

Joining Jesus in conquering evil

Jesus is a general.

His followers are soldiers.

Life is war.

You can't avoid spiritual warfare. Every soul and every structure of society is involved in a clash of unseen powers. You might try to be neutral, but you cannot avoid the antithesis. If you are not with Jesus, you are against him and need to switch sides. If you believe in Jesus' victory, you still need to fight. Find out how to defend against evil attacks from the devil, the world, and the flesh. Learn to carry out missions in the Holy Spirit's power that would otherwise be impossible. Get trained on how to wear the armor of God and use divine weapons.

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**CHRISTIAN
LEADERS
PRESS** 

Spiritual Warfare

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Feddes

David Feddes

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*We are more than conquerors
through him who loved us.*

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Part One

Christ the Commander: Serving Under General Jesus

May God arise, may his enemies be scattered, may his foes flee before him.

(Psalm 68:1)

Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. (Matthew 10:34)

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. (Revelation 19:11)

Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. (Ephesians 6:10)

Chapter One

Jesus the Troublemaker

I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. (Matthew 10:34)

Jesus is the world's greatest troublemaker. He disturbs the peace and causes fights. Jesus arouses conflict and turns family members against each other. Some people even end up dying because of Jesus. Here's what Jesus himself says:

Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.

Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it (Matthew 10:34-39).

We might expect such words from an anti-family religious nut or from the leader of a wacko suicide cult. But the troublemaker who says these things is Jesus.

Those aren't the first words most preachers quote when calling people to Jesus. Those of us who are preachers usually figure that if we want to "sell" people on Jesus, we'd

better advertise him as a problem solver, not a troublemaker. We'd better picture Jesus as a source of peace in troubled times, not as a cause of conflict. We'd better present him as a therapist for troubled families, not as someone who divides families. We speak of him as the one who can save your life, not as the one who makes you lose your life. We say things like, "If you want peace in this troubled world, come to Jesus. If you want help with family problems, come to Jesus. If you want your life to be all it can be, come to Jesus."

Combat Commander

"Be all that you can be"—that's an old slogan of army recruiters, and sometimes we preachers sound like those recruiters. Recruiters for the military know that strife is the army's job. If your commanding officer orders you into combat, you must be willing to go wherever he commands. You must be willing to abandon father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, even your own life. You must obey your commanding officer, no matter what. Army recruiters know this—but do the advertisements show a lonely soldier longing for people back home, or family members who are sad and angry at their loved one for leaving, or horrifying scenes of combat and death? No, recruiters produce ads that look exciting and inviting.

We preachers do something similar. We try to enlist people in Jesus' army by telling them all the advantages and none of the troubles. For some reason, though, Jesus himself doesn't stick to such positive advertising. Yes, he promises great things, but he also speaks about strife and division, family problems, and loss of life—the sort of troubles that any combat commander causes. What if we preachers, in our eagerness to recruit people for Jesus, aren't telling the whole truth about him?

You may find it hard to think of Jesus as a troublemaker. With so many preachers talking about a nice, helpful

Jesus whose only goal is to help us be all that we can be, it's hard to see why anyone would want to crucify him. But people who met the real Jesus had no problem at all seeing him as a troublemaker. They saw him as strange, even dangerous. "Even his own brothers did not believe in him" (John 7:5). His family once tried to stop him from teaching and wanted to take him home, because they thought he was out of his mind (Mark 3:21). Some religious leaders concluded that Jesus was possessed by the prince of demons (Mark 3:22). Some of the common people also thought he was demon-possessed (John 7:20). If you doubt that people saw Jesus as a threat and a troublemaker, why do you think they killed him? Maybe you've imagined Jesus as helpful and harmless. But what if he's really the fighter and troublemaker he claims to be? What then? Will you follow him?

It may sound foolish, even crazy, to follow Jesus if he's a troublemaker. He says, "I did not come to bring peace, but a sword... a man's enemies will be the members of his own household." What does Jesus mean?

Let's be clear about one thing right away: Jesus doesn't cause trouble just for the sake of trouble. He comes as God to reclaim a world which has turned against God, and that means a fight. Whenever a ruler starts to reclaim territories and people who have turned against him, it's impossible to avoid strife. Jesus came into this world to reclaim it for God and to rescue it from enemy occupation by Satan and his demons. Jesus' coming arouses resistance from the realm of demons. Jesus' coming divides people between those who continue to side with sinful powers and those who side with Jesus. So if you enlist in Jesus' army and follow him, you had better be ready for conflict.

Worthy of Complete Loyalty

Your loyalty to Jesus is bound to create problems with people around you, even with family members. Jesus calls

for absolute, undivided loyalty. We must follow him even if it causes trouble, not just if he makes our family life easier. We must be willing to alienate ourselves from people we love in order to follow Jesus.

This may sound troubling at first, but think about it. Suppose you decide to follow Jesus on the grounds that he might help you to succeed in your family life or in your business. You don't love Jesus or care about him, but you figure he can help you out in some things that really matter to you. Well, Jesus isn't interested in that kind of a relationship. He wants you to love him, not use him.

What would you think of someone who pretended to be your friend just to get what he wants from you? How eager would you be to marry someone who is only interested in your money? Not very appealing, is it? So why should the Son of God put up with being used by people who don't love him? Don't come to Jesus for what he can do for your family life or your business. Come to Jesus simply because you love him more than anyone and because he deserves your highest loyalty.

If Jesus were just one more religious nut who causes strife and disrupts families and demands complete loyalty, it would be crazy to follow him. But Jesus isn't just some crazy guy who thinks he's God; Jesus *is* God. As God he is supremely worthy of our love, since his divine love is far greater than that of any person we know. And as God he is also supremely worthy of the absolute, unconditional obedience that a soldier owes to his supreme commander. No matter what trouble it might cause in your other relationships, love and absolute obedience to Jesus come first. That's the only fitting response to who he is as God.

It's also the only realistic response. You might as well know what you're getting into if you're thinking about following Jesus. If an easy, trouble-free life is what you're after, then Jesus the troublemaker isn't for you. If you like your relationships just the way they are, and you're unwill-

ing for any of that to change, then forget about Jesus. He changes everything, and not all of the changes will be pleasant for you, at least not in the short term. Yes, Jesus promises to bring you joy and deliver you from many troubles; but he also warns that you will have troubles that you might not have had if you didn't follow him. Jesus is very honest about that. He wants you to know what you're getting into right up front, with no fine print or deceptive advertising.

Lesser Loves

Jesus wants you to know that as long as you put family ties first, you can't follow him. Your loyalty to Jesus must be unchallenged by any other loyalty. Your love for Jesus must come ahead of all lesser loves. You can't let anyone else get in the way of your relationship to Jesus. What does this look like in everyday life? Here are some examples.

Suppose you come from a family that doesn't follow Jesus. You identify with your mother and father, your brothers and sisters, and with your family's way of life. Perhaps you even have a bit of ritual or religion in your family, but not a living faith in Jesus. If that's the case, you can't follow Christ unless you turn away from what your family members are like and what they expect you to be like. That's not easy. It's terribly hard to admit to yourself that Jesus is right and your family is wrong. To you it may feel like you're hating and rejecting your family, and it may feel that way to them too. In some societies, family members actually try to kill their relatives who leave their family's religion to follow Jesus. And even if your family doesn't do that, you may sense that your family isn't comfortable around you once you've become a Christian. You feel strong pressure from them to return to the way you were. Only by rejecting your family's wishes can you follow the way of Jesus. Loyalty to Jesus comes first.

Another kind of relationship where Jesus causes trouble is romance. Once you become a Christian, Jesus doesn't permit you to marry someone who doesn't also belong to him. You shouldn't even have a dating relationship with such a person. Samson was a mighty man, but he became attached to the ungodly woman Delilah, and she was his downfall. Solomon was a brilliant king, but he married women who worshipped other gods, and they turned his heart away from the Lord. So unless you're stronger than Samson and smarter than Solomon, don't violate your relationship with God by pursuing romantic relationships with non-Christians. Love for Jesus must come ahead of all lesser loves.

Olivia Langdon was raised in a Christian home by devout parents, and she claimed to be a Christian herself. One day, she met the brilliant writer Mark Twain. She was charmed by his intelligence and humor. Mark Twain was an open critic of religion, but Olivia thought she could marry him and then help him become a Christian.

At first, it seemed to be working. As one biographer puts it, Twain's "natural kindness of heart, and especially his love for his wife, inclined him toward the teachings and customs of her Christian faith ... It took very little persuasion on his wife's part to establish family prayers in their home, grace before meals, and the morning reading of the Bible chapter."

As time passed, however, Twain got tired of pretending. He told Olivia, "Livy, you may keep this up if you want to, but I must ask you to excuse me from it. It is making me a hypocrite. I don't believe in the Bible; it contradicts my reason. I can't sit here and listen to it, letting you believe that I regard it, as you do, in the light of the Gospel, the Word of God." Olivia had failed to persuade her husband to become a Christian.

But the worst was yet to come. Some years later, Olivia told her sister that she no longer believed in a personal God

who cared for every human soul. Then came a time when Olivia felt crushed by the death of a loved one. Twain told her, "Livy, if it comforts you to lean on your Christian faith, do so."

She replied, "I can't. I haven't any."

That story has been repeated many times. People think they can marry a non-Christian and continue to follow Jesus, but already in making that choice, they have put loyalty to their loved one ahead of loyalty to God. All too often they either end up abandoning faith in God, or else living at odds with their spouse. That's why the Bible says, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers...What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?" (2 Corinthians 6:14-15). If you're a Christian dating a non-Christian, end the relationship. Follow Christ.

But what if this warning has come too late for you? What if you're already married to someone who doesn't follow Jesus? In that case, you may have a hard road ahead of you. But you can still follow Jesus if he moves you to love him more than you love your husband or wife. Ask Jesus to forgive what you've done. Commit yourself to following the way of Christ. Live by the Bible's teachings. Worship each week with other Christians. If your husband or wife becomes upset about any of this, don't let it stop you. You can't compromise your commitment to Christ in order to make your marriage easier. Jesus matters even more than your marriage.

Please don't misunderstand. You shouldn't try to cause trouble with your spouse, and you can't end a marriage the way you can end a dating relationship. You've made those marriage vows, and you must take them seriously. God hates divorce. He doesn't want Christians trying to get rid of unbelieving spouses. Still, the fact remains that if you become a living, active follower of Jesus, you will be different than you were before. If your husband or wife can accept the new you, great! If you keep living as the person

Jesus calls you to be, you may win your spouse over to Christ. But even if your spouse is uncomfortable with your new life in Christ, don't stop following the Lord just to make your marriage more comfortable. You have no choice but to follow Jesus, even if your spouse finds it hateful.

You must love Jesus more than husband or wife, and you must love him more than your sons and daughters too. If loyalty to your children comes before loyalty to Christ, it can distort and destroy your faithfulness to God. How can this happen? Here are a few examples. Your daughter decides to live with a man, and you think, "Maybe marriage isn't the only proper context for sexual intimacy as the Bible claims." Or your son informs you he is gay, and you figure the Bible must be wrong to say that homosexual behavior is sinful. Or some people you love reject Jesus to follow another way, and you can't bear the thought of them going to hell. You become more concerned about them than about God's honor and truth, and you start to wonder if maybe Jesus isn't the only way to eternal life. Your ideas change to suit the behavior of your loved ones. Your love for them eats away at your convictions about God's truth.

Cruel to Be Kind

The sad irony in all this is that if you love other people more than you love Jesus, you're not in a position to help them. You can't accept the plain teaching of the Bible, so you can't help your loved ones to change their ways. You say only what they want to hear rather than what they need to hear. They are so important to you that you can't risk offending them or losing them. And because you can't risk losing them now, you instead allow them to be lost for all eternity. Only when you oppose their behavior for Jesus' sake can you truly love them and help them come to the Lord they need so much. Even if it feels cruel to put loyal-

ty to Jesus ahead of loyalty to loved ones, you must be cruel to be kind.

So far we've seen some examples of what happens when you love unbelieving, sinful family members more than you love Jesus. But what if the people close to you are devout Christians? Well, even then, it can wreck your faith to love them more than you love Jesus. Suppose God takes those people from you. What then?

The Bible tells about Job and his wife. They had a close-knit, God-fearing family, and they were prosperous. Then tragedy struck. Their children were all killed, their wealth vanished, and Job was struck by an illness that caused excruciating pain. How did Job's wife react? She wanted nothing more to do with God. She told her husband, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" Job replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?" (Job 2:9-10)

When God allowed Mrs. Job's children and her prosperity and her husband's health to be taken away, she began to hate God. Why? Because all along she had loved her children and her wealth and her successful husband more than she loved God. Job wasn't like that. Job loved God even more than he loved his wife and children, more than he loved his own life. He grieved his losses and asked many questions, but he refused to stop trusting God. And by loving God more than his children and by rejecting the advice of his own beloved wife, Job held on to God and called his wife back to God as well. In order to have a faith strong enough to survive tragedy, you need a love for Jesus that is greater than your love for anybody else. A half-hearted relationship to Christ can't survive. When your loyalty is tested, you would rather abandon Jesus than lose a relationship with someone you love.

Counting the Cost

When Jesus tells you all this, is he trying to discourage you from following him? No, quite the opposite: he's calling and urging you to follow him. But he wants you to know what you're getting into. Jesus is an honest recruiter. He wants you to count the cost ahead of time. There are great and eternal rewards in following Jesus, but there are also risks and losses. God may give you many blessings, but he may also take away some things and disrupt relationships that are important to you. Do you love him enough to follow him even then? Jesus doesn't want fair-weather friends. He wants disciples who love and follow him, no matter what.

Maybe it sounds like Jesus is demanding too much. But as you count the cost of following him, make sure you also count the cost of not following him. If you try to hold onto your own life on your own terms, you will lose it. You will forever cut yourself off from the Lord and his blessings. That is a terrible price to pay.

Count the cost of following Jesus, count the cost of not following him, and then count one more cost: the cost to Jesus of coming into this world to rescue you from enemy forces and to make you his own. If you think the Lord demands a lot from you, keep in mind that he has given far more than he demands. The Jesus who calls us to give up everything for him is the same Jesus who gave up everything for us. And he had a lot more to give up. Jesus left his place in heaven at his Father's side to become a tiny baby. He gave up his position of power to become a weak human being. And that's not all he gave up. Here on earth, there were times when Jesus had to ignore the human family he loved so much. They wanted him to stop preaching and come home. But Jesus decided: "No matter what my family says, I've got to do what God sent me to do. My real family is anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Mark 3:21, 31-35).

Jesus even laid down his own life, in order to please his Father and to save us. His death was horrible for him, and it pierced his mother's soul. But Jesus loved his heavenly Father even more than he loved his mother and brothers, even more than he loved his own life, and so he took up the cross and laid down his life as his heavenly Father directed him. So yes, Jesus may cause trouble for us, but not nearly as much trouble as he suffered on our behalf. He ignored his own welfare and the wishes of his family in order to carry out God's plan. And in doing so, he opened the way to eternal life for his mother, his brothers, and for everyone else who comes to trust in him.

What's your response to Jesus the troublemaker? Have you enlisted in his army? Do you trust and obey him as your commander? Some troublemakers are bad, but Jesus is one troublemaker you can't live without. You can't live without the troubles he suffered for you. You can't live without him troubling your status quo with his revolutionary gift of new life. You've heard his outrageous demand to love and follow him no matter what. You've also heard his outrageous love and sacrifice for you. Now what? How are you going to respond?

*Chapter Two***The Ultimate War Hero**

With justice he judges and makes war. (Rev. 19:11)

On June 6, 1944, thousands of soldiers splashed onto the beaches of Normandy, France, amid explosions and a deadly barrage of bullets from German machine guns. D-Day was awful and wonderful: awful because of the terror, pain, and death; wonderful because the forces of freedom triumphed over the forces of oppression.

We should not glorify war or think that killing or dying is glamorous. But neither should we ignore the heroism of those who fought for freedom. The world would be very different if Germany's Nazi regime had not been defeated—if there had been no one smart enough to come up with a strategy, no one brave enough to face ferocious opposition, no one selfless enough to risk being maimed or killed, or no force powerful enough to win the victory. And so, when we think back to the horrors and heroes of D-Day, we honor those who changed history for the better.

War heroes come in different varieties. Some are heroes because of their strategy. General Dwight Eisenhower, for example, was hailed for his role in planning the Normandy landing and directing the allied forces on D-Day. Others are heroes because of their bravery. While all who serve in the armed forces face some danger, those who fought on the front lines and in the deadliest spots are honored as especially heroic. Others are heroes not only be-

cause of the risks they faced but because of the price they actually paid. Those who were wounded or captured or tortured or killed hold a unique place in the ranks of war heroes. And then, of course, the heroes include those who survive the battles, overpower the opposition, and parade triumphantly into a city they've liberated, surrounded by the welcoming cheers of grateful residents who have finally been set free from brutal enemy occupation. Different war heroes are special for different reasons: strategy, bravery, sacrifice, or victory.

Who would be the ultimate war hero? We can't really compare. We can't say that a general devising a brilliant strategy back at headquarters is more heroic than a private charging forward through enemy fire, but neither can we say that the private is more crucial to victory than the general. We can't say that victorious troops marching into a newly liberated town are more heroic than those who were killed before victory had been won, but we also wouldn't want to take anything away from the accomplishment of the soldiers who survived and pressed forward until victory was achieved. It's hard to say what kind of hero is best.

But what if there was a person who somehow managed to do all these things? What if there was a general who devised a brilliant strategy, who courageously placed himself at the point of the fiercest conflict, who was tortured and killed, and yet who could somehow defeat the cruelest enemy, enjoy a victory parade, and bring freedom, justice, peace, and prosperity to millions throughout the entire earth? Wouldn't such a person be the ultimate war hero? No mere human could do all that, of course, but there is one person, both human and divine, who has indeed accomplished all these things. His name is Jesus Christ, and he is the ultimate war hero.

The Lord is a Warrior

The Old Testament tells many stories of how the Lord defeated his enemies and rescued his people. The Lord wiped out the armies of Pharaoh at the Red Sea, and the people of Israel sang, “The Lord is a warrior” (Exodus 15:3). When the Israelites fell into the cruel oppression of the Canaanites, the Lord rescued them and gave them a great victory near a place called Har-Meggido, or Armageddon, inspiring his people to sing, “So may all your enemies perish, O Lord!” (Judges 5:31). The Lord brought down the walls of Jericho; he destroyed the giant Goliath; he wiped out the cruel armies of Assyria, killing 185,000 troops in a single night. And those are just a few of the Lord’s warrior deeds in the Old Testament. People of faith knew God as a mighty commander of vast armies. They prayed for him to show his power, defeat his enemies, and rescue his people.

What the Old Testament says about the Lord God, the New Testament applies to the Lord Jesus. In Jesus the being of God is joined to a human individual. Jesus was humble, gentle, and willing to sacrifice himself to save others, but that doesn’t mean the Lord stopped being a warrior. Coming to earth was Jesus’ way of entering territory occupied by the enemy forces of Satan and setting in motion a strategy for bringing millions of people over to the side of God and setting them free forever. Although he was supreme commander, Jesus suffered more than anyone under his command when he was captured, tortured, and killed. That was not the end of him, however. Dying on the cross was Jesus’ way of paying for the sins of those he had come to save, and it was also his way of disarming Satan and dooming him to defeat. Jesus rose from the dead, breaking the grip of sin, death, and Satan, and he now reigns in power, poised for the final offensive when the time is right.

In the last book of the New Testament, Revelation, the apostle John sees a vision of Jesus the war hero. “I saw heaven standing open,” writes John, “and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war... the armies of heaven were following him” (Revelation 19:11-14). In the visions of Revelation, General Jesus faces the forces of Satan and all the leaders and armies this wicked world can muster in a final Armageddon. Christ overcomes all his enemies with a blast of divine power and casts them into the fire of hell forever. Then he brings heaven to earth and gives his people eternal peace and joy.

General Jesus is gentle and generous toward his friends, but he’s devastating to those who refuse to join his side. Jesus is not only a wise teacher and kind helper; he’s also the ultimate war hero, supreme in strategy, bravery, sacrifice, and victory.

Strategy, Bravery, Sacrifice, Victory

As a commander and strategist, the Lord came up with a plan that no merely human general could have conceived, a plan brilliant enough to astonish even the angels. Throughout human history there have been some talented military leaders who have devised some clever strategies, but none except Jesus could devise a strategy to conquer sin, death, and Satan. No general could ever surpass the strategic brilliance of General Jesus.

And that’s not all. Jesus is supreme not only in strategy but also in humility and bravery. A general who comes up with a brilliant plan usually leaves it to others to actually carry out the most dirty and dangerous part of the plan. What general would stoop to the dirty work of polishing the boots of those under his command? But that’s what Jesus did when he washed the dirty feet of his disciples. What general would expose himself to the greatest danger and send himself behind enemy lines on a mission that is

sure to get him killed? But that's what Jesus did. No war hero could ever surpass the humility of Jesus in performing the lowliest task for others of lower rank, and no war hero could ever surpass the bravery of Jesus in handling the deadliest assignment himself.

As the ultimate war hero, Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice. If a group of soldiers was trapped and one of them deliberately showed himself and drew enemy fire and died to give his friends a chance to slip away, it would be heroic. If a live grenade landed among some troops and one of them flung himself on the grenade in order to absorb the blast and save his friends, it would be heroic. But even such sacrifices as these are surpassed by the sacrifice of Jesus. Jesus' beatings, torture, and crucifixion brought him enormous pain, and that wasn't the worst of it. He somehow absorbed an eternity's worth of agony as he took the sin of millions upon himself and suffered hell on the cross. If dying to save someone else is the supreme sacrifice, then the hellish death of Jesus makes him the ultimate war hero.

But there is still another aspect of Jesus' heroism to consider: the magnitude of his victory. Jesus is a hero not just because of his death but because of his resurrection, reign, and final victory over all his enemies.

How is the greatness of a victory measured? One measure would be the cruelty and strength of the enemy. It's a greater victory to defeat a huge, well-trained, well-equipped military force than to overcome a small ragtag band that is poorly armed. The more terrible the enemy, the greater the victory. If we measure the magnitude of Jesus' victory by the power of the enemy he defeats, no other war hero can compare to Jesus.

The book of Revelation pictures Christ's enemies as awful and powerful. The Lord and his people aren't up against harmless, helpless opponents. No, the enemies are brutal and powerful, and there are plenty of them. Revelation portrays at least five different kinds of opposition. One

is a hideous dragon, representing Satan himself. Another is a vicious beast which does the dragon's dirty work, an antichrist oppressor who represents the worst cruelty and persecution. Then there's a beastly false prophet, using false religion and phony miracles and joining forces with the powers of persecution. A fourth enemy mentioned in Revelation is a prostitute named Babylon who seduces countless people and drinks the blood of Christians; she represents worldly culture with its corrupting, killing effects. Joining these dreadful powers is a fifth element: multitudes of people and armies who reject Christ and his cause.

If you read Revelation and focus mainly on the enemies of Christ, it can be terrifying. But the main point of showing these enemies in all their power and terror is to show what a great victory Christ wins in defeating such enemies. When all the powers of earth and hell seem to be against you, it's tempting just to give up. How can anybody resist? If you can't beat them, join them, right? But any such thoughts vanish when you see the ultimate war hero, the rider on the white horse, Jesus himself, and see his awesome power to crush all his enemies.

Defeating Dreadful Enemies

The book of Revelation records various visions involving the dragon, the beast, the false prophet, the prostitute Babylon, and the armies of sinners who oppose Christ. These visions all have something in common: they all end with the enemy being defeated and punished and Christ reigning triumphant.

Some Bible scholars try to apply each vision to a different phase of the future, but perhaps the best way to see these visions is to understand them as describing the same conflict from various perspectives. In that sense it would be like watching a film which shows a single battle but which deals first with one part of the battlefield, then shifts to another, then back again, focusing on different actors,

using various camera angles, sometimes showing how one part of the battle goes and then flashing back in order to show how another part of the battle was unfolding at the same time.

The dragon, the beast, and the false prophet gather the kings of the earth and their armies, all of them in league with Babylon, and they come together at Armageddon. Revelation then portrays the outcome of the battle. First the fall of Babylon, the prostitute civilization, and her allies is envisioned. Then comes another vision, focusing on the defeat of the beast and the false prophet. Still another vision focuses especially on the defeat of Satan the dragon and the people who sided with him against Christ and his people. These visions show different aspects of the same event: the final victory of Jesus Christ when he comes again to judge the world.

Just before the coming of Jesus, his enemies may seem to have the upper hand. The cause of Christ may appear hopeless. His people may seem surrounded and helpless. But when Christ himself appears in majesty and might, the power of his enemies will suddenly seem as nothing. The earth will shake and Babylon, the city and culture which seemed so great, will collapse in a moment. The beast and the false prophet, the powers of persecution and deception at their worst, will instantly be helpless and hell bound. Revelation 19 says,

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to

strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS...

Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the white horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

The magnitude of Jesus' victory is apparent when you see the enormous strength of his enemies and see how quickly Jesus defeats them all when he unleashes his might.

The most terrible enemy is Satan himself, but even Satan doesn't stand a chance against the ultimate war hero. In Revelation 20 the Bible pictures the role that Satan plays in the last battle and what happens to him. Satan deceives people from all over the world and gathers them for battle.

In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever (Revelation 20:8-10).

If an army combining every deadly demon and hateful human can't stand against the Lord in the last battle, surely any

lesser forces will never defeat Christ or prevent his final victory.

This means that if you don't belong to Jesus Christ, you are doomed. Revelation speaks of those who wear "the mark of the beast," and some authors work hard to figure out what such a mark might be. But let's not make it too complicated. All who don't bear the mark of baptism or live by faith in Christ end up wearing the mark of the beast. Their names are not in the book of life. This applies not only to the end of history but to every point before the end. There's a war going on right now; the last battle will simply be the fiercest and final part of the war. Those who are defeated in the last battle will end up in the fires of hell, and those who even now choose the wrong side in the long war leading up to the last battle will also end up in hell.

On the other hand, those who, by God's grace, are on the side of Christ may be sure of victory. The Bible's visions of the last battle speak to God's people in every age. We don't need to know when the final battle will be. We need to take sides with Christ right now and do so with confidence. For if the Lord will someday take on all the fiercest powers of evil all at the same time and defeat them quickly and totally, then he will surely be able to save us from any lesser attacks we might face in the time before the last battle.

Some folks want to use the Bible's visions to figure out how close we might be to the end of history. But nobody can figure this out with any accuracy, and that's not the most important thing. What's important is that, no matter when the end might come, we must be on the side of Christ right now and realize that all the rage of earth and hell cannot overcome the ultimate war hero.

Fruits of Victory

The greatness of a victory is seen in what strong enemies are defeated, and another measure of the greatness of a victory is the amount of good it produces. The allied victory

in World War II, for example, was a greater thing for Western Europe than for Eastern Europe. In Eastern Europe, people merely got Stalin instead of Hitler, while in Western Europe people gained freedom, peace, and a return to prosperity. A victory that produces liberty, justice, and even joy is far greater than a victory that merely produced a new brand of oppression.

Here again Jesus shines as the ultimate hero. Revelation says that the victory of Jesus leads to a new heaven and a new earth, with "no more death or mourning or crying or pain" (21:4). The new creation will have as its capital the holy city, New Jerusalem, a place of astonishing beauty and security. God's people will be filled with his light and life and enjoy face-to-face friendship with the Lord for all eternity. They will enjoy prosperity and authority beyond imagination, reigning with Christ forever.

Of all the heroes who have fought to make the world a better place, only the Lord Jesus can succeed completely. Only Christ can make the world a perfect place of uninterrupted harmony, holiness, and happiness. And you will be part of that perfect world if Christ is your Savior and Commander right now.

Meanwhile, the war between good and evil isn't over, but D-Day has already happened. Jesus invaded this world by coming here as a man, absorbing the deadly attacks of Satan, sin, and death, and making the decisive breakthrough in his resurrection. Now the victory of good over evil is sure. It's just a matter of time. Think again of World War II. After D-Day there were still other battles to be fought, some of them quite awful, but the final outcome of the war had been determined on D-Day. So too, after Jesus' death and resurrection, the war between good and evil still continues, and some of the battles are awful. But the outcome has been decided by Jesus' first coming, and the Lord has given us a glimpse of his victorious second com-

ing. So, no matter how fierce the conflict may still be, the final outcome is sure.

The Bible portrays Jesus as the ultimate war hero, unsurpassed in strategy, humility, bravery, sacrifice, and victory. The Bible pictures Jesus this way to give him the honor and praise he deserves, to call Jesus' enemies to surrender and join his side before it's too late, and to encourage Jesus' followers that we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Do you trust Jesus as *your* ultimate hero?

Chapter Three

Call to Combat

*Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.
(Ephesians 6:10)*

Jesus Christ is a general. The church is a fighting force. Christian people are soldiers. Christian living is war. The call to become a Christian is a call to combat. It's a call to enlist in the forces of General Jesus, to fight his enemies, to pursue his strategy and objectives, to wear his protective gear and attack with his weapons.

If you think Jesus came into the world to make it instantly peaceful and comfortable, think again. Jesus says, "I did not come to bring peace but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). Jesus came to start a fight, and he has already won the decisive battle. But the war isn't over yet. Jesus calls people to join his forces and march with him to final victory. The outcome is certain, but the fighting still rages, and there can be no peace until every stronghold falls and the last enemy is defeated. Only when the war is over can we enjoy the benefits of peace and freedom. Until then we live in a combat zone. We must fight for Jesus, or else we are against him. It is impossible to be neutral.

Does this sound too aggressive and violent? At some points in history, bloody religious wars have been fought under the sign of the cross, and terrible crimes have been committed in the name of Jesus. But that's not the kind of combat Jesus calls for. It is impossible to change hearts by

force. When Christ calls people to combat, it is warfare of a very different kind.

We must fight spiritual enemies, and we must use spiritual weapons. The enemy is not a nation or its military; the enemy is far worse. The war is not conflict between nations; the powers involved are greater than any nation. The weapons are not guns and blades and bombs that destroy humans; the Lord's weapons blast the bunkers of evil and devastate demons. "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). Christianity is spiritual warfare, with larger and longer-lasting results than any physical, political war.

Peace in Our Time?

Our warfare is spiritual, not physical—but it is still warfare. We must stand and fight for Christ, not be spiritual appeasers. Spiritual appeasers see no need for conflict, no need for a fight. Some churches are eager to avoid every hint of combat. They don't sing "Onward, Christian Soldiers, Marching as to War" or "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus as Soldiers of the Cross" or any other hymn about battling sin and Satan. They don't preach Bible passages that describe Christianity in military language. Why not? Why no mention of spiritual warfare? Some church leaders and their followers don't see Satan as a threat; they might not even believe that Satan and his demons are real. They think human nature is basically good; they see little need to fight sin. They don't see false religion as a danger to souls, they aren't eager to lead non-Christians to a relationship with Jesus, and they oppose vigorous evangelism. Spiritual appeasers think we just have to love ourselves, be tolerant of others, and all will be well.

The Bible says otherwise: I must fight against my own sins and Satan's attacks against me, and I must join Jesus' mission of bringing gospel freedom to others and winning them to his cause. This kind of warfare—fighting Satan in our personal life and spreading gospel freedom to others—does not involve physical force. The Bible allows *government* to use physical force and weapons in some situations, but that is not the *church's* calling. The church must mobilize people not for political and military conflict but for spiritual warfare. When the Bible calls the church and individual Christians to combat, it calls for something very different from the kind of wars and weaponry that make the news. Scripture calls for warfare in the unseen realm: spiritual warfare against Satan and the power of sin. This doesn't require guns, tanks, and fighter jets—but it does require courage, determination, and strength.

There's a lot more to following Jesus than being a nice, tame pussycat. The Bible speaks of Jesus as a lion (Revelation 5:5), and Scripture says, "The righteous are as bold as a lion" (Proverbs 28:1). Do you see Jesus as a lion or as a fluffy kitten? Do you want to be a tame pet in a safe home that does nothing but lie around and eat? Or do you want to be a lion in the service of the ultimate lion, Jesus Christ? To live as a real Christian, it's not enough to be tame and safe. You need to be bold, strong, even fierce.

Lack of this warrior mentality may be one reason many churches have little appeal to men. Instead of God's call to be strong, some churches merely call men to be nice. Author John Eldredge says,

Christianity, as it currently exists, has done some terrible things to men. When all is said and done, I think most men in the church believe God put them on earth to be a good boy... If they try really hard they can reach the lofty summit of becoming ... a nice guy. That's what we hold up as models of Christian maturity: Really Nice Guys.

Wouldn't Bible study be more exciting if it became a strategy session of warriors? Wouldn't church be different if it became a place to rally for war against Satan? Church might then be a place not just for children, women, and old people, but a place for men—bold, dangerous men who are strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

In any case, whether the church has turned men off by becoming too wimpy or men have simply hardened their hearts against the Lord, the fact remains that all of us—men and women alike—are living in a spiritual war zone. You might want a peaceful, easy feeling, but if you aren't prepared to fight sin, if you're not ready to battle Satan, if you're not on a mission to win victories for Jesus, you are doomed. You can't negotiate or make peace with Satan.

In the period before World War II, the British government was so eager to avoid conflict that it stood back as Adolph Hitler invaded one country after another. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain boasted of solving disputes "by discussion instead of by force of arms" and spoke flattering words about Hitler and Mussolini. After the Munich agreement giving Czechoslovakia to Hitler, Chamberlain said, "I believe it is peace for our time. Go home and get a nice, quiet sleep." Many British people cheered wildly. But there would be no peace and little quiet sleep. The only way to stop Hitler was to fight.

When a tyrant wants to conquer everything he can, there can be no peace. Satan is a tyrant, and he wants to conquer everything he can. Satan wants to dominate you and hold you under the power of sin. Satan wants you to die in your sin and end up in hell with him. He wants people around you to perish too. He wants them to ignore Jesus, believe false religions, and end up in hell. If you expect peace in our time, a life without struggle or conflict, Satan will completely control you.

Don't be an appeaser. Be a warrior. Stand against Satan. Fight him. "Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty

power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes" (Ephesians 6:10-11). Join Jesus' army, and don't expect an easy, peaceful life. It's hard to stand against Satan's attacks. It's hard to go into enemy-occupied territory and bring the liberty of Christ to those ruled by Satan. There will be no peace in our time. There will be spiritual warfare until Jesus comes again.

His Mighty Power

The first and most important thing about spiritual warfare is to look to the strength and leadership of the ultimate war hero. Scripture says plainly, "The Lord is a warrior" (Exodus 15:3). Why did Jesus come to earth? To pick a fight! Jesus says, "I did not come to bring peace but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). The final result of Jesus' coming will be peace, but before he brings peace, he brings a sword against evil, and he brings division between those who join him and those who reject him.

Jesus did not come to earth to negotiate with Satan. He did not come for diplomacy or to work out a compromise. Jesus came to destroy. "The reason the Son of God appeared was to *destroy* the devil's work" (1 John 3:8). The Son of God became one of us and died for us "to *destroy* him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil" (Hebrews 2:14).

Do you think of the Lord as a warrior, as a destroyer of his enemies? In the Bible, God often reveals himself that way, and biblical prayers speak of him that way. Psalm 18 starts out with words of love—"I love you, O Lord"—but is this love for a sugary, sentimental deity? No, he's the God of strength and battle. The psalmist says, "I love you, O Lord, *my strength*," and then says,

The Lord thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded. He shot his arrows and scattered the enemies, great bolts of lightning and rout-

ed them... With your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall... You armed me with strength for battle (Psalm 18).

Psalm 68 speaks of God's concern for orphans and widows, but does that mean God is just a gentle do-gooder? No, one reason God is such a comfort to the weak is that he wields terrifying power against enemies:

May God arise, may his enemies be scattered, may his foes flee before him... A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling... The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands... Surely God will crush the heads of his enemies... Summon your power, O God; show us your strength, O God as you have done before (Psalm 68).

The Lord Jesus calls us to join his fight against Satan and evil, against sin, cruelty, fear, discouragement, and all Satan's other weapons. Jesus could be very gentle with weak and wounded souls, but he could also be combative and downright terrifying to Satan and his demons. Jesus often met people who were possessed and tormented by demons. These people did not have the strength to liberate themselves from demonic power. But Jesus had more than enough strength, and the demons knew it. They panicked whenever they saw Jesus coming. Some demons yelled in rage; some whimpered in fear; all felt threatened by Jesus. They knew they could not stand against him. As the Bible says of the Lord, "How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies cringe before you" (Psalm 66:3). Demons are not wimps. They are rebel angels who have lost all goodness but still have terrible strength. Human power can't scare them, but the divine power of Jesus terrifies them. In fact, Jesus only had to speak a few words to make the demons flee.

If you've always thought of Jesus as a mild-mannered wimp, please watch the real Jesus in action. When he's

confronted by a legion of demons, Jesus sends them fleeing in terror (Luke 8:26-33). When he's told that King Herod wants to kill him, Jesus fearlessly denounces the wicked king (Luke 13:32). When he's told that his words have offended some elite religious leaders, Jesus offends them even more by calling them "blind guides" (Matthew 15:12-14). When he sees God's temple made into a marketplace, Jesus goes on a rampage with a whip, driving out the merchants and flipping their tables upside down (John 2:15). When he sees a mob coming to arrest him, Jesus calmly tells them that he's the one they're after—and something about him makes them shrink back and fall to the ground (John 18:3-6). When Jesus enters death itself and takes on the ultimate enemy, the ground shakes, the grave opens, and death is defeated. These are not the actions of a passive, harmless wimp. This is the Lord of hosts, the commander of angels, the ruler of the kings of the earth, the General who calls us to combat in his forces.

The Bible pictures Jesus as a general riding a white horse, with the armies of heaven following him. If you've seen *The Two Towers*, the second film in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, think of the great battle scene where a monstrous army is launching a terrible assault on Helm's Deep. The weary, wounded defenders have little hope for success, but they won't give up, and they try a desperate counterattack. At that very moment, a rider on a white horse appears at the top of a hill, followed by a mighty army. It is their friend Gandalf, racing to help. On their own, the defenders could not win, but once the rider on the white horse shows up, they can't lose. The enemy is crushed. That's just a hint of how the ultimate rider on the white horse, Jesus Christ, has power to defeat the forces of Satan.

Be Strong

That same power can be yours and mine—not because we're divine or equal to Jesus, but because Jesus gives the

power of his Holy Spirit to those who trust him. When Scripture says, “Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power,” it means that we can be strong in the very same power that enabled Jesus to terrify demons and to defeat death. God calls us to be strong, not on our own, but in the strength of Christ. Expect victory, not because you’re so strong on your own, but because you’re part of the irresistible forces of Jesus. This is warfare for winners.

If you’ve been bullied by evil power, you may realize that Satan is much stronger than you are, and you might find it hard to believe that Satan will ever be defeated or that you will ever be free. Even after Jesus has entered the conflict, even though Satan is losing ground and is doomed to destruction, you still might have a hard time believing it. The good news of the gospel might not be getting through to you. Satan is losing, but he won’t tell you that. He’ll do everything he can to keep you from finding out about his defeat at the hands of Christ.

Satan has dominated so many of us for so long that we find it hard to believe in the defeat of evil and in our liberation. We find it hard to believe that our struggle is warfare for winners. Even as his power collapses, Satan keeps telling lies. He whispers into our minds that we are losers. He keeps saying that Jesus is dead. He keeps tempting us to side with evil rather than with Christ. Satan tries to keep us from finding out the real truth about his defeat so that we won’t rise up against him and shake off the shackles of sin. But the gospel announces the triumph of Christ, the defeat of Satan, and the call to be free of a dying regime. The gospel calls us to accept the rule of Christ and to rejoice in freedom from sin and fear. Don’t be intimidated by lies that the forces of evil are winning. Satan is too strong for you or me, but a far greater power has entered the battle. Satan is no match for Jesus and his angel armies.

The Lord is a warrior, and he calls you to join him in the warfare against the spiritual forces of evil. Be brave

and fierce in resisting evil. “Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.” Join Jesus in demolishing Satan’s crumbling regime. Psalm 144:1-2 says, “Praise be to the Lord my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle. He is my loving God and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield, in whom I take refuge, who subdues peoples under me.” Psalm 149:6 says, “May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands.” The day of peace will come when Christ returns, but in this day of battle, we have the heroic calling to battle against sin, doubt, and despair, and to tell others the good news that Satan is losing and that they can be free from his tyranny and enjoy freedom under the loving leadership of Jesus Christ.

Are you taking your stand or just taking a nap? Have you put on the armor of God, or have you refused to join his forces? This is no time for indecision. It is no time for cowardice. It is no time for appeasement. It is time to accept Jesus as your leader and to become a daring, dangerous soldier in his army. You might think it’s ridiculous even to imagine yourself as daring and dangerous. But if you dare to live by faith, you are an extreme danger to Satan and his demons. You have a very strong Father—the Lord is a warrior—and you can be a strong warrior who stands firm in faith. So be bold. Strike fear into Satan. Keep capturing more territory for General Jesus. Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Chapter Four

Armed and Ready

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

(Ephesians 6:13)

It was a dark and stormy night—about as stormy as any night could get. Snow and sleet slashed the air. The weather was too bad to be outside. It was Christmas, a night to stay inside and party, so the soldiers stationed in Trenton, New Jersey, decided to relax and have fun. They didn't want to be outside, and they were sure no enemy would venture outside in such weather.

The soldiers in Trenton were Hessians, professional fighting men from Germany. They were in Trenton the winter of 1776 because they had been hired to join British forces and stamp out the rebellion of the pesky American colonists. The Hessians had easily won several clashes with the Americans and scoffed at the ragtag colonists. The Hessian troops in Trenton didn't even bother to build up fortifications or have a safe place for baggage in case of attack. They figured they could easily destroy any Americans who might attack them.

That night in particular, they were sure there would be no attack. George Washington and his men were on the other side of the Delaware River, and that's where they would surely stay. What madman would dream of crossing the river on such a night? It was horrible to be outdoors at

all, let alone try to steer boats through dark waters made more dangerous by jagged slabs of floating ice. Even if they made it across the river, they'd have to walk nine miles in the horrible weather to reach Trenton. This was one night the Hessian soldiers didn't have to think about combat. They could afford to kick back and party until the wee hours of the morning.

They didn't know George Washington. While the Hessians were gobbling food and guzzling barrels of beer and rum—just as General Washington figured they would be doing—the general set his plan in motion. He and his men braved the bitter cold, climbed into boats, and made their way across the treacherous Delaware River. Many of the men hardly had enough clothing to stay warm. But Washington kept encouraging them, and at last they were gathered on the other side of the river. Then they made the nine-mile march to Trenton.

By the time they arrived, the night was over, and they feared they had lost the opportunity for a surprise attack. But most of the Hessians were still in bed. Their commander was groggy from heavy drinking the night before. Washington's men subdued the Hessians after a short skirmish and captured more than a thousand prisoners. It was a major victory in the war for American independence.

It was also a lasting lesson that if you're a soldier, you must be armed and ready. It's not enough to have equipment available somewhere. You must be armed with that equipment and be able to use it. A soldier can't prepare only for nice weather and comfortable conditions; he must be ready to fight any time, under any conditions. That was the key to the American victory over the Hessians. That's also the key to victory in spiritual warfare: You must be armed and ready to fight at any time, under any conditions.

Ready for the Evil Day

In Ephesians 6, the Bible calls God's people to "be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power" and to recognize that our worst enemy is not any human person or country but "the spiritual forces of evil" led by Satan. "Therefore," commands Ephesians 6:13, "put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand." You never know when that day of evil will come. You never know when you'll have to fight. So be armed and ready at all times to battle Satan.

Don't be caught napping. Scripture says, "Let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled" (1 Thessalonians 5:6). The Hessian troops at Trenton had plenty of supplies and training, but all the supplies and training in the world won't help soldiers who are sleeping off a drunken hangover when the enemy attacks. Likewise, we have plenty of God-given supplies, protection, and weapons available to us, but the armor of God doesn't help people who aren't wearing it and are sleeping. Satan can sneak up on you, and battle can break out when you least expect it. The Bible says, "Be prepared in season and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2). Be prepared every day, even on the least likely day for an attack, so that if it turns out to be the evil day of Satan's assault, you can stand firm.

Sometimes the day of evil comes in the form of a painful illness or disability. If you always assumed you'd stay healthy and happy and never prepared yourself for such things, you'll be caught by surprise and your faith may fall when your health fails. But if you arm yourself in advance by learning what the Bible says about suffering and by trusting God's promises, you can stand firm.

Sometimes the day of evil comes as the tragic death of a loved one. If you always assumed that such things would never affect *you*, the blow may be too much for you to

bear. You may turn against God and surrender to Satan's anger and despair. But if, when things are going well, you take the Lord as your comfort in life and in death, and if you keep strengthening your faith by focusing on Jesus' resurrection power, then you'll be ready to defeat Satan when death strikes close to you.

Sometimes the day of evil comes in the form of persecution. If you assume that nobody would mock Christian beliefs or the Christian way of life, if you assume you would never lose a job or face hardship for following Jesus, you may be caught by surprise when persecution hits you. But if you're prepared in advance, knowing that when you join Jesus' army you'll be targeted for attack, then you'll have your armor on and be able to stand up under persecution without abandoning the Lord.

Sometimes the day of evil comes as temptation to sin. You may be tempted to cheat on classwork or to make money by crooked methods or to have sex with someone who isn't your spouse or to gossip about others or you may be tempted by something else, but whatever it is, Satan presents something that seems so delicious, so desirable, so necessary for your happiness, that if you're not fortified in advance to resist temptation, you will fall into sin. But if you're fortified by study of God's law in Scripture and by the strength of God's Holy Spirit inside you, then you can say no to the tempter and defeat his strategy.

Sometimes the day of evil comes as lies about God. Satan attacks with all sorts of false doctrines and deceptive theories, and if you're not protected by knowledge of God's truth, you can fall for Satan's lies. But if you know your Bible and your mind is clothed in the truth of Christ, you can repel Satan's lies.

In all of this, you need to be ready in advance. Don't wait to get ready until after the attack starts; prepare for battle ahead of time. Be ready for suffering *before* it strikes. Be ready for tragedy *before* it strikes. Be ready for

persecution *before* it strikes. Be ready for temptation *before* it comes. Be ready for doctrinal challenges *before* they arise. Put on the full armor of God *before* Satan attacks you.

Once the attack has begun, it's rather late to be looking around for armor and weapons. Many casualties of spiritual warfare occur, not because the attack was so fierce, but because the person was not prepared ahead of time. If you ignore the Bible when things are going well, it will be hard to find what you need from the Bible when the evil day comes and Satan attacks you. If you don't draw on Jesus' protective power when life is calm and you can think clearly, how will you know what to do when your mind is spinning and your heart is breaking? Put on the full armor of God, keep up your training and combat readiness, keep listening to God's direction, and you will have what it takes to stand against the devil's schemes.

Summer Soldiers?

In spiritual warfare, we must always be armed and ready. Part of our readiness is realism about the difficulty of the struggle. At the time of the American war for independence, there were some colonists who didn't realize how long and hard the war would be. They talked big about freedom and patriotism in the exciting summer when the Declaration of Independence was signed, but they deserted the cause when more of Great Britain's mighty warships and armies arrived. However, others never expected it to be easy. All along they had expected a hard, long struggle. They stood firm in the worst times when others gave up. "These are the times that try men's souls," wrote Thomas Paine. "The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman." The men who crossed the Delaware River in icy darkness with George Washington

were not summer soldiers. Those who endured wounds and the bone-chilling winter in Valley Forge were not sunshine patriots. It was men like these who won the victory. Likewise, in the spiritual realm, those who win in the war with Satan are those who can endure hardship and keep battling to the end.

But some religious people don't seem to believe this. They talk as though it's nobler to be a sunshine soldier and a summer saint than to battle Satan in grim circumstances. They have a "name it and claim it" approach in which you just have to speak a few magic words to claim victory, and you can make Satan flee with hardly a struggle. They have a health-and-wealth gospel in which the best Christians are people who don't suffer because their fabulous faith keeps them healthy and prosperous. Their heroes are not strugglers and martyrs but fast-talking preachers with luxury cars and fabulous houses who promise prosperity to their listeners. In their opinion, going through hardship is not a sign of heroism but of weak faith, because, if you're really close to Jesus, faith prevents illness and financial problems, and faith also keeps you from being severely tempted by sin.

But that's nonsense. The Bible says we're in a war. Wartime living isn't always easy, painless, and trouble-free. You can't just "name and claim" victory or "let go and let God." You must fight. Of course you must depend on God's power, not your own, but you still must fight with all the strength God gives you. Living for Jesus is warfare, not a vacation cruise.

Winston Churchill became prime minister of England in the midst of a terrible war with the powerful Nazi forces of the evil Adolph Hitler. The previous prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, had promised "peace in our time" and told his people to "get a nice, quiet sleep." But when war came, it was no time for false peace and phony com-

fort. Winston Churchill did not promise pleasant times and easy victory. He told his nation,

I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat. We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind... You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word. It is victory. Victory at all costs—victory in spite of all terrors. Victory, however long and hard the road may be.

Suppose Churchill had said, “The Nazis are wimps. We can easily defeat them. It won’t take much effort or pain.” Anyone who expected a quick, easy victory would have given up when in the face of fierce Nazi attacks. But because Britain’s leader told his people ahead of time what to expect—blood, toil, tears, and sweat—the troops and people of England stood firm and reached their goal: victory.

Jesus promises victory in our war with Satan, and this outcome is guaranteed by his winning the decisive battle through his death and resurrection. But in promising victory, Jesus does not promise it will be quick and easy. He does not promise health and wealth to those who name it and claim it. He promises blood, toil, sweat, and tears. Jesus promises hardship and suffering as we move toward victory over Satan. Scripture says, “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed” (1 Peter 4:12-13).

Don’t be shocked when Satan attacks and life is hard. You’re in a war. Expect attack. Prepare for it. Endure it and stand firm. The Bible says, “Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer” (2 Timothy 2:3-4). If Jesus is your commander, and if victory over Satan is your goal, stay focused on your mission. A good soldier has to be able to endure hardship and keep his mind free from dis-

tractions that hinder his mission and hamper his effectiveness. You can’t win victories if you’re more concerned about civilian affairs of health and wealth than with Christ your commander. You must focus on the campaign against Satan and on your God-given mission in that campaign.

A Strong Army

Spiritual warfare is hard, but victory is certain for those on the Lord’s side. Spiritual warfare requires all our attention and strength, but the ultimate victory is God’s. It is God’s armor that protects us, God’s weapons that fight for us, and God’s overall victory which provides the setting for our individual victory.

Scripture says, “Put on the armor of God”—not just armor that God gives but armor that God himself wears. The Old Testament says of the Lord, “He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head” (Isaiah 59:17). The New Testament tells us to put on “the breastplate of righteousness” and “the helmet of salvation.” The armor the Lord wears, we must wear. The weapons the Lord uses, we must use. The mighty power of God must be our power. The divine strength that defended the Lord Jesus from Satan’s temptations and enabled Jesus to conquer sin and death must be our strength.

Suppose you face an invasion from hostile forces. Your only weapons are a kitchen knife and a shotgun for hunting birds. Your only vehicle is a used car. Meanwhile, your enemy has machine guns, grenades, artillery, and tanks. When the battle comes, you will have no chance if your weapons are so pitiful and your enemy’s weapons are so powerful. But now suppose you are offered the weapons of a superpower: Stealth bombers, cruise missiles, the best tanks, body armor, and training to use all this equipment. Then your enemy’s terrible weapons aren’t so unbeatable.

Smart soldiers accept God’s equipment and God’s training to use that equipment. Who would rather go to war

in used cars than in tanks? Who would rather go on the attack armed with kitchen knives than with cruise missiles? If you don't use God's armor and weapons, if you battle Satan ill-equipped and unprepared, you cannot win. But if you use God's equipment, go through his training, and follow his orders, you can't lose.

The weapons of human effort have no chance against Satan's weaponry. But with the power of God, the armor of God, and the weapons of God, we have a huge advantage over Satan's forces. Connected to Jesus, you become part of the best-equipped spiritual fighting force in the world. You have the full armor of God, God's own personal armor, available to protect you from the enemy. You have God's own all-powerful weapons to go on the offensive and drive the enemy back. It's not enough for such armor and weapons to be available, however. You must put them on and use them.

Victim or Victor?

As you fight, don't be discouraged if the battle is especially fierce or if you suffer a setback here or a wound there. Rejoice that God entrusts you with a mission where the fighting is fiercest. The greater the opposition you face, the greater the victory when you triumph. The worse the temptations you have to resist, the worse blows you deal to Satan's forces when you succeed.

Even when you falter or fail, the failure isn't final. Keep in mind the overall campaign. Satan might wound you or take you prisoner for a time, but stay loyal to the Lord. Don't let Satan brainwash you into thinking he is winning or that God has abandoned you. Be confident that God is still winning the overall war, and count on him to rescue you. He won't leave behind even one soldier who loves him and is faithful to him. If you pray to him and seek his forgiveness and help, the Lord will rescue you, heal you, and put you back into service. Meanwhile, the

outcome of the overall war is already sure. A smart soldier doesn't just look at his own personal success or failure; he looks at how his country and cause is doing. The good news for the Christian soldier is that Jesus is winning, and his cause is assured of victory. Satan is doomed. If individual setbacks trouble you, it helps to remember the big picture. The fight of faith is warfare for winners.

Don't fall into the victim mentality. Many wounded people turn to Jesus and go to church looking for relief from pain and healing for their damaged spirits, and that's good. Jesus offers to heal sin-sick souls and injured spirits. But once he heals you, he doesn't leave you in a hospital bed. Jesus sets you on your feet, trains you for battle, equips you with the full armor of God, and sends you on a mission to do great things for him. The church of Jesus is not just a hospital for victims but an army of victors.

Don't get so stuck in the condition and mindset of a hospital patient that you don't do any soldiering. Every military force has medical units for the wounded, but it also has fighting units, and the fighting units had better be larger than the medical units. A military force is in big trouble if the weak and wounded outnumber those on active duty and ready for combat. If everybody remains as sick as ever, you have to wonder if the doctors know what they're doing. If the officers are content to have all sick patients and no active troops, you have to question whether those officers are fit to lead.

The church is God's army, and the majority of the church ought to be strong and ready for combat, not lying around weak and helpless, depending on pastors to help them survive from day to day. There may have been a time when some churches were too quick to shun sinners and shoot their wounded, but many churches today have gone to the opposite extreme, accepting as normal a situation in which most church people remain broken, pitiable, dysfunctional victims of sin year after year after year. Few are

strong in the Lord or strike fear into Satan's forces. This is what happens when the church's motto is merely "find a hurt and heal it" instead of "find a stronghold of Satan and conquer it."

The church must not shoot its wounded members, of course. It must minister to the hurting. Sinners must be restored gently, and doubters must be encouraged. But they must not remain in the same miserable condition. They must become healthy, strong, and ready to take up spiritual weapons in the Lord's mission. If a church prides itself on being compassionate and accepting but doesn't call for transformed lives or lead people to march in Christ's army, it can end up full of people who are mostly sin and little holiness, mostly doubt and little faith. The church becomes like an army where almost everybody is in the hospital and almost nobody is advancing against the enemy. A church that's all therapy, no military, must recover its identity as Christ's army. A person who's always in a pity party and never in a war party, always a weakling and never a warrior, must shake off the victim mentality, draw on Jesus' strength, put on the full armor of God, and learn to stand firm.

The night George Washington and his troops crossed the icy Delaware River and marched on Trenton, many of the men left bloody tracks in the snow from their sore feet and other injuries. They could have sat around feeling sorry for themselves, but instead they attacked the enemy. They were a war party, not a pity party. They focused more on their mission than on their injuries. They focused more on their general's orders than on the harshness of the weather. They focused on the importance of their cause rather than on the power of their enemy. If those patriots had settled into a victim mentality, the war would have been lost. But they were prepared to fight under all conditions, they put their weapons to use, and they won an amazing victory.

Jesus doesn't promise trouble-free victory, but he does promise victory. When you truly commit yourself to his service, you'll be amazed at what you can do in his power. You might say to yourself, "I didn't think I had it in me!"—and you don't have it in you until you get the Holy Spirit of Christ in you. Once the power of Almighty God is in you and his armor surrounds you and his weapons are in your hand, there's no telling what heroic things you can do in his service. You won't do mighty deeds if you're a sunshine soldier or a self-pitying victim. But if you accept Jesus, his armor, and his training, you will be armed and ready for the evil day, and you will be one of the heroes of faith who share in the suffering and the glory of Christ.