

## INTRODUCTION

Paul reminds the Corinthians, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal [of the flesh] but mighty in God for the pulling down of strongholds” (2 Cor. 10:3, 4). To the Ephesians he writes:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. (Eph. 6:10-12)

Although this battle is spiritual and although our enemy is unseen, both are nevertheless real. A spiritual battle calls for spiritual (yet real) weapons; weapons provided through our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Therefore, as a “good soldier” of Jesus Christ, we first think of...

➤ The Conflict in Which We are Involved

We are engaged in a spiritual battle. It’s a close encounter with the powers of darkness, and we are to be in a continuous fight of agony against evil.

➤ The Cooperation Which is Invoked

Each believer is commanded to do his or her part in sharing with other believers the hardships of ministry “as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” A good soldier not only thinks of himself, but he also thinks of his comrades. What each of us does greatly impacts the rest of the church.

Let’s now consider just a few areas where we will definitely have conflicts. We have conflicts with...

➤ Satan

He will do all he can to try and neutralize our testimony and teaching. He tries to snatch away the Word of God even before it enters the heart of the student (Matt 13:19). He knows just how powerful and effective a *steady* and *systematic* approach to the Word of God really is. He will do all he can to discourage the believer: a pastor, a Sunday School teacher, or a parent. In fact, *discouragement* is one of his greatest weapons. Another weapon he wields is *diversion*. If he can get us diverted or side-tracked on trivial topics, the consequence is the neglect of the Word. If we neglect the Word, we have abandoned the only source of power that will transform lives.

➤ Society

The philosophy of society is predominately anti-Christ. It is an atheistic and humanistic world system in which we live. For the most part, the public school system is filled with it. The media promote it. Television basically opposes all biblical principles, displaying sex, adultery, violence, and crime. We have folks that come into our services and classes who have been bombarded with that stuff all week long. It might be a little boy or girl; it could be a teen, a dad, or mom. This leads us to the next conflict:

➤ Students

When I refer to students, I'm referring to any individual sitting under the Word of God as it is taught or preached. Now please hear me out. In my years of pastoring, there is something I have seen. I know what it is, and I know what it looks like. The word is "carry-over." "Carry-over" refers to things that people carry over from work, school, or home. These things are difficulties or problems they might be having and they bring them to church. Truth is we may not really know what that person is thinking or going through, who's sitting right beside us. A couple may be having marital issues, maybe facing a financial crisis, or even thinking about their wayward son or daughter. Maybe a little boy or girl is afraid to go back home to face an abusive father or mother. I realize that these things aren't always the case, but you can be sure, there's more "carry-over" than we realize.

The church is where we should find comfort, help, strength, encouragement, and guidance from the Word of God and from the people of God. However, if *we* are not careful as believers, *we* can allow the pressures of this life to crowd out the Word of God. We are then unable to effectively receive God's Word, unable to genuinely worship, and unable to have meaningful fellowship.

Because we and others face such a risk, we need to pray for ourselves, our families, our children, those in every service, and those in every classroom. Effective ministry requires effective, energetic, and earnest prayer. Many of these "carry-over" situations folks may bring with them will be beyond us. But I guarantee they are not beyond God's ability, grace, power, and the authority of His Word.

Because of the risk of "carry-over," it's important that each of our teachers have themselves and their lessons adequately prepared. When we do, we can better arrest the attention of our audience. Having pored over the lesson and saturated everything in prayer, we have the guarantee that God, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, will apply it in the hearts and lives of individuals where it's needed. Only God can do that.

The last conflict that we face is with...

➤ Self

If we are not careful we can become our own worst enemy. We can become the greatest enemy of ministry. We can allow our own personal opinions or attitudes stand in the way of what God really wants to accomplish. We can become cynical and selfish, thinking only of ourselves.

Each believer faces the same triad of enemies and they are usually stated in this order: the world (society), the flesh (self), and the devil (Satan). As believers, we know our weaknesses and the root of our greatest battles. As teachers, you know your strengths, and you know your weaknesses. Turn your strengths over to the Lord so you might remain humble. Turn your weaknesses over to the Lord so that He might give you confidence.

➤ The Compromise Which We Should Avoid (v. 4a)

Paul says, “No one in active service entangles himself with the affairs of this life.” It’s absolutely impossible to have an effective ministry when we become entangled with the affairs of this life. When a soldier loses his focus and his attention is elsewhere, lives are at stake.

Paul writes:

And do not be conformed to this world [“Don’t let the world squeeze you into its own mould”], but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Rom. 12:2)

Listen to John’s admonition:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 Jhn. 2:15-17)

This brings us to our last point. When we think of a good soldier, we are reminded of...

➤ The Commander We are to Please (v. 4b)

There is no higher motive for Christian service than to please God. When we delight to do the Father’s will, what a blessing to hear Him say, “This is my beloved son or daughter, in whom I am well pleased.” And one day to hear Him say, “Well done good and faithful servant.”

## CONCLUSION

May each of us, no matter where we serve in the body of Christ, be able to say,

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. (2 Tim. 4:7, 8)