

“Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.” (Eph 6:19-20 NIV)

Do you get the idea from his words here that there were times that he was *not* so fearless? Notice also in these verses that Paul asked them to pray that “*words may be given*” to him. When we decide to talk to someone about Jesus Christ, we can never be certain what questions might be asked of us but we can’t let that keep us from the mission. Paul asked that the “*words may be given*” to him. Of course, the better we are prepared because of our own study of the Word, the better equipped we will be to answer those questions — with God’s help.

Christian soldiers who are willing to engage the enemy (Satan’s grasp on lost souls) with evangelistic effort can accomplish that mission in a variety of ways. There are a number of “tools” that can be used if one is just willing to learn what is available *and* determine to use them. Our Commander-In-Chief expects his soldiers to simply sow the seed and He will take it from there. Paul states —

“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.” (I Cor. 3:6-9 NIV)

You see, God is the One who *wins* the battles — we just engage the enemy and let God take it from there. We must be willing and able to use our sword (the Word of God). Remember that a 1-A-O “*will not be assigned training or duties that include using weapons.*” Yet our mission as soldiers in the Lord’s army is to “*... go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you....*” (Matthew 28:19-20 NIV)

Somehow, God expects us to obey that command. So if we don’t know exactly how to go about doing that, there are a lot of helps available that can make it easy to at least plant the seed. That’s all we have to do. We are either marching forward for God or we are marching forward for the enemy — we’re either with Him or against Him. We just need to be equipped with the proper weapons for battle. An arsenal of “tools” can help us to be fearless when facing the enemy (Satan).

Scripture is able to equip us for all the work required of every soldier in the Lord’s Army (II Tim. 3:16-17). But there are those times when we could perhaps use a little help drawing our sword (Hebrews 4:12). We’ll be discussing that in the next issue.

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DILIGENCE

“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.” — Hebrews 6:11

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1-A-O’s

It used to be that a young man who registered with the Selective Service System was classified as one of several eligibility levels. The process of classifying each individual who registered was a way to determine who was available for military service and whether or not the individual was deferred or exempted from certain duties. The classification assigned to a “non-combatant conscientious objector” was “1-A-O.” The Selective Service System describes the duties of such an individual in this way:

The person whose beliefs allow him to serve in the military but in a noncombatant capacity will serve in the Armed Forces but will not be assigned training or duties that include using weapons.

So this classification — “1-A-O” — meant that the individual would be assigned to a unit of the military that would not require training him or her for any sort of direct combat with the enemy. *That’s* the United States military but as christians — *we* serve in the *Lord’s* army.

As young children many of us enjoyed singing the children’s song “*I’m in the Lord’s Army.*” When we were immersed in the watery grave of baptism, the Lord added us to the Army that we had sang of so frequently as children. It’s been *many* years since *we* were added to His Army and since that day we’ve had the privilege of serving in various units (congregations) and have noticed a few things that they all seem to have in common.

While most of those units (congregations) have had about the same number of people in each of them, they all seem to have an abundance of “1-A-O” Christians. There is a general lack of individuals who are willing to engage the enemy with evangelistic effort. 1-A-O’s are unwilling to use their sword (the Word) to combat the enemy. It seems that the most common problem is that too many of the soldiers (Christians) would rather stay in the barracks (fellowship hall) and play cards or games or perhaps sing or share a good potluck dinner rather than going to the battlefield in search of the enemy. Then there are also a lot of soldiers who can’t be found at all except for occasional special events to honor members of the unit. They seem to be AWOL most of the time. Very few want to study the manual (Bible) to sharpen their skills in using their swords — an absolute necessity needed to win battles for the Commander in Chief (Christ). Very, very few of the soldiers will dare venture to the front lines and actually engage the enemy

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for the purpose of converting them from the grasp of the enemy (Satan) and bringing them into the safety provided by our Commander in Chief.

The marching orders —

“... go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you...” (Matthew 28:19-20 NIV)

— can be recited by most every soldier in the Army, but few see an active role in carrying out that command for *themselves*. After all — most of the “units” have a paid staff, and there are others more qualified than they are and besides no one would listen to *them* anyway. The general attitude is that anyone who *wants* to know about the Kingdom has *surely* already had a chance to learn of it and its benefits.

The Kingdom of God is not unlike other earthly organizations with various tasks to be done and differing skills and skill levels needed to accomplish them. There is however, one significant difference between the earthly organizations and the Lord’s Army — that is the *mission* of the Army of God. God’s will is that no one should perish, but that all would have everlasting life (II Peter 3:9). With such a significant difference in the *goal* of this Commander in Chief why would anyone in a unit of *this* army not be engaged in the battle?

It’s anybody’s guess as to why so few people in various units of the Lord’s Army are unwilling to study and grow to gain enough skill to fight the battle and win the war. We have however, tried to identify why it may be difficult to either become engaged, or to stay engaged in the battle of direct contact with the enemy. Here are a few possibilities that may cause some soldiers to remain classified as 1-A-O’s in the Lord’s Army and choose to serve in a non-combatant capacity — unwilling to use their weapon (their Bible - Eph. 6:17) against the enemy.

Lack of personal knowledge — Perhaps some soldiers have relied too long on the knowledge of others and when that is not available for one reason or another, they are unable to research the manual (Bible) for themselves.

Lack of concern for others — Some soldiers are just happy that they are in the safety of the Kingdom and see no reason to crowd it with other people.

Focus on the unit (congregation) rather than others — The unit has a good thing going for a lot of its soldiers. Bringing in new un-churched people makes it a bit uncomfortable. Some reason that we have our comfort zone; let them find their own.

Disobedience to the marching orders — This is a volunteer unit. No one, including the Commander in Chief (Christ) is going to tell *some* of the soldiers to do *anything*.

Marching to a different drum beat — Some of the soldiers are not sure that the message *they* heard and responded to is relevant in today’s world. There’s an overriding attitude prevalent today that says: “it’s okay for me but I don’t want to impose my beliefs on others. They have a right to their own belief.”

I’m retired — Most of us have known some soldiers that say; “I did my time in all the church work, now it’s time for someone else to pick up the slack.”

Church worship — There are those soldiers who worship the unit more than they worship God. All of their energy is spent on everything *but* the mission (Matt. 28:19-20) given by the Commander-In-Chief Himself, to His soldiers.

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’” (Matt. 7:21-23 NASB)

Is it possible that the disrespect shown toward the Commander-In-Chief by Christian soldiers who serve *all of their lives* in the Lord’s army as 1-A-O’s are the subjects of the words “*I never knew you; depart from Me?*” Can a soldier in the Lord’s Army refuse to engage the enemy (Satan) in any combatant capacity and consistently refuse to use the weapons spoken of in Ephesians 6:13-18 for the entire duration of their term in His service and be the kind of soldier that the Commander expects him or her to be? Just a thought for your contemplation.

Serving in the United States military makes one aware (sometimes painfully aware) of several things that are very real.

- 1) Every soldier knows the chain of command.
- 2) Every soldier knows that the Commander-In-Chief is the highest authority in that earthly chain of command.
- 3) Every soldier knows the mission.
- 4) Every soldier is *committed to the mission* and will apply his or her skills to accomplish that mission.

This USA military lesson is of little significance in relation to that same lesson as it applies to what God has said in regard to our service in *His* Kingdom.

Take a moment and answer the following questions for yourself:

- 1) *Do you know anyone who you can talk with that you believe will be lost without accepting Christ as their Savior?*
- 2) *Who was the last person with whom you had a personal Bible study, and how did it go?*
- 3) *If you were to meet with a specific individual with the intention of starting a study with him or her, how would you begin the process?*
- 4) *Who was the last person with whom you had some involvement that accepted Christ?*

Even Paul understood that telling another about the Gospel is not always an easy thing to do. We think of Paul as a very dynamic person who never faltered when it came to preaching the Word and telling others about Christ. But look at what he asked the Christian soldiers in Ephesus to do.