

## Church as Army of God

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Today I would like to share another metaphor that is used to describe the church. One of the metaphors for the Christian in the New Testament is that the Christian is a soldier. Now, where there is a group or battalion of soldiers, you have an army.

What comes to your mind when you think of an army? For me, I think of a group of people who have been commissioned to protect the people and, if necessary, even sacrifice their own lives for their cause. I think of uniforms, weapons, flags, parades, awards, discipline, etc. What also comes to mind is that an army is made up of a variety of different people who have different skills.

What we see in the face-to-face combat does not give the full scope of what is behind the front line. An army is made up of soldiers, nurses, doctors, engineers, plumbers, intelligence officers, radio operators, chef and cooks, musicians, and people from many other trades. These are the workers who complement each other and contribute towards the overall purpose and effectiveness in a war.

An army can also be viewed as a group of people with a mission, but they may not always be deployed in line with their original purpose. For instance, they may be used around the world to help bring about relief when natural disasters like earthquake, flood, and fires strike.

So, what pictures come to your mind when we talk about God's army?

You might find that there are many similarities between us Christians and the army.

### Philippians 2:25

<sup>25</sup> But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs.

In this verse, Paul described Epaphroditus as his brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier. Similarly, he referred to another believer, Archippus, as a fellow soldier of the cross (**Philemon 2**).

When Paul wrote to Timothy he said,

### 2 Timothy 2:3-4

<sup>3</sup> Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. <sup>4</sup> No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer.

A Christian is a soldier and every soldier belongs to a particular army. The church is the army of Christ and believers are the soldiers. Whether the church actually understands this and operates like an army is a different matter. If an army has the mentality of civilians, there will be problems. Such an army will be likely to face disaster.

### Ephesians 6:11-13

Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Christians are not fighting physical battles like the armies of nations but Christians are to engage in spiritual wars.

I will share some of the aspect of the church as the Army of God.

### **Army of God has the same commander in chief**

First of all, and this is the most important, we serve together under **one Commander-in-Chief, Jesus.**

Joshua 5:13-15

<sup>13</sup> Now when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or for our enemies?"

<sup>14</sup> "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come." Then Joshua fell facedown to the ground in reverence, and asked him, "What message does my Lord have for his servant?"

<sup>15</sup> The commander of the Lord's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

Many theologians would agree that the commander in Chief of the Lord's Army who Joshua met was Jesus.

We all have the same objective, we all have the same order from Him.

### **The great commandment**

#### **Matthew 22:37-40**

<sup>37</sup> Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."<sup>38</sup> This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup> And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' <sup>40</sup> All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

### **The great commission**

#### **Matthew 28:18-20**

<sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

These two are the commands that we must follow and accomplish.

### **The army of God has weapons**

For the battle, soldiers must be equipped with weapons, but the weapons we have are quite different to the ones that are in the possession of secular armies. The weapons for a spiritual army engaged in spiritual warfare are not the same as those used by armies fighting physical wars.

#### **2 Corinthians 10:3-5**

<sup>3</sup> For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. <sup>4</sup> The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. <sup>5</sup> We

demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

The success of the army and the victory over Satan, can only be achieved by the authority and power that the Lord Jesus has given us to fight Satan.

### **Luke 10:19**

<sup>19</sup> I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.

### **Army of God has discipline**

Soldiers have a way of life, values, and principles that are different from that of civilians. They are well-trained, well-disciplined and well-equipped.

### **2 Timothy 2:3-4**

<sup>3</sup> Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. <sup>4</sup> No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer.

No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.

As in the military, there should be a strong sense of *esprit de corps* in the church, manifested through solidarity, enthusiasm, cooperation, loyalty, pride and honour. We must endure hardship as good soldiers of Christ and not entangle ourselves with the affairs of this life so that we may please Him who enlisted us as soldiers. The church should work together to achieve her mission, especially the mission of soul-winning.

What are the things in your life that hinders you from becoming an affective soldier of Christ? Some of us could be spending too much time engaged with social media, or online shopping. Some of our hearts could be occupied with the desire for greater comfort offered by this world. Some of us could be bound by sin and we need to be set free from these sins.

Comparing the Christian to a soldier, Paul said in verse 3 that the Christian should endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. It is hard to be a Christian; we face ridicules from people. We discipline ourselves not to go with our natural desires. For instance, we might want to sleep longer on Sundays instead of getting up to go to church – but we discipline ourselves and get up and go to church. Or we might reason that a Sunday with fine weather should be used for an outing and that it was acceptable to skip church, or we might just feel lazy to attend meetings – but we discipline ourselves and go to church. Sometimes, we lose opportunities in business because of our Christian principles. Is it worth it? Of course, there is an eternal reward waiting for us.

### **The army of God fights in unity**

The church as an army will not be able to win its wars unless it operates like a united army. The professional army operates as a team. Soldiers work together as a team. There is no rivalry among them. There is no competition but cooperation. They risk their lives for their nation and for each other. They have each other's back. They fight for each other. Soldiers don't leave their colleagues behind, not even those who die in battles.

The professional army submit its interests to the interests of the nation. The soldiers maintain a high level of discipline, integrity, and loyalty. They are courageous, selfless, and respect others. They give their best as they serve their nation and many of them pay the ultimate price which is dying for their country.

The church as an army needs to possess these ideals in fighting her spiritual wars. But do we fight as an army? Do we possess the values of the professional army? How are we placed with regards to discipline, integrity, loyalty, selflessness, respect for others? Do we fight as a team? How much teamwork exists in the army of Christ, the church?

Every professional soldier belongs to a unit in the army. There are Christians today who don't belong to any unit in the army of Christ! The professional army is well-organized into divisions, which are further divided into brigades or regiments, battalions, companies (batteries or troops), and platoons. The squads are the smallest units. No soldier stands alone; he or she belongs to a unit.

Every Christian soldier should belong to a unit for fellowship, service, support, etc. You won't see one soldier fight alone. Every soldier fights within a unit. Soldiers draw strength, support, and encouragement from each other. They fight for each other. Maybe Christian soldiers have lost some battles because they fought alone, not as a team. This might be because of ignorance or lack of trust something that you are unlikely to find in a professional army.

### **The army of God has common enemy**

We have a common enemy, Satan. Although Satan has been defeated by Jesus, Satan is still the prince of this world for the time being and will remain so until our Lord Jesus returns. He has influence in the world, and he is here to steal, kill and destroy peoples' lives, including Christians if we allow him.

The church needs to fight as a team. We have a common enemy: the devil.

### **1 Peter 5:8-9**

<sup>8</sup> Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. <sup>9</sup> Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

The devil is our enemy. He is the one we should be fighting against. We should not be fighting against each other as some people often do. When a soldier is wounded, fellow soldiers do everything possible to carry him and get him to medical care and the army gives him the best medical treatment. If a soldier pays the supreme sacrifice on the battlefield, they make every effort to recover his body for burial. So we too need to have the commitment not to leave anyone to the devil.

### **The army of God fight together**

There is a picture of the Roman soldiers following what they called a **testudo** or **tortoise formation**..

This gives a very good demonstration of a group of Roman soldiers fully shielded front, side and top from the assault of the enemy.

In Roman times, people who lived under their authority would be quite used to the way in which the Romans controlled people, and also be quite used to seeing the discipline and advanced fighting techniques that

these soldiers use during battles and the forming of a phalanx as well as other military methods. These tactics allowed the roman solders to advance upon the enemy until such time as they could get to close quarters where they then engage in one-on-one combat.

The Roman army speaks to me of togetherness, serving a common purpose and working towards the achievement of common objectives, and that these were forefront with these soldiers. They worked together. They fought together, they defended one another together. Yes, they have their individual armour and weapons. Yes, they were trained and disciplined as individuals in their preparation for the battle. Yes, they were ordered by the same commander. And yes, they would have had messages drummed into them as individuals, as to the strategies of the enemies they faced.

As God's army, we too should not neglect the individual training and development that are needed for us to be enlisted into the Army of God. These include things like prayer and Bible study for they are essential for all of us as they lead us to the understanding of the importance of being together.

Things like sharing and praying together, studying together, learning together, life groups and Bible study groups, activities that we have in the church, all of them have the common objective of building a group of people, building an army of God and preparing God's people for the fight against the enemy.

**1 Thessalonians 5:11** Paul writes,

<sup>11</sup>Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

When a Christian soldier is wounded, we should do the same and not criticize him or help the devil to finish his work by killing the wounded soldier! This wounded soldier might have sinned, but those in the right position to help to restore him should do so and not abandon him.

**Galatians 6:1-3**

<sup>1</sup>Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. <sup>2</sup>Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. <sup>3</sup>If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves.

Dear Christian soldier, which unit do you belong to in the army of Christ? That's how a fake soldier is identified. He may be wearing the army uniform but he must say the unit he belongs to. Every army unit has areas of specialization such as combat, engineering, intelligence, and artillery. Which one do you belong to? There are no spectators in the army. Every soldier has a duty he performs. Where are you serving in the Kingdom of God?

The church must operate truly as the army of Christ. Samson was a judge in Israel endowed with great physical strength. Sometimes, I think that, probably, he would have done greater exploits if he had raised and led an army to fight the Philistines instead of doing it all by himself.

**Judges 13:25**

<sup>25</sup>and the Spirit of the Lord began to stir him while he was in Mahaneh Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.

Here it says the Spirit of the LORD began to move upon him but he fought alone for the twenty years that he judged Israel. He also died alone (the only Israelite) along with the Philistines after they had captured him.

Sadly, **Judges 16:31** says,

<sup>31</sup>Then his brothers and his father's whole family went down to get him. They brought him back and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. He had led Israel twenty years.

Maybe the situation would have been different if he had raised a standing army.

Are you in the Lord's army? **Romans 13:12b** says we should put on the armour of light.

### **Ephesians 6:13**

<sup>13</sup> Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

Also, **1 Thessalonians 5:8** says we should be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.

Brothers and sisters, we must fight in the army Jesus Christ has enlisted us in. No single Christian can win the war alone. The war is won when the church conducts warfare together as a team, as one unit, one army. Believers must fight as an army.

### **Hebrews 10:25**

<sup>25</sup> not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Here it says we should not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near.

The church must fight as a team. As it is often said, "Together Everyone Achieves More" (TEAM).

### **1 Timothy 6:12**

<sup>12</sup> Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Fight the good fight of faith. Fight well, don't lose because it has eternal impact on your life.

### **The army of God is a call to service**

How do people get into the army. Well, sometimes it is voluntary; sometimes it is through conscription. And there are people in our church who have known their relatives have been called up to serve either at a time of war or under the national service. I don't think anyone in the church, who are part of the army of God have the entitlement to sit on the sideline and do nothing. I don't see anywhere in Scripture that says that we are allowed to do that, we are not commissioned to do that.

In fact, there isn't any retirement, if you like, from active service either, apart from the fact that one day God will call us home or He may come before that day and release us from the service.

Some of you might feel that for some reason your service in the army has ended, or that God does not have a role for you. Well, may I encourage you to think again at the types of jobs that we discussed earlier in this sermon? There were many areas of service, they were varied, and they were all necessary. We can easily think that we have no purpose, we are of no use, we are too old, we are not skilled, but that is not how God sees us. God has enabled each one of us to be enlisted and be fully active within His army, and our service should continue and last under our Commander-in-Chief until the day that we see Him face-to-face.