for Him? But this charge cannot be made against Christ our Commander. He left His Palace in Paradise and took the field Himself against the foe. He engaged Appolyon face to face, overcame him in the wilderness and administered a fatal and unrecoverable blow by His own Death on the Cross. By His Death, He put Death to Death, thus removing one of the enemy’s primary weapons. You see, He asks no soldier in His Army to take the field where He has not gone Himself. Though the battles may be long and bloody, *the war has already been won.*

Remember, dear Christian that you are to be “conformed to the image of God’s Son” (Romans 8:29), and *He was “a man of war.” You, then, must learn the art of war, and engage the enemy by His Plan of conquest.* God wants no cowards in Heaven, so you must stay close by the side of your Commander, move when He moves and fight when He fights. If you would wear the crown of conquest, you must carry the cross of conflict.

When Lord Horatio Nelson, the greatest naval commander in British history, was sailing the seas and defending England’s cause against all foes, his sailors would return to England after impossibly hard trips, riddled with wounds, racked by disease, often having suffered severe deprivation and hardship. They were often asked about salaries and rewards. Their reply often was, “Pay? Salaries? Rewards? *The only reward we ever really wanted was to be with Nelson!*” *Christian, are you seeing my analogy?? It is enough to fight under the banner of Christ our Commander!! But how many are really engaged in His assigned battle?? If we are not very careful, our good-faith traditional substitutes for His Original Assignment will rob us of all possible medals at the Last Great Hearing.*

High above Trafalgar Square in London, adorning the top of a tall, thin monument in his honor, stands Nelson’s statue. He died at the battle of Trafalgar while revealing his

usual heroism. Arrayed against a French fleet of warships, significantly outnumbered and outgunned, he led his navy against the enemy. He had in earlier battles twice spared a French ship, The Redoubtable, when he could just as easily have sent it to the bottom of the sea. But here it was again, in the Battle of Trafalgar, and the musket ball that blew away part of Nelson's face and one of his eyes was fired from the mast of The Redoubtable. Nelson, as usual, was standing in the bow of his ship, directing the battle from its most intense point. The French were having the best of the battle, and they began signaling by code for surrender. Nelson held his telescope to his eye, watching the enemy movements, until one side of his face and one eye were shot away by a musket ball. He had just seen the demand to surrender delivered by the enemy when the bullet struck his head. He quickly shifted his telescope to the empty socket, signaling that he would not even consider surrender. His sailors rallied resoundingly to the courage of their commander and won the battle. Meanwhile, Nelson collapsed and died in the pool of his own blood.

It is enough to fight and die with Christ our Commander. It is enough to win victories that will secure Him the spoils of His own suffering at Calvary. But we must give exceeding great care that we are really in His assigned battle, and not merely in pursuit of traditional substitutes that will prevent His approval. It will be worth it all *if we made the right investments, saw the returns He commanded* and finally hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful soldier. You have fought well and bravely in the battle I assigned, and because you have been faithful and productive on my terms in time, I will give you more gratifying assignments with full reward in eternity." *What a trip, and what trophies await the war heroes of His Army!*