



**“And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully,” II Timothy 2:5.**

## **Being a Good Soldier**

**Lesson Aim:** To emphasize the believer’s obligation and privilege to be a good soldier in the ranks of God's army.

**L517. Date:** May 1964. **Text:** Ephesians 6:10-20; II Timothy 2:1-5; 4:7-8.  
**Topic:** Service; Warfare (Spiritual).

### INTRODUCTION —

Onward, Christian soldiers,  
Marching as to War,  
With the cross of Jesus  
Going on before!

The words of this stirring Christian hymn strike the note for today's study. The aim of this lesson is “to emphasize the believer's obligation and privilege to be a good soldier in the ranks of God's army.” It should be studied with much soul-searching and prayer.

The Bible makes several references to the Christian's life being like that of a soldier. There is no reason for anyone being a poor Christian soldier. God has given the Holy Spirit to prepare for service. There is the example of many who have served before.

The Bible offers full instruction as to what is demanded and how adequate preparation can be made for effective service. The great Companion accompanies each one of God's children in the battle and He is greater than any opponent faced, I John 4:4. Therefore the only reason any Christian would be a poor soldier for Jesus is because he has not laid hold on the resources God has made available.

Being a good Christian soldier involves much more than forgiveness in salvation. It also involves diligent preparation and strict discipline of one's personal life. Each reader can profitably examine himself according to the

standard set out in today's lesson.

## EXPOSITION

### I. THE SOLDIER'S ARMOUR, Ephesians 6:10-20.

The victorious Christian soldier must put on the armour which God provides. There will be no inadequacy for him who is so clothed. Since the armour is of divine origin and gift, being supplied of God, it is sufficient.

1. The Christian soldier needs to put on the armour of God, verses 10-11. Two reasons are given for this demand. First, the Christian soldier needs the strength of the Lord for the battle he wages. Paul had already prayed for his readers that they may “be strengthened with might by his (God's) Spirit in the inner man,” Ephesians 3:16. He makes it plain that spiritual strength must be a sharing in the power of God. The Christian soldier enjoys the experience of “being strengthened with all might according to His glorious power,” Colossians 1:11. For spiritual battles, spiritual strength is needed. This God alone can confer.

Second, the opposition faced by the Christian soldier is nothing less than “the wiles (methods) of the devil.” This makes the armour of God the more essential. Only one so clothed can hope to wage his warfare successfully. True, “We are not ignorant of his (Satan's) devices” (II Corinthians 2:11), but if his devices are to be detected and frustrated, heavenly strength is necessary.

This is not a flesh and blood contest. Involved here are principalities (meaning highest angel-princes), powers (hostile forces devoted to evil), world-rulers of this darkness (referring to angel-princes under Satan's will), and the spiritual hosts of wickedness. Against such, the Christian must be equipped with the panoply of God. The warfare is not on the human plane and so human strength will not suffice. In himself the Christian is incapable of gaining the mastery over the principalities and powers; only the power of Christ can help him. **“Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand,”** verse 13.

2. The Christian soldier must not neglect any part of the armour of God, verses 13-17. There is need that the whole armour of God be worn. So determined and fierce is the opposition of satanic forces to the kingdom of God that the believer can hope to stand his ground against them only by taking the armour of God and putting forth all his exertions. The parts of the armour are but the “fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22-23.

(1) Truth is to bind all the armour together. The ancient soldier wore a sash about his waist which held his garments in place and from which his sword hung. Paul designates this belt as “truth” in the Christian armour. Truth includes loyalty, faithfulness, and freedom from deceit, sincerity and simplicity. The absence of the definite article (“the truth”) shows this does not refer to saving truth in Jesus. See II John 4.

(2) Righteousness is to be the breastplate of the armour. This protects the heart. The breastplate was worn on the chest to protect from any disabling wound. So the Christian, covered with the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ, will be protected against any fatal blow by evil forces. “Righteousness” means God's verdict which acquits us of sin and guilt and declares us justified. It also refers to one's manner of life which is wrought by the new life placed within.

(3) The gospel of peace provides firm footing for the Christian's feet. Roman soldiers wore sandals with nails driven in the soles to give firmer footing. So the Christian warrior is to shoe himself with the “preparation of the gospel of peace.” “Preparation” means the base or pedestal of equipment and may be translated foundation. This means we are firmly set to battle with satanic forces and win when we have peace with God through the gospel.

(4) Faith is to defend the Christian against Satan's attacks. Faith in God is a comprehensive protection (a large bodyshield) against the flaming shafts of evil which are aimed at the people of God. Satan's darts are not only stopped, but extinguished, by the shield of faith. Roman foot soldiers carried shields about four feet long, reaching from the knees to the eyes. An advancing line of men would hold these as an extended wall before their bodies. In like manner, faith is to serve as the advance guard, to always stand between the Christian and his foe.

(5) Salvation is the Christian's helmet. (See also Isaiah 59:17 and 1 Thessalonians 5:8.) The helmet of salvation is worn by him who is the receiver and possessor of deliverance from the guilt of sin. Since salvation is eternal, it is best to protect the Christian soldier from any crippling blow to the head.

This concludes the description of the defensive armour of the believer. Truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, and salvation—what more does one need? What more could one want? Now remains only one more part of the armour and it is the only offensive part described.

(6) The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit and is the only weapon of attack. The Spirit puts into the believer's hands the word which is necessary on each occasion so that Satan is put to flight. Against this sword

there is no defense, for the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword,” Hebrews 4:12. The Old Testament speaks of God slaying the disobedient with the words of His mouth, Hosea 6:5; Isaiah 11:4. The great Conqueror whom John saw in the Revelation is called “The Word of God” and a sharp sword proceeds from his mouth for the smiting of the nations, Revelation 19:13-15. Here is a glorious truth: “No word of man is capable of routing the spiritual hosts of wickedness, but they cannot stand their ground when God speaks,” — F. F. Bruce.

3. The Christian soldier must use his armour properly, verses 18-20. Proper use of the armour demands that it be used in a spirit of prayer. This prohibits any arrogant spirit or wrong motive. Persistence is of great significance at this point. Observe the inclusive words of these verses: “always, all prayer, all perseverance, all saints.”

Observe the instructions concerning prayer which Paul gives. (1) It is to be offered on all occasions with petitions when needs arise. (2) It is to be offered in union with the Spirit wherein the Holy Spirit surrounds, penetrates, transforms and guides, Romans 8:26; Jude 20. (3) It is to be offered with persistence, “keeping awake to persevering prayer,” as taught in Luke 18:1. (4) It is to be offered with petitions for all saints. The redeemed of God are standing against the hosts of Satan. Prayer for self is to be enlarged to prayer for all saints. A Christian cannot really draw near to Christ unless he is drawn near to his brethren in Christ.

## **II. THE SOLDIER'S DUTIES, II Timothy 2:1-5.**

1. The Christian soldier is to wage his battle in the strength which the Lord provides, verse 1. Man is impotent without the strength of God. Jesus has truly said, “**Without me ye can do nothing,**” John 15:5. Power to resist and overcome spiritual foes comes only from God.

Those who depend upon God find that He is enough. Victory in the spiritual warfare does not come by multiplicity of number nor intricacy of organization, but by the Spirit of God, Zechariah 4:6. “**The exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power**” (Ephesians 1:19), is available to each soldier!

The foes of the Christian are devilish, unseen, powerful, exalted, and numerous. They must be overcome through Him who is greater than any of them. Who knows their nature, Who sees their working, and in Whose Son the powers of evil suffered eternal defeat. This is His assurance to us: “**Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed; for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest,**” Joshua 1:9.

**“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me,”** Philippians 4:13.

2. The Christian soldier is to deliver his message, verse 2. This is his great responsibility. George Barlow writes, “There is only one gospel, and this has been authenticated by its own intrinsic value and by the testimony of incorruptible witnesses, and every care must be taken to preserve this gospel inviolate and transmit it in its purity and strength to future generations. Care must also be taken that the human vehicle of the truth be duly fitted and prepared to convey it to others.” No Christian is an end in himself. He is saved to help others be saved; he is taught to teach others; he has the witness borne to him that he might bear it to others. Satan tries to turn him from the way, but like the messenger in war, he goes on through uncounted dangers to carry the message through. This is the Christian soldier's duty and the great reason why the armour of God is provided him.

3. The Christian soldier is to persevere in hardships, verse 3. The admonition here is not that the soldier become hardened, but that he endure hardships. Tertullian writes: “Even in peace soldiers learn betimes to suffer warfare by toil and discomforts, by marching in arms, running over the drillground, working at trench-making, constructing the tortoise, till the sweat runs again. In like manner do ye, O blessed ones, account whatever is hard in your lot as discipline of the powers of your mind and body. Ye are about to enter for the good fight, in which the living God gives the eternal prize . . . Therefore your trainer Jesus Christ has seen good to separate you from a state of freedom for rougher treatment, that power may be strong in you.” When things get rough, renew your dedication, but don't quit.

4. The Christian soldier must have a dedication unto duty, verse 4. The soldier must be wholly devoted to his profession. He must leave family, give up his former occupation, and forsake all else which would keep him from peak efficiency as a soldier. In like manner the Christian soldier must not be enslaved by worldly affairs. There is no way such affairs can be completely ignored. The Christian must rather guard against their interfering with the obedience he is due to render his Heavenly Commander. There is nothing evil about business dealings and worldly affairs when they are kept in their proper place. They must never be permitted to assume an importance which God does not intend them to have.

5. The Christian soldier must be marked by faithful conduct, verse 5. Consider the college athlete. He is anxious to perfect his skills at a certain game. He is anxious to develop his strength as much as possible so as to play his part the better. Therefore he disciplines himself. He is kept from certain foods; he is given proper hours of sleep; he is required to exercise faithfully.

As Tertullian says it, “The harder their labours in training the greater their hopes of victory. Virtue is built up by hardness, but by softness is overthrown.” Even then, to merit the honour of winning the contest, every rule must be obeyed. Why then should it be considered strange if the Christian is expected to discipline himself and give his whole heart to Christian service? He, too, may be disapproved if he does not live according to God's rules, I Corinthians 9:27.

### **III. THE SOLDIER'S REWARD, II Timothy 4:7-8.**

1. The Christian soldier can receive the reward of a good conscience, verse 7. Paul's evaluation of his life's ministry is not idle boasting. He had been a missionary for more than thirty years at the time of this writing. His efforts had been expended in accord with the leading of God's Spirit. He had been instrumental in organizing scores of churches. He had written epistles which would afterward compose more than one-half of the entire New Testament. He had not shirked his duty to God nor man. Death was no terror for him but was an act of worship in which he was “offered” up to God. Now three figures are used to describe his ministry. As a conflict, he had “fought a good fight”; as a race, he had “finished my course”; as to stewardship, he had “kept the faith.” He was ready to die when God's time came.

Of course, not all of God's children can make statements like this. Many have been negligent. Some have fallen by the way. Others have blasphemed the Saviour's name by unworthy conduct. Yet, righteousness is justified in her children in that a life of faithful service brings its own reward in the peace of a pure and unseared conscience. **“Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God,”** I John 3:21.

2. The Christian soldier may receive a crown of reward, verse 8. In the Greek athletic events the winner was given a laurel crown as a reward. Paul uses this terminology and figure to picture God's reward of His own. The Bible speaks of a crown of righteousness, a crown of glory, a crown of life, etc, There is one crown waiting the ones who persevere, another for martyrs, another for the soul winners, etc. There is no description of these crowns, but they must be glorious indeed. Such crowns are only a part of the reward which Jesus will bring at His second coming and confer upon the saints. **“ . . . And every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour,”** I Corinthians 3:8b.

CONCLUSION—Every saved person is to be a soldier in the Lord's army. It is imperative that each soldier do his very best. God has provided

the armor, the strength, the task, and the reward. All that is needed is a willingness in the ranks to be the kind of soldier God intends each Christian to be. Occasions will come for each one to “stand up and be counted” for God. The response to God's call for us to fill His ranks as Christian soldiers will either honor Him or reproach Him. If we would honour Him, proper preparation must be made to become a good soldier of Jesus Christ. This is “the Divine purpose in the believer,” which will be studied next week.

### **QUESTIONS**

1. How is a church like an army?
2. Who provides the armour for Christian soldiers?
3. What opposition do Christians face?
4. Why is it important to put on the “whole armour”?
5. What are the defensive parts of the armour?
6. What is the one offensive weapon?
7. Why is there no armour for the back?
8. How is prayer related to the Christian's armour?
9. What duties await the Christian soldier?
10. What rewards await the faithful Christian soldier?