

INTRODUCTION

We're in an expository series through the book of Philippians. There are a couple of interesting things about expository Bible preaching. You cannot perform kangaroo exegesis, in other words, hop over any passages of scripture. Another thing is the text of the Bible is the message itself. That's why you need to bring your Bibles and keep them open during the entire message, because we'll be referring to it over and over again.

Today we're going to be talking about "Take Your Battle Stations!" In this passage, Paul uses warfare terminology to indicate to us that the Christian life is spiritual warfare. Paul is trying to encourage and admonish Christians to live up to their calling.

I got the chance recently to meet one of my boyhood baseball heroes, Bobby Richardson. He said when he played for the New York Yankees, every time a rookie came into camp, the manager always gave them the same speech to help them understand the tradition of the New York Yankees. He would hold up the distinctive pinstriped uniform and say, "Boys, you're part of the world champions now. And every time you put on these pinstripes, you should go out and play like world champions." And that's what the apostle Paul is saying in this passage of scripture. He is telling the believers at Philippi, "You are believers now. And you need to live like Christians live." Up until this point, Paul has been writing in the first person, from an autobiographical standpoint. Now he shifts to the second person, talking to them and to us as well.

Philippians 1:27-30. "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have."

I want to talk to you about how the Christian life is spiritual warfare. There's an excellent by John White called *The Fight*. It's a great introductory book to the Christian life. This is what he says about Christian warfare. "To acknowledge Jesus as Savior and Lord is to join an army. Whether you know it or not, you have enlisted. The only other option to you is to become a deserter, to hide your uniform and pretend you are someone whom you are not. Now to be a deserter is not to leave the army, celestial regulations make no provision for the discharge personnel but to evade your responsibility to your Commanding Officer." The Bible says you're a soldier if you're a Christian. The question is: Are you a good soldier of Jesus Christ or are you a deserter? Have you folded up your uniform and put it away, maybe put it on every Sunday morning. Are you obedient to your Commander in Chief, the Lord Jesus Christ?

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS NOT A PLAYGROUND; IT IS A BATTLEGROUND

The Christian life is not a walk through a rose garden, it is a journey to the frontlines of spiritual warfare. In 2 Timothy 2:3, Paul wrote to young Timothy and said, "Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus." If you are a Christian, you have enlisted in God's army.

In Philipians 1:27-30, Paul gives three characteristics of a good soldier.

1. GOOD SOLDIERS STAND TOGETHER WITH CONSISTENCY

Number one. Good soldiers stand together with consistency. Paul wrote, "You stand firm in one spirit." It's a picture of a group of soldiers standing at attention. I've never had the honor of serving in the armed forces, but when you're in the army, there are times when your drill sergeant says, "Attention!" and you stand at attention in line with other soldiers. And the drill sergeant is looking for consistency: Is your uniform correct? Are your boots shined? Is your weapon clean? Are you in line with the other soldiers? But you don't become that way immediately when you join the army. The bus stops at the base. A group of guys with varying clothing and hairstyles get off the bus and they are lined up by the drill sergeant. It's an interesting lineup. But after basic training, they are different. They are lined back up and are totally different, there's consistency in their ranks. That's what Paul is saying here. Once you become a Christian, you ought to stand together with consistency.

Is there consistency in your Christian life? Consistency is acting the same on Monday as you do on Sunday morning. Paul even addresses this in verse 27. "Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence."

When I was nine or ten, we had a Sunday School Christmas party at our house. There were probably 20-25 people at our house, including the preacher and his wife. We ate dinner and had a good time. As a kid, I was in the background. During the course of the evening, the preacher and his wife left. And as they were walking down the sidewalk to their car, a man at the party said to the entire group, "Well, the preacher's gone. Now we can have fun!" And everybody laughed. As a kid, I wondered what he meant by that. Why would there be any difference with the preacher there or not? To be honest, they didn't do anything they would have done if the preacher had been there; they just said that. But the question is, why do you act differently when you're in the presence of an apostle Paul or in the presence of a preacher than you do when they're not there?

In the little town I grew up in, there was only one barbershop. The only kind of haircut I got was called a Regular and I never knew what that was, but it cost a quarter. There were three chairs and just like a lot of small towns, it was a men's gathering place. I remember sitting there many times with my dad, hearing all these jokes and not always getting them. But in retrospect, they were off-color jokes. The first barber nearest the door had the job of advance scout. Anytime a preacher walked, that barber would loudly announce, "Hello preacher!" In other words, he was letting every one know they had to watch what they said.

That's not consistency. Inconsistency made Jesus angry. The harshest words Jesus ever spoke were to the hypocrites, the Pharisees. He said, "You're like a cup. On the outside, the cup is

shiny, but on the inside it's dirty." And "You're like a tombstone. On the outside, you're whitewashed, but the inside is full of decay and corrupting flesh and bones." He called hypocrites rattlesnakes. Are you who you are when you're here, or are you who you are when you're with that other crowd? You are who you really are when you're by yourself or with your family and are not trying to put on airs for anyone else. Jesus said it's what's on the inside that matters.

Several years ago in New York City, there was a garbage strike. Garbage was piled up everywhere. One man devised a way to get rid of his garbage. Every evening he wrapped his garbage in a box with beautiful wrapping paper and a bow and then place it on the back seat of his car. The next morning it was always stolen. Can you imagine the person who opened the box and saw all the garbage? This is what Jesus is means when he talks about hypocrites: They are different on the inside than what they present on the outside.

In order to win over those in the world? When we begin to live a consistent Christian life. They've heard the gospel, they have Bibles, but *we're* the Bible they're really reading. There is a little poem that goes:

You are writing a gospel, a chapter each day,
By the deeds that you do and the words that you say.
Men read what you write—whether faithful or true;
What is the gospel according to you?

Anonymous

The thing that will win over your non-Christian friends is consistency. Hypocrisy makes Jesus angry. Some of the harshest words he ever spoke to a church was the church at Laodicea in Revelation 3:15-16, "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth." The word Jesus used for "spit" is *emeo*, which means, "to vomit." Lukewarm, inconsistent Christians literally made him sick to his stomach. A good soldiers stands with consistency.

Some of you may struggle with consistency. You're okay when you're in church on Sunday morning with a Bible in your hand, all dressed up; you feel holy. But to be honest, when you go back to work or school on Monday, and mingle with your co-workers or classmates who make fun of Christians, it's tough for you to be consistent and stand firm. The key to consistency is actually very simple: Every morning, get on your face before God and have your quiet time and receive your marching orders from your Commanding Officer.

2. GOOD SOLDIERS STRIVE TOGETHER WITH COOPERATION

Number two. Good soldiers strive together with cooperation. "I know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel." Soldiers shouldn't fight amongst themselves, instead they should fight against a common enemy together.

We are in a battle, but not against flesh and blood. The Bible says our enemy involves demonic forces and spiritual wickedness in high places. That's why Ephesians 6:13-17 says it's so important to dress for battle with the belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness, feet fitted with readiness, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit.

Some Christians don't like to talk about warfare. Some denominations have even removed every hymn referencing warfare from their hymnbooks. You can remove warfare from your hymnal, but you can't take it out of the word of God. It's there. We are in a battle and we need to strive together as one team.

The word "contending" used in verse 27 is the word *sunathleo*, *sun* means "together," we get our word "athletics" from *athleo*, but it literally means to "fight side by side."

Alexander the Great and later the Romans were able to conquer the world because they devised and ingenious strategy. Prior to Alexander the Great, armies lined up along the mountain ridges and descended into the valleys for hand-to-hand combat, every man for himself. But Alexander the Great came up with a battle strategy called the phalanx. Rather than assemble in a straight line, a phalanx formed a box with about 25 soldiers across and several rows deep. They advanced into battle in this formation. The soldiers in front and on the sides held their spears straight out. The soldiers on the inside laid their spears on the shoulders of the soldiers in front of them and they could break through any line and then come back and attack from the flanks. It was said that when opposing armies first saw this phalanx advancing, many of them turned and ran, because they'd never seen that before. Rather than doing battle one-on-one, these soldiers were marching side-by-side, teamwork, cooperation.

Paul says to be a good soldier, don't go out and be a secret agent or a sniper, work together with other believers: Fight together.

Another thing that will convince non-believers that Christianity is real is unity and community, when Christians work together. People expect hostility and mudslinging and name-calling. We all expect George Bush and Bill Clinton to throw verbal barbs at each other—that's just expected in politics. We expect hostile takeovers in business. But things like that shouldn't happen in a church, because we have been redeemed and we are a team that works together. Church is a place where conflict can be resolved with love and by people sitting down and talking face-to-face.

I want to change metaphors at this point. I want to take that concept of teamwork and instead of warfare, I want to talk about football. As a church, we should work together as a team to accomplish God's will. Many times, the church frustrates God's will when we don't work together. Imagine it's a crisp autumn day and your college team is ready for the kickoff. Everyone in the stands is clapping and shouting. But instead of eleven men running out on the field to receive the kickoff, the middle-aged coach trots out and stands at the five yard line without any equipment on. So you run over to a team member and ask them to go receive the kickoff but the player says, "That guy knows more about football than we'll ever know. He knows all the plays so we're going to let him carry the ball." You know what is going to happen. The ball is kicked off. The coach catches the ball and starts to run toward the other goal. But

there are eleven guys coming at him and no one is blocking them. So at the 15-yard line they tackle the coach and almost kill him. And the coach is carried out on a stretcher. You know that would never happen in football but the sad truth of the matter is it happens too much in the church. We all let the pastor do it, we let the staff do it, we let the deacons do it—"They're the experts! They know more about it than we do." It takes teamwork. We all need to get out of the stands and get on the field and do the job God's given us to do.

Finally, the team goes out on the field. It's first and ten on the 20-yard line. The team goes into the huddle...and they huddle...and they huddle. The referee throws a flag. Delay of game. The team huddles...and they huddle...and they huddle. Flag thrown. Delay of game. So finally you go out into the huddle and ask why they don't go to the line of scrimmage and do something. Somebody looks at you from that tight huddle and says, "Man, this is the sweetest huddle I've ever been a part of. We are having a wonderful fellowship in this huddle and have been talking about this fantastic playbook." We all know that would never happen in a football game, but it happens many times in a church. Rather than go up to the scrimmage line and reach people for Jesus Christ, they stay in their close little huddles.

And then the team goes up to the line of scrimmage and just as you think they're about to run a play, suddenly the big tackle pulls his helmet off and slams it to the ground and storms off the field in a huff saying, "They never let me touch the ball!" And then you look back and the center and the guard are fighting each other over the ball.

OUTLINE

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS NOT A PLAYGROUND; IT IS A BATTLEGROUND

"Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus." 2 *Timothy* 2:3

GOOD SOLDIERS:

1. STAND TOGETHER WITH CONSISTENCY (vs. 27)
2. STRIVE TOGETHER WITH COOPERATION (vs. 27-28)

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David O. Dykes
Pastor, Green Acres Baptist Church
Tyler, Texas

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes