

## David Stein - Onward Christian Soldiers

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We have come to the end of a week long convention. I'm sure that you're all filled to the brim with blessed fellowship and instruction that we have had as we leave the campus to return to our everyday lives. We return to the battlefield and to the war.

Someone might say, brother David, we've enjoyed such peace and blessings this week. Why are you going to talk about war? Well, the answer, dear brethren, is that war and battle are part of the everyday character of our consecrated lives. When we get together in our meetings, our conventions like this one, our studies, or gather just for fellowship and Christian camaraderie, these oases provide refueling and instruction in order to return to the battle. However you consider it, you and I are soldiers of Christ.

Paul used this phrase several times, so we're not pulling it out of the air. It's a biblical phrase. For example, Philippians, chapter 2, verse 25. But I counted it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier. Paul uses that term.

Philemon, chapter 1, verses 1 and 2. Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy, our brother. To Philemon, our beloved and fellow worker, and to Apphia, our sister, and to Archippus. Here it is again, our fellow soldier. You know, if any of you have received emails from brother Rick Serasi, remember how he always signs it your fellow soldier.

As soldiers, we participate in war. What do you think of war? Well, I'm with you. If you say war is bad, supremely unpleasant. No one really wants to participate in war.

That's why young brothers within our fellowship historically identify as cos. Conscientious objectors. We object to participation in carnal warfare, and not a few of them have suffered punishment and imprisonment because of their stand. Dear brethren, war has come to us.

This is not carnal war with guns and tanks and military jets. Rather, it is spiritual war. Second Corinthians, chapter 10, verse 3. Second Corinthians 10:3. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.

You may have heard the phrase righteous war. What constitutes a righteous war as opposed to an unrighteous war in the world? It is used to justify carnal war to some extent. That's right. A war to oppose an evil dictator like Adolf Hitler in the 20th century seems quite justified considering the murderous character of the Nazi regime.

But consider the cost of that righteous war, the deaths of tens of millions and the international destruction of property. There's no question that many, if most wars would not fall into the category of a righteous war. It has been true through history. But our spiritual war is indeed a righteous war. Why?

Because it is authorized by our Heavenly Father and overseen by our redeemer. Ephesians, chapter 6, verse 12. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against. Against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places. Brethren, as soldiers in Christ, we are in a real war with real battles.

With whom or what are we at war with? Who are our enemies?

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Let me quote from reprint 5814 Pastor writes there to a certain extent the Christian soldiers are engaged in a great warfare against sin, against error, against superstition, against the adversary of men who especially the adversary of the light and of the Lord and the faithful followers. Let's make a listing starting at what the Pastor recommends here. Listing of our enemies, he says, Sin, error, superstition, the adversary, the devil, and I'm going to add to this list the world and the power of the devil, and brethren, we have to also include our own imperfect flesh.

That's a battle that you all know about. The wisdom of this world advises to you to know your enemy. Knowing your enemy's characteristics, their strengths, their weaknesses, how they move, how they think, it enables you to gain victory over them. Brethren, we know what our enemy is like. In 2nd Corinthians 2:11, Paul said this that no advantage may be gained over us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of of his devices.

What's his devices? That's the means that he uses to war against us. We know how he works. We've got nearly 6,000 years of history behind us of how Satan the enemy works.

So it should be no surprise to us when he tries these same things on us. Let's look a bit more closely at our enemies for a moment. You've heard the term strategy and tactics. These are military terms, although they get applied in business and elsewhere whenever you have efforts to accomplish something. Let's define this.

What is strategy? A strategy is a high level plan or plans getting into a position to maximize the attack options that we have in whatever goal that we might have. So think of strategy as something high level. Tactics. Tactics is the actual attack.

Attack procedures or maneuvers to produce a specific reaction or get a victory. I'll give an example of chess. I don't know how many of you may be chess players, but back in my younger years I used to play a lot of chess. Now chess has two armies. I'm going to characterize them that way because we're talking about warfare.

And it's got pieces on it. Now, the pieces vary in definition by what they're able to do. Some pieces are more powerful than the other, and of course the object is to capture or checkmate the king. Now, in chess, you start out with a strategy.

Before you have a single attack, you want to execute a strategy, and what that means is you want to get the pieces in position so that you can begin a tactical attack. I'll give you an example. In positional chess, the knight in chess moves in an L shape. It either goes 1, 2, 3 or 1, 2, 3.

It's the shape of an L. If you put a knight in the corner of the board, there's only two spaces it can move. Not a real good position. If you put it on the side of the board now you've doubled that to four places it can move. But if you put a knight in the middle of the board, it's got eight different places it can go.

So your strategy, at least for the night, is you want to get the knight as close to the middle of the board as possible, because that maximizes your power and gives you the best attack options.

The strategy of Satan is to control things. It's positional. He wants to maximize his ability to. To attack you and me, and make no mistake about it, the church is right in his crosshairs.

That's the biggest enemy. If he can prevent you and I from making our calling elections, sure he slows things down. In Second Corinthians 4, 4, we read this in whom the God of this world hath

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blinded the minds of the unbelieving. That the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn upon them the God of this world. This is a strong position.

By the way, the word for world here is not cosmos. Cosmos means arrangement. The word here is ion aeon. It means age, the God of this age. I like this because this suggests that the time for Satan's control is limited to this age.

But he has control in this age. He controls the world, as we've seen here, the religious, political, social, financial structures of the world. This is the high level strategy. Get as much control as you can. Here's another text that shows that he does have control of these things.

Matthew, chapter 4, verses 8 and 9. You remember the context and this is the beginning of his ministry. We read there again. The devil taketh him to an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them will fall down and Worship me.

Now you know you can't give something you don't have. Satan had control. He had strategic control of all the kingdoms of the world. But Satan also has tactics against us. Here's a scripture that shows a very strong tactic that Satan has had and used through the age.

Hebrews 2:14.

Since then, the children are sharers in the flesh and blood. He also in like manner partook of the same, that through death he might bring to naught. Now listen, him that had the power of death, that is the devil. Satan has had the power of death. What does that mean?

It means he has been permitted to kill people. You know, he motivated Cain to murder Abel, the very, very beginning, and throughout the age, Satan has had that power. These are tactical, not strategic, and dear brethren, he has power over the church as well, you might say.

Well, wait a second, Brother Dave. You know, what you're saying is, isn't that the Church under the power of God? Yeah, it is. Let's consider this for a moment. Number one, Satan's power is not unlimited.

Whatever God provides, whatever Jehovah permits in the way of Satan's power is done so with God's own strategy to bring about and cause to happen certain things. That has been true through the whole age. Satan has not run amok doing anything he wants. He may think so, but he has been in a shoot, in a guide that Jehovah God has permitted and constructed. Whether he knows it or not.

The power that Satan has had during the gospel age has caused great hurt to the church. Let me change that great hurt to the flesh of the church. In Daniel, chapter seven, verse 26, we read about this fourth king. It says, and he shall speak words against the Most High and shall wear out the saints of the Most High. Well, that's a power he has.

But I really like the way Daniel expresses it here. To wear out. Notice it doesn't say that the king defeats them, says he wears them out. The wording implies resistance, not submission, and the church through the gospel age has always resisted.

And so it is with our battles with the adversary and his emissaries. They may wear us out in the flesh, but it will not cause the church to give up. 2nd Corinthians 12:10. Paul writes this. Wherefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake.

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For when I am weak, then I am strong. Paul keenly felt the tactical attacks of Satan and his emissaries. But he didn't stop. It wore out Paul quite a bit. He talks about what it cost him, but he didn't give up.

In one important way, we are living in a spiritual space over which Satan has no control.

But if we fail to live by faith, dear brethren, if we fail to be obedient in every way, if we fail to remain in the protective and spiritual environment God has provided them, and only then are we in danger. But the devil keeps probing our defenses. If I was to ask you, what are the three enemies of the new creation? You'd say, the world, the flesh, and the devil. That's right.

I might be tempted to add the nominal systems to that, but those are our enemies. All right, so let's talk about the weapons of our warfare a little bit, because we are not without weapons. In 2nd Corinthians 10:3-5, we read verse 3 earlier. Paul writes, for though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not the flesh, but mighty before God.

To the casting down of strongholds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. That's pretty powerful weapons, wouldn't you say? And I like this last thing, bringing every thought into the captivity to the obedience of Christ. You know, we've often talked about our inability to obey God's law perfectly because of our imperfect flesh. We can't do it.

And notice Paul doesn't say, bringing every behavior into the captivity, every thought, the perfection of character, the perfection of intention is a legitimate goal for us. We want to be perfect. We want to be totally obedient. We want never to fail. Now, that won't happen in the flesh.

But God counts that desire according to our faith. He credits it to us, and we bring those thoughts into obedience to Christ. In Ephesians, chapter six, we don't have time to go into it. He lists the whole armor of God, and this is a wonderful chapter.

We've seen many studies at conventions and discourses and panel discussions on this, and it's worthwhile for us to consider it. But have you noted that in the armor, which consists of seven items, six are defensive and only one is offensive? You remember the offensive weapon, sword of the spirit. That's the sword. All the rest of them are armor.

They're protected. This sort of suggests to us that the tactical attacks of our enemies occur six times more often than the need to attack back with the truth. I like that ratio. We are not to use the truth as a Battering ram, beating the truth into somebody's head to make them accept it. That's not what the sword of spirit is all about.

But the sword of the spirit is appropriate to fend off attacks on our faith, attacks on the doctrines that we hold close, attacks that would besmirch the character of our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus. There's a couple other scriptures where Paul talks about armor in a slightly different metaphor. Romans 13:12 the night is far spent, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. We associate light with truth.

Truth and light have a protective effect. Second Corinthians, chapter 6:7 is another armor that Paul uses here, another metaphor. He writes there in the word of truth, in the power of God by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left armor of righteousness. Further, doing right is

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protective. Doing what is righteous, what pleases God, what is the right thing to do in terms of just and love and kindness.

It protects us. It's an armor foreign. Let's go on to another aspect of war. War certainly has villains. It also has heroes.

There are heroes of the faith. There have always been. You look back in the book of judges. Weren't they all heroes? In reprint 4533 brother Russell wrote this about heroes.

Reprint 4533. St. Paul's courageous life reminds us of the words of the Be not like dumb driven cattle. Be a hero in the strife. God is seeking only for heroes.

Now by and by he will deal with the remainder helpfully. The elect must be courageous, conformed to the image of his son. Heroes hence the promises to the church are to him that overcometh, and let us remember that scripturally considered, this character which the Lord seeks may be developed in very humble stations. The butcher, the baker, the machinist, the housewife, the washerwoman.

All of these may develop the overcoming qualities of which the Lord will reward.

Brethren, do you see yourself as heroes? Honestly, I don't see myself as a hero. But that has to do a lot with the worldly image or worldly definition of heroes that I had. The worldly definition, where the worldly pictures a hero as someone who saves the day, someone who possesses unusual strength and abilities and who battles against all odds and comes out victorious.

I grew up in my early teens with comic books. I remember getting new issues and reading about how Superman and Batman and Spider man waged an epic battle and beats the bad guys down until the next issue when another Villain comes on the scene. That's my background in understanding heroes. But how is a soldier of Christ a hero? Here are some ideas.

A sister unable to travel because of illness, regularly calls brethren to encourage them. That is heroic. A brother travels into an authoritarian country bringing truth litter which is prohibited. Heroic. A sister monitors the old Ron list for brethren in distress or trial and sends cards of encouragement to every one.

A brother regularly brings an older brother who no longer drives to conventions.

Brethren who faithfully pray for the brotherhood and the harvest work. Brethren that faithfully study in preparation for ecclesia meetings desirous of being a blessing to others. In these studies we've had in the Testimony meeting today examples of heroes. Brother Cruz in his presentation talked about wonderful brethren in Germany who were heroes that thought of others that put their needs above their own.

Brethren, from the Heavenly Father's perspective, any and every action we take in carrying out his will in connection with preaching the Gospel, caring for our brethren, standing for the truth in tense situations, praying for each other, simple acts of love for the brethren and the like, these are all heroic. That's the divine perspective. Hebrews chapter 10 or chapter 6, sorry, verses 10 and 11. Hebrews 6, 10 and 11. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and your love which he showed toward his name.

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In that ye ministered unto the saints and still do minister, and we desire that each one of you may show the same diligence unto the fullness of hope, even to the end.

Brethren, when we think of modern heroes, many names come to mind. Of course, our dear pastor, Brother Russell was your hero. One of his pilgrims was a personal hero to me. Brother Benjamin Barton, who died at the young age of 41. I came across his his consecration card.

This brother wrote a card. He solemnized his consecration vow. Here's what the consecration vow card reads. I disclaim all right to myself from henceforth to my soul, my body, my time, my health, my reputation, my talents and anything that belongs to me. I confess myself to be the property of my glorious Redeemer.

I dedicate myself to him to serve, love and trust him as my life and my salvation to my life's end. Signed Benjamin Barton, May 19, 1895. How lovely is that? All of us have taken a consecration vow. But Brother Barton wrote it down.

I have no doubt that he looked at it frequently to remind him of that commitment. Other modern heroes Brother John Egger also died before Brother Russell know his work on the Great Pyramid. After brother Russell we have brother Norman Woodworth, who recognized in the turmoil of the time after Brother Russell's death. That the harvest work was not going as it should. That the Brethren were isolated and spread out.

And he worked very hard to bring the Brethren together and get that harvest work going again. Some of the pilgrims, more modern pilgrims. John Megason never met. Brother Megison. W.A.

baker never met him either. How about some brethren that I have known? Some personal heroes. Brother Anton Fry loved this brother. Loved his dedication to the truth.

He was a hero to me. Rose Hirsch met her one time. I think she goes all the way back to Brother Russell's time. But what a life. What a heroic life of dedication.

Brother Carl Hagenson, personal hero to me. One of the most influential brethren in my life. Brother Richard Sarasi. How lovely. He served the Brethren year after year.

Leo Post. Pentel Hatches. Now, somebody might see. Well, David, you didn't have any sisters on that list. I've got one sister.

Well, many sister, but one that's a hero to me. Alpha Keturba. What a wonderful sister. What a wonderful example. Brethren, will you be a hero of the faith?

Yes, you will. If your obedience and faith are demonstrated in your everyday consecrated life, you are a hero from the divine definition. 2nd Timothy, chapter 2, verses 3 through 5.

Suffer hardship with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier of service entangle himself in the affairs of this life that he may please him who enrolled him as a soldier, and if a man contend in the games, he is not crowned, except he hath contended lawfully.

Brethren, this has great practical application to us. No soldier on service entangleth himself in the affairs of this life.

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Soldiers have a single focus and that's to carry out the orders that they have to defeat the enemy. A soldier in a carnal warfare can't go off and do what he wants when he wants. He can't pursue other interests. He is single minded and must be single minded for the battle to be won. Brethren, that single mindedness that we must have, that consecrated focus is just as important.

There are so many, many distractions in this world. Things that are pulling us this way and that way.

Things that will waste our time and other ideas that will cause us to maybe minimize or at least not maximize our service to the Lord. Brethren, this is the enemy of the world. Do not let the world pull you away from being a soldier of Christ.

We have a daily battle. Brother Russell often talked about the battle with our flesh. That's the closest enemy, and it is a daily battle.

But one of the ways in which we can win our Daily battles is to focus on the preaching of the Gospel. That's what Christianity was all about. What Jesus started was so unheard of in the ancient world. A religion that goes out and tries to make converts, tries to make proselytes. This was the character of Christianity from the very beginning.

Let's look at a couple of scriptures in Acts that just show how important it was to those early apostles. Acts 5:42, and every day in the temple and at home, they ceased not to teach and preach. Jesus as the Christ wasn't on weekends, every other day, every day, it said they ceased not. Acts 17:17.

So he reasoned, this is Paul now. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and devout persons and in the marketplace every day with them that met him. In the synagogue with the Jews, in the marketplace. Wherever Paul went, he preached the gospel every day. Acts chapter 20, verse 31.

Again, the apostle Paul.

Wherefore watch ye, remembering that by the space of three years, I cease not to admonish every one night and day with tears.

That's a soldier, that's a hero, that's a focus. Now you might say, well, brother David, those are the apostles. We can't all be apostles. True. Remember we read earlier, though it doesn't matter your station in life, you still can have the attitude to do with your utmost what you can in the sharing of the Gospel.

And remember we said that one of the metaphors was the armor of light. When you're giving the light out, when you are preaching the gospel day by day, you've got the armor on automatically, and what a wonderful thing is on those rare occasions when you find a hearing mirror.

This sounds like a lot of work. Sounds like tiring work. Yeah. Okay, so what we do have a certain amount of strength in our flesh. We have finite.

But the Lord does not expect from us. He never expects from us what we cannot give. But the corollary is, he always expects what we can give.

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What can you give, brother? I can't give today what I could give 30 years ago. Sure, all of you could say that. It's okay. The Lord doesn't expect me to give today what I gave 30 years ago.

He sure expects me to give today what I can give today. In reprint 1656, Brother Russell had this little ditty entitled the Test of Endurance, and he used First Kings 20, verse 11 as a kickoff, and that scripture says, let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off. Here's what Brother Russell wrote about that the Test of endurance is certainly one of the severest tests of faithfulness to which the elect church, the body of Christ, is subjected.

It is the test which gauges and registers the strength of every other virtue and grace, and no soldier of the cross will be crowned with the laurels of victory who has not stood this test. The Christian life is a warfare, and the above words of one of the kings of Israel to a boastful enemy of the Lord's people are applicable not only to every new recruit in the Lord's army, but similarly to all who have not yet finished their course of faith.

Brethren, in carnal wars you fight, but there's no guarantee of victory. You fight hard to gain the victory. Nothing's guaranteed. But guess what? The battle and the war that we have is guaranteed.

We will be victorious if our faith fail not. You cannot help but to be victorious if you are faithful first. John 5:4. For whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world, and this is the victory that overcometh the world.

Even our faith.

Brethren, we're going to close with hymn number 337, but I'd like to go through the verses of that hymn. Just make a comment in each verse. You're going to sing it at the end.

Onward Christian soldiers marching as to war. One of our points of this main point is that we're in a spiritual war now with the cross of Jesus going on before. Isn't it nice? We got the cross of Jesus right here. That's our standard.

And I like that. You have cross and crown and the laurels of victory. Christ the royal master leads against the foe. Jesus is a general far better than Caesar, than Napoleon, than Patton. He's our general who never makes a mistake, Our leader.

Forward into battle, see his banners go. Brethren, we each must move forward. Not backwards, not sideways, not stop. We do not retreat or surrender. We continue to move forward.

Verse 2. At the sign of triumph, Satan's host dost flee. Every personal victory that you have chases away the adversary. Unmend, Christian soldiers on to victory. As we said, ultimate victory is inevitable.

Hell's foundations quiver at the shout of praise. Death and grave are doomed and we are raised to heavenly places. Now, brothers, lift your voices loud your anthems raise. Preach the gospel, let the light shine. Verse 3.

Like a mighty army moves the Church of God. The Church of Christ is mighty in spirit and it will accomplish the purpose on this side of the veil before the full end of its gospel age guaranteed. Brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod. We looked about some of the heroes of the past, some of the modern heroes of our faith. We have a rich legacy of faithful saints to inspire us.

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We are not divided, all one body, we brethren. The little flock recognizes each other in the oneness of Christ. One in hope and doctrine, one in charity. We are united in the doctrine of the ransom for all and obey Jesus command to love one another. Verse 4.

Onward then ye people, join our happy throng. Brethren, stay the course. Rejoice in the membership of the body of Christ. Blend with ours, your voices in the triumph song. Keep the triumphant end of our course in mind.

Every day of our lives. Sing it every day. Glory, laud and honor unto Christ the King. Recognize the power of our King Jesus Christ, our general Jesus Christ and honor him always. This through countless ages.

Men and angels sing the eternal purpose of God will be accomplished and celebrated forever and ever.

Brethren, let me conclude.

When I first saw that I had the closing talk of the Convention, I immediately listened to 13 years of general convention closing discourses. I wanted to see how brethren handled it, and what I pray to the Heavenly Father is Father, let me inspire the brethren. Let me stir up their emotions and arouse their consecrated lives so that when they leave here, they'll take this wonderful blessing of seven days and be rededicated to doing your will. Here's nine things that I'd like to suggest or recommend going from this Convention.

Never, never, never forget we are at war.

2. Organize your life. Develop your habits to reflect this reality. You know, there's a saying that we used to hear in business. Don't rearrange the chairs on the Titanic.

The idea was the Titanic was going on. You don't want to get involved in stuff that makes no difference at all. That's true of us as well. Number three, rededicate the consecration of your life. I think Brother Barton did that by having that card.

He probably kept it with him all the time. 4. Discipline yourself with the strategy and tactics to battle against our enemies. Soldiers need to be prepared. This has been six days of preparation.

Our ecclesia meetings, our preparation, our personal studies are preparation that allow us to discipline ourselves for the battle. 5. Preach the word with zeal, urgency and constancy. Remember, preaching the gospel gives you the armor of light.

6. Apply the lessons you learn as a soldier every day. Apply them and share them.

7. Celebrate your daily victories and give God the praise and credit for them.

8. Assist your fellow soldiers in their fight. Now, when I was first putting this together, I was looking for some maybe inspiring war stories. There just wasn't time for it. There are so many stories out there about soldiers who were battling together.

You've heard the expression, I've got your back? It's a military term. You know, somebody's going this way against an enemy they got. They need protection from behind. So one of their fellow surges has their back.

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Assist your fellow soldiers in the fight. 9. Our last one. Keep before your mental eyes the promise of victory. Don't allow this the adversary to discourage you and say, are you kidding?

You think you're going to be member of the little flock? Just look at you. That's the accuser of the brethren. Rather. Keep the promise before your eyes always.

Victory is promised. We don't have to do much. Just be faithful. Just obey the commandments of God. John says they're not burdensome.

Keep the victory ahead. Brethren, I close with the scripture from Second Peter, chapter one, verse ten.

Wherefore the rather brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, ye shall never fall for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. May the Lord bless this too.