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#SS30

THE CHRISTIAN IN MILITARY SERVICE

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The prophet Isaiah tells of a time to come when "**nation shall not lift up sword against nation.**" The Psalmist speaking of that same time declares that God will "make wars to cease to the end of the earth." **The day will surely come when** God will intervene in the affairs of men and nations and then these promises will become a reality. It is pointing out the obvious to say that they are not a reality today. The blessing of universal peace is not now the state of mankind. Nations lift their swords against nations, and war has become almost normal. This has produced a situation wherein millions of men have been called from civilian life to serve in the military forces of their country. Among these millions are thousands who have every right to bear the name of *Christian* in the highest meaning of that term. It is to these Christians in military service that this message is written. However, in view of the careless use of terms today, there will need to be some unity of understanding in regard to the meaning of the word *Christian*.

The Bible tells us that the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. It is evident that they were called this because they were believers in and followers of the resurrected Jesus, whom they owned to be the Christ of God and whom they acknowledged to be Lord of all. The name *Christian* was in those days a term of reproach, and it was used in connection with some of the most violent persecutions of early times. Men were made to suffer because their persecutors branded them as Christian. Men did not take the name Christian unless they were sure they could pay the price that wearing this name would demand of them. .

The designation of *Christian* should neither be given nor taken in a loose or arbitrary manner. To do so is in reality taking the name of the Lord in vain. No man has a right to be called a Christian or to call himself a Christian just because he was born and lives in a so-called Christian country, or because he is a part of a so-called Christian family, or because he is a member of some so-called Christian church. A man can be called a Christian, or may call himself a Christian only if he has become related to God through personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

While God is the Creator of all men, and all men are related to Him by creation, a much higher and more intimate relationship between God and individual men is possible. God has made possible between Himself and men the intimate relationship of Father and child. This exceedingly desirable relationship is based upon the death of His own Son on the cross, and it becomes a reality with God when Jesus Christ becomes the object of our personal faith. This is the plain testimony of sacred Scripture:

Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also. 1 John 2:23.

For us to have the Father means that we are among His children. This relationship cannot exist where the Son of God is disowned, but it is a fact in the sight of God when we can truly avow our faith in Him.

At this point it must be emphatically declared that there is nothing in church affiliation or ordinances that can add to this relationship or make it any more real. Neither can the absence of these take from it. God does not become the Father of men when they join a church or are baptized. He becomes the Father of men and they become His children when they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The believer in the Lord Jesus Christ will be no more a child of the Father if he becomes a member of a church, and he will be no less a child of the Father if he decides to refrain from church membership. Those who seek to make a church to be the mediator between man and Christ will not agree with this position; nevertheless, the fact remains that there is only one mediator between God and man. This mediator is the man Christ Jesus.

For there is one God. and one mediator between God and men. the man Christ Jesus. 1 Timothy 2:5.

No mediator is necessary between man and Christ. God has placed nothing between the sinner and the Savior of sinners. Relationship with God is the result of personal faith in Jesus Christ, and it is not the result of joining some religious organization. The individual believer in the Lord Jesus Christ may see fit to cast his lot with some branch of organized religion, but he must realize that such an act has no bearing upon his relationship with God. He must never condemn another as not being a Christian because he does not do so. It should be remembered that many who do NOT believe join churches, and that many who DO believe do not affiliate themselves with organized religion. The intimate relationship which God has made possible between Himself and man is not an ecclesiastical relationship. It has nothing to do with churches. It is a personal and individual relationship. It has to do with the, personal faith of an individual, and it is founded wholly and solely upon the work of Christ.

It is to the men in military service who are personal believers in the Lord Jesus Christ that this message is addressed. It is to the one who desires to live for Christ that these words are directed. Such believers as these are not few in number, and many of

them will be found in that great company of men who have been called from civilian life into the service of their country.

The Danger Recognized

In times of war no greater mistake could be made than to underestimate the strength of an enemy. It is a serious mistake at any time if we fail to recognize the dangers that may be inherent in certain situations. The Christian who enters military life must recognize that the circumstances are peculiar, and that these will form a most positive threat to the spiritual life of any man. It would be a tragic mistake to ignore this. A real test to the spiritual life is encountered at the very time a man is forced to undergo major readjustments. nevertheless, it can be declared as absolute truth that the Christian life can be lived under any circumstances. even the most adverse.

A religious life can be lived only under certain favorable circumstances, but the new life in Christ Jesus can be lived by an individual in whatever position he may find himself. In fact the reality of any Christian profession is open to doubt if a true spiritual life cannot be maintained in all its fullness no matter what the situation may be. Any man related to God by personal faith in Jesus Christ can live just as complete and faithful a life before God in the military forces as he can in civilian life. The one who cannot live for God while serving as a soldier would not be able to live for God under any circumstances. The intensely practical nature of the new life in Christ Jesus is such that it seems to flourish best and glow the brightest when conditions are adverse to it.

The foregoing statements may sound strange to many whose idea of worship is to attend and sit through what they call "the morning worship," whose idea of prayer is to attend a "prayer meeting," or whose idea of Bible study is to be present at some Sunday school class. But they will not sound strange to the true Christian individualist. who has discovered that true worship is "in spirit and in truth," that true prayer is a moment by moment looking unto and drawing upon God -for every need, and that Bible study is the work of an individual seeking to know the truth that God has enshrined in His word. That the challenge may be plain, the truth must be repeated. A man who cannot live the Christian life in military service, could not live the Christian life if he were a resident student in a theological seminary.

Faith, The Great Fundamental

Before anyone can live the Christian life successfully he must be sure of one great fundamental. This is the only foundation upon which a true Christian life can be erected. He must belong to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ must belong to him. As said before, this is possible only if there is personal faith in Jesus Christ.

It must be recognized that faith is not an abstract thing. It must be definite and concrete, for in order for any attitude of ours to be worthy of the designation of "faith" it must be in someone, some statement, or in some thing. The faith that the Bible exalts, the faith that relates men to God, the faith that brings so many blessings; is faith in what God has revealed concerning Jesus Christ.

In the English language the words *belief* and *faith* are synonymous terms, with *belief* signifying mental assent and *faith* implying the ideas of trust and confidence. In the language in which the New Testament was originally written the word for *faith* and *belief* is the same Greek word; therefore, no distinction should be made between the words as they appear in our English versions. In changing Greek into English the translator is forced to use two words, but we should never permit this necessity of translation to confuse us. When we come upon the word *faith*, we should read into it the idea of *belief*, and; likewise, when we, come upon the word *belief* we should read into it all that is found in the word *faith*. In the New Testament, *belief* is *faith* and *faith* is *belief*.

In its simple scriptural definition faith (or belief) is seen to be taking God at His word and acting or thinking accordingly. To have faith in Jesus Christ is to believe the record that God has given of His Son. This record is composed of the testimony the Bible gives concerning Him. To believe this record is to believe in Him. There is no other way to have faith in Christ. There is no other way to believe in Him. Our forgiveness, our redemption, our justification, God's gift of eternal life to us depends upon believing the testimony God has given of His Son.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth (has faith) in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. John 3:16.

It should be fully recognized that there is no ritual or ceremony involved in or connected with our believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is useless to devise one or to perform one that someone else has devised. Faith in Jesus Christ is our belief in God's record of Him, and we believe this in the same way we believe any other record, witness, or testimony. There are no two ways of believing anything. God has spoken and in His Word, has given us His record of His Son. We must believe God's record. We cannot ignore it and honestly claim that we believe in Jesus Christ. We are forced to begin by believing the record; even though afterward *our* faith in the record becomes *our* trust in the One of whom it speaks, Jesus Christ.

Consider carefully the reply of Jesus Christ to those who asked what they might do in order to "work the works of God."

This is the work of God. that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent. John 6:29.

This is God's answer to everyone who asks this question: There is no work we can do for God in exchange for salvation.

To him that worketh not but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly. his faith is counted for righteousness. Romans 4:5.

The true Christian is a personal and individual believer. He is not just *one* who has cast his lot with some group that professes to believe certain things. He is himself a believer. He believes in God, he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. he believes in the Word of God, he believes that Jesus Christ is the Savior of sinners, he believes in the effectiveness of the Savior in relationship to the entire question of sin, he believes in the promise *of* the Savior to raise him from the dead that he might inherit eternal life.

The exhortation *of* the Apostle Paul: "**Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves,**" is of the utmost importance. It sets forth the ever present necessity of exercising care lest the first great principle of Christian life and experience be neglected. If the reader has entered military service with the foundation of personal faith in Jesus Christ under his feet, it will not be altered by any new set of circumstances. You enter as a man of faith, you should continue as a man of faith, and you should come out as one who has stood a test and emerged victoriously.

We will now consider the second great fundamental of Christian life and experience.

The Word of' God.

The man of God in military service is threatened with spiritual failure and defeat if he fails to recognize the God-ordained place that the Bible must have in his life. The most important fact in the universe is the fact that God has spoken, and it is a fact that can never be ignored by anyone who would give God a proper place in his life. The usual advice is to "read your Bible every day," but this suggests Bible reading to be performed as a religious duty. There must be some definite purpose in Bible reading if it is to be of any value. God gave us the Bible so that by it we might be taught, enlightened, corrected, and instructed in righteousness. God has spoken, and it is the Christian's primary duty to become familiar with what He said. The meaning *of* His sayings. the interpretation of His words is secondary. We need first of all to get the simple historical contents of the Bible straight in our minds. Our duty is to know what the Bible says. The meaning can come only from God. Understanding of the Bible can be given only to those who know what the Bible says, and this gift of understanding may be deferred until such time as our need and circumstances may require.

The time which the reader will spend in military service is indefinite. It may be two, three or more years. Whatever the time may be he can mark up a real gain in knowledge if there is a definite purpose to know what the Bible says. Progress may seem painfully slow, and at times he will feel like throwing it all aside because of failure to immediately understand what he is reading, but there is no easy road to a knowledge of the word of God. If there be definite purpose, he can, while in the service, gain a much better knowledge of what God has said in the pages of His book.

To be definite, take for example the first book in the Bible, Genesis. Suppose that one determines to become familiar with everything recorded in the fifty chapters that make up this book. It will be found to be a historical record of events and characters. It tells what happened, what was done, and what was said. It tells of creation, of Adam and Eve, of their temptation and sin. It is the record of Cain, Abel, Seth, Enoch, Methuselah and Noah. It tells of the flood and the tower of Babel. It gives the history of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. When one has learned all that it declares about these events and characters, he has a working knowledge of the book of Genesis. He will not understand it all, he will have many questions and problems, but he will be familiar with the book. This puts him in line to receive as time goes by the God-given interpretation. Genesis is not a book of morals, it was not written to tell man what is right and what is wrong, but in its pages we find a faithful record of God's works and ways with men, and to those who know this book God has a basis upon which He can make Himself known.

As a more pertinent example, take the fourth book of the New Testament, the gospel of John. At the close of this book the writer tells us the purpose for which it was written.

And *many* other signs truly did Jesus In the presence of his disciples, which are not written

in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God: and that believing ye might have life through His name. John 20:30-31.

In the gospel of John we have a condensation or an epitome of the record which God has given of His Son. To believe the contents of this book is to believe the condensation of the witness of God concerning, Jesus Christ, The gospel of John is not a long book. Its twenty-one chapters can be read by the average reader in about two hours, which is very little time to give to reading a book of such great importance. But one reading is not enough. This book should be read, reread, and carefully considered. It must be read for the sole purpose of finding what God would have us to believe. If this is done an exact knowledge of the contents of this gospel can be obtained, and those who have a knowledge of just this one book will be in possession of that which

very few professing Christians can claim today. They will be in possession of the only true basis for faith in Jesus Christ. The years spent in military service need not be barren. They can be used to gain familiarity with the Word of God.

The True Spiritual Life.

The many erroneous ideas that exist as to what constitutes a God-honoring life make it necessary to present certain truths against a background of error. In the second world war a leaflet was published which claimed to give advice to men in military service concerning their spiritual lives; It was shallow to the extreme. It advised men to "attend divine services every Sunday." Absence from a Sunday service whenever it is possible to be present is set forth in this leaflet as being so serious that fellowship with God is broken. It also insists that the military man must "read a short portion from his Bible every day, say his prayers every night and to seek to "convert his buddies" to Christ. In general, such advice is not so bad but when the details are considered it becomes repulsive. In regard to prayer he is warned that if he does not make a public demonstration of his devotions before his fellows he will be denying his Lord. Furthermore he is urged to become the custodian and critic of other men's morals, rebuking sin on every occasion.

All such advice is reprehensible and cannot be condemned too strongly. It would make a religious extrovert and a snooping critic out of every Christian in military service. His ungodly companions would have just cause for loathing his presence in their midst.

If a man can get anything of spiritual value out of a "divine service" it is good to go, but if the service is devoid of Biblical instruction, or is one made up of mysterious mumbo-jumbo ritual he will be just as well off if he stays away. The man who has been reared in the false idea that a God-fearing life is indicated by attending a religious service on Sunday will be inclined to feel that there can be no life for God apart from it. But the one who has learned the meaning of true worship will know that this is not a divine essential. We can gain nothing whatsoever of a spiritual nature by the mere attending of a religious service.

A matter of great importance to many is the matter of so-called "sabbath keeping." the shallow thought now prevails everywhere that a man keeps Sunday as the sabbath if he attends religious services on that day, or that he observes Saturday as the sabbath if he goes to church on that day. Concerning this there has been much controversy from which every Christian will do well to refrain, no matter what his practices may be. The man of God can take his stand on the clear declaration of Scripture found in **Romans 14:5.**

**One man esteemeth one *day* above another: another esteemeth every *day* alike.
Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.**

It is the conviction of this writer that it is best for those who would live as individual men of God to esteem every day as being a day in which God and Christ shall be revered and honored in his personal life. However, if in military service Sunday should be a day of freedom, the Christian will do well to take advantage of it in order to advance and improve his spiritual life.

The Moral Life

A positive characteristic of the Christian life is expressed in the words of Paul in **Romans 6:12-13:**

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as Instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

This passage reveals that it is God's desire that our lives shall be moral lives. A moral life is not necessarily a Christian life, for high morality is often exhibited by men who are not Christian. However, the Christian life is a moral life, and no man can consider himself to be a Christian if his practices are immoral. It is well known that military life is often a severe test to a man's morality. If it be a morality which is founded upon a true relationship to God through faith in Jesus Christ it will weather any storm. The testing of military life will soon demonstrate if it be a house built upon sand.

There is much morality that is based upon restraints imposed by others. Men are held in this by the pressure that is brought to bear upon them by others. Such morality is generally considered to be undesirable by the one who is forced into it, and it is cast aside at the first convenient opportunity. This opportunity may be when one is transferred from home to a college dormitory, or when a businessman goes out of town for a convention or it may be the radical transfer from civilian to military life. True Christian morality is a most desirable possession, greatly prized by those who have it; and one which springs from a desire to please God in all things. Such morality will triumph over every test. It is based upon definite principles of conduct which the believer has adopted as being good in the sight of God. Principles of conduct are rare in these days. For even good men sometimes can give no reason for being good, and most men do what the crowd does. They dare not adopt principles of action in advance for fear they may find themselves out of step with unprincipled men.

Morality apart from principle is apt to slip away and be gone even as a live fish may slip from the wet hand. To clutch it more tightly only aids it in escaping. A man may

look with abhorrence upon a certain sin and feel that he will never become involved in it. But a set of circumstances may arise bringing peculiar temptations which he has never anticipated, and his morality slips from his grasp. It was not anchored to any principle and there was nothing to hold it.

Take, for example, the matter of personal purity. If the Christian has determined that this is well pleasing in the sight of God, then let him adopt this as a principle which is never to be surrendered no matter what the circumstances may be. By so doing he has strongly fortified himself against the day of temptation. He has anchored his morality to a principle which is based upon what God would have him do.

Again, there is the matter of gambling, which is a common evil among military men. The rewards that may come from gambling are the very opposite of those which come from honest labor. If the Christian has determined in advance that it is good in the sight of God that he come into possession of material things by the work of his hands, the whole question of gambling is answered and the matter is settled.

The only safe course for the Christian to follow is to adopt definite principles in advance in regard to such matters as *personal* purity, gambling, drinking, and dishonesty, then abide by these principles and refuse to surrender them under any circumstances. The one who has determined to follow Jesus Christ must not allow his conduct to be shaped at the insistence of weak-willed, unprincipled, and, usually, loud-mouthed men. Such men do not dare to be alone in their sins. They find satisfaction and a false sense of security in the fact that the vices they know to be wrong are almost universally practiced. The fact that there is even one who does not do as they do spoils their satisfaction and upsets their sense of security. They cannot be happy unless every man is as wicked as they are. It is perilous to follow the lead of men such as these whose cry is, "Come on, wallow in the mire with me."

When the Christian's morality is challenged, he must not adopt an air of superior and arrogant righteousness. All he needs to do is inform his challenger that he is acting upon principles which he does not intend to surrender. This should close the matter, as it puts it above arguments. Such an answer may bring scorn at first because of the rebuke it contains, but in due time it will earn respect. It is a real honor to be regarded as one who has principles and convictions and who stands, by these under all circumstances. There can be no consistent moral life without definite principles. When these are divine principles they will safeguard the morality of any Christian in military service.

The Importance of Prayer

In regard to prayer we come face to face with one of the most important items of the new life in Christ Jesus. Truly, prayer is the vital breath of the Christian. And just as no man can do his day's breathing in a few minutes each morning or night, neither can a man do a day's praying at anyone or two times in the day.

It seems strange indeed that after the Lord Jesus so simply and emphatically taught: "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut the door, pray to the Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seest in secret will reward thee openly," that men would ever come to feel that such prayer is a denial of the Lord. Yet this is what some certainly do. An example of this is seen in the admonition given in the leaflet, already referred to, that the soldier must kneel down each night and pray in the presence of all who may be in tent, barrack, or on ship. The religious extrovert would probably find a measure of satisfaction in kneeling in public and crying out his prayers so that all can see and hear, but most men of God would righteously shrink from such a display. To refuse to do this is not a denial of the Lord, for His instructions concerning prayer called for a complete lack of display. . The admonition that "men ought always to pray," and the exhortation to "pray without ceasing" clearly demonstrate that true prayer consists of continually drawing upon God. To make prayer to be an act or a ritual to be performed on certain occasions is to miss the truth of prayer altogether. Stated and definite times for prayer are good, but they will not be easy for the Christian soldier to find and maintain. Neither will he be able to find any literal "closet" to which he can retire for prayer, but he can draw on the resources of God every moment of every day, and each night lying upon his bed or upon the ground he can pray to God in secret. He can make his own closet by shutting out **all** that is around him, and shutting himself in with. God.

No man in any walk of life could possibly have any more need of God's help than the one who is in military service. Unusual demands are sure to be made on strength and mind. The road is sure to be exceedingly rough at times, and the hardships encountered will be too numerous to mention. He must undergo separation from his loved ones, he will experience loneliness, danger, and even face death. The Christian in military service will need to know the strength, power, wisdom, and encouragement that is the portion of those who have learned to pray without ceasing," who draw upon God at all times for every need just as he draws upon the atmosphere for breath. Such praying can never be formal. It has no "proper opening and dose." Its rugged simplicity makes no appeal to those who are fascinated by man-devised rituals.. It is not made up of the pious platitudes and worn religious phrases that characterize so many prayers today. But it is the simple cry of one in need. It delights the Father, and it results in a peace that will cause those who experience it to stand in wonder and praise.

God Is For Us

These words of advice are fragmentary. No attempt has been made to present a manual of life or a code of ethics for the Christian in military service. The things set forth are merely suggestive, seeking to encourage thought along these lines. They are written in the confidence that there are many serving in the armed forces who desire to live lives that are well pleasing to God. To all these a final word is added. If there is a true desire to live a God-honoring daily life, to live and walk as a man who has faith in Jesus Christ, to live clean, to maintain a true prayer life. then this fact can be relied upon. God is on your side. He is for you in these things. His resources are at your disposal. You can count on God.

The End SS30

**Safe In Jehovah's keeping,
Led by His glorious arm.
God Is Himself *my* refuge,
A present help from harm.
Fears may at times distress me.
Griefs may *my* soul annoy:
God Is my strength and portion,
God my exceeding Joy.**

**Safe In Jehovah's keeping,
Safe In temptation's hour,
Safe In the midst of perils,
Kept by Almighty power.
Safe when the tempest rages,
Safe though the night be long:
E'en when my sky Is darkest,
God Is my strength and song.**

(Poem by Sir Robert Anderson)