

No. 17 Courageous Soldiers of Christ

[Please note: This talk includes two videos]

ARE YOU A COURAGEOUS SOLDIER? (2 min.)

Is that a strange question to ask an audience of loyal Witnesses?

After all, as Christian neutrals, we do not take part in the wars of the nations (Isa 2:4; Mt 26:52; Joh 18:36)

Yet, the Bible compares us to soldiers [Read 2 Timothy 2:3]

It is vital that we prove to be *courageous* soldiers; as we will see, lives are at stake—our own life and the lives of others

Let us consider three questions: (1) Why does the Bible compare us to soldiers? (2) How did we become soldiers? (3) And, most important, how can we prove ourselves *courageous* soldiers?

WHY DOES THE BIBLE COMPARE US TO SOLDIERS? (12 min.)

The apostle Paul several times used the metaphor of a soldier

In defending his apostleship, he likened himself to a soldier (1Co 9:7)

He used the expression "fellow soldier" to describe both

Epaphroditus and Archippus (Php 2:25; Phm 2)

To use the metaphor of a soldier, Paul must have been familiar with the life and activity of military personnel; but how?

Paul undoubtedly observed firsthand many soldiers

About 56 C.E., soldiers rescued him from an angry mob in Jerusalem (Ac 21:26-32)

For two years (c. 59-61 C.E.), he was placed under house arrest in Rome with a soldier guarding him (Ac 28:16, 30, 31)

His prison bonds became "public knowledge among all the Praetorian Guard" (Php 1:13)

Why is a soldier a fitting illustration of a true Christian?

Put simply, we are in a spiritual warfare

While many lives are lost in literal wars, spiritual warfare saves lives

We wage this spiritual warfare on several fronts

Within ourselves [Read Romans 7:21-23]

We have a constant war within ourselves between "sin's law" and "the law of God"

With Jehovah's help, the law of God can win

[Relate an experience of one who overcame a personal weakness, such as from *The Watchtower* No. 4 2016, pages 12-13; July 1, 2015, pages 10-11]

Against wicked spirits [Read Ephesians 6:11, 12]

We must keep fighting against "wicked spirit forces"

Satan and his demons use those under their influence to oppose us or to tempt us, trying to get us to be unfaithful (2Co 2:11)

With the help of holy spirit, we can be victorious (Eph 3:16)

[Share an experience of one who remained firm during trial, such as from *The Watchtower*, February 15, 1988, page 18, box; May 1, 2001, page 16, paragraphs 10-13]

Against false teachings [Read 2 Corinthians 10:4, 5]

We war against "strongly entrenched things," such as doctrines and philosophies that blind others to the truth

We are on a rescue mission, searching for and helping

honesthearted ones break free from religious error (Joh 8:31, 32)

[Relate an experience of someone who was helped to break free from false religious teachings, such as from *The Watchtower*, February 15, 2010, pages 12-13, paragraphs 12-13; June 15, 2009, page 12, paragraph 6]

HOW DID WE BECOME SOLDIERS? (3 min.)

Did anyone have to press us into service as soldiers of Christ?

On the contrary, we volunteered! [Read Matthew 16:24]

The words "if anyone wants to" show that this is *our* decision

How did we make the decision to become soldiers of Christ?

We accepted in faith God's provision for salvation through Jesus

We dedicated ourselves to Jehovah God without reservation

We, in effect, signed up, or enrolled, by getting baptized

What is expected of us as loyal soldiers of Christ?

We work to increase the ranks of Christ's soldiers

We search for those who are "rightly disposed" (Ac 13:48)

When such ones come to appreciate Bible truth, they make their own decision to become soldiers of Christ

We must be courageous; why?

Jesus said that we would have to pick up our "torture stake," suggesting that the Christian course would be challenging

It also takes courage to *remain* a soldier of Christ

HOW CAN WE PROVE OURSELVES COURAGEOUS SOLDIERS? (15 min.)

Paul's words to Timothy reveal three qualities that are vital for soldiers of Christ [Read 2 Timothy 2:3, 4]

(1) *Endurance*—a soldier takes his "part in suffering adversity"

A Roman soldier had to endure hardships, perhaps including privations, loneliness, and exposure to the elements

Why do we need endurance?

We should not expect an easy life now; recall Jesus' words about picking up our torture stake

We may face such hardships as indifference, reproach, hostility, imprisonment, even death

How can we maintain endurance?

Reflect on examples of endurance, past and present

Take a long-range view, remembering that present trials are temporary but the future reward is everlasting

Rely fully on God, for he "supplies endurance" to those trusting in him (Ro 15:5)

Ask yourself, 'Am I willing to suffer adversity as a courageous soldier of Christ?'

(2) *Focus*—no soldier 'gets entangled in everyday activities' (2Ti 2:4, ftn.; w07 5/1 27-28 ¶14-19)

A Roman soldier was not to be preoccupied with commercial activities, becoming distracted from his duties

Why do you need to stay focused?

Distractions, such as secular or material pursuits, can entangle us in a selfish way of life (Lu 21:34-36; 1Ti 6:9, 10)

How can you stay focused?

Examine your goals and priorities to make sure that you are putting first the things that are important (Mt 6:24, 33)

Keep your life simple (Mt 6:22, ftn.; w01 3/1 5-6)

Reach out for greater opportunities in Kingdom service

[Video crew begins three-minute video of young ones in developing lands who resisted pressure to pursue secular goals and instead pursued full-time service]

Ask yourself, 'Do my goals and priorities show that I am truly focused on proving myself a courageous soldier of Christ?'

(3) *Loyalty*—a soldier seeks “to gain the approval of the one who enrolled him”

A Roman soldier sought to please his commander; the soldier held his commander in great regard

Why do we need the approval of Christ?

Christ is our Commander; Jehovah has given him “all authority” (Mt 28:18)

How can we gain the approval of Christ?

Christ is pleased when we . . .

“Keep bearing much fruit”—looking for ways to cultivate more abundantly the fruitage of the spirit and to spread more fully the Kingdom message (Joh 15:8)

Loyally keep separate from the world (Joh 15:19)

Demonstrate self-sacrificing love (Joh 15:12; cf 177-180 ¶12-17)

Ask yourself, ‘Am I doing my best to gain the approval of Christ as one of his courageous soldiers?’

Paul’s words to the Ephesians highlight the spiritual armor needed by soldiers of Christ [Read Ephesians 6:13-18]

Setting: Paul wrote this letter about 60-61 C.E. while he was under house arrest in Rome and guarded by a Roman soldier

[Video crew begins 1-minute, 30-second video of two images. The first image shows Paul writing his letter to the Ephesians while a Roman soldier is waiting nearby. The second image shows a Roman soldier wearing a suit of armor. While the artwork displays, discuss the points below]

Why do we need this spiritual suit of armor?

Because Satan is relentless in his efforts to get us to break our integrity and to deprive us of everlasting life (1Pe 5:8)

How will this suit of armor help us?

It will help us to win our spiritual warfare, provided that we wear it—all of it, not just some of it—at all times

Paul twice urges us to put on “the complete suit of armor” (Eph 6:11, 13)

[As time permits, mention some aspects of the suit of armor and how they can protect us (w07 3/15 28-30 ¶10-18; it-1 172)]

COURAGEOUS SOLDIERS TO THE END (2 min.)

Are we not proud that we have been enrolled as soldiers of Christ?

Let us prove ourselves courageous soldiers by . . .

Enduring any hardships we may face as Christ’s followers

Staying focused on spiritual goals and putting the Kingdom first

Gaining the approval of Christ by proving ourselves loyal

Wearing the complete suit of armor at all times

May we remain courageous soldiers of Christ to the end—the end of our life or the end of this wicked system, whichever comes first!

TO BE COVERED IN 34 MINUTES