

Warfare: Joining the Fray vs. Conscientious Objection

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When I was serving in the United States Air Force as a flight surgeon, I learned that it took at least ten ground personnel to keep every pilot in the air. There were the maintenance workers who assured that the planes were in perfect condition, the jet fuel airmen who drove the tankers and loaded the planes with JP-4 that powered the engines, air traffic controllers who manned radar screens and guided the planes onto and off the ground, ordinance people who armed the bombers and jet fighters, loadmasters who put the cargo on board the transports, paper shuffling clerks who cut military orders, cooks at the mess hall (making gallons of coffee, stirring the bean soup and mixing the creamed dried beef for toast), Air Police who kept order on the base, flight surgeons (like me) who kept the airmen healthy, chaplans who attended to our spiritual needs and corpsmen and nurses who assisted the doctors, etc. etc. The same can be said for any of the other branches of service: Army, Navy, Marines or Coast Guard; there are the front liners who take the risks and all the others whose important work enables those brave servicemen and women in the firing line to do their highly dangerous, often fatal, work.

As a civilian I also know that there are many other non-military folks who were responsible for putting those planes in the air. There were those factory workers who manufactured the materials and others who assembled the aircraft, the garment workers who finished the uniforms, boots and flight suits. There had to be munitions manufacturers, engineers, guidance experts and other high tech people who were constantly working to improve our nation's ability to preserve and protect our freedoms and the lives of our citizens. There were the farmers and ranchers whose hard work supplied the food for the mess halls and, of course, all of the hard-working American taxpayers whose April 15th income tax check went into the US Treasury where some was parceled out to the Department of Defense. I could go on and on, but I think by now that you get the point. For every person out at the front, sitting in a fox hole, flying a jet fighter, piloting a naval vessel into harm's way or storming a beachhead as the Marines are called upon to do, there are numerous support people behind the lines who do not have to carry a weapon or end someone's life. Thus even the so-called true conscientious objectors can do something to assist their nation in a time of war. The commandment that tells us not to murder

does not mean that we should not defend ourselves or those we love. However, I can still fully appreciate and respect anyone who will don a military uniform and work behind the lines in a

non-combative capacity, without a weapon in his/her hands, because of conscience.

The purpose of this essay however, has nothing to do with physical war. Those conflicts will always come and go and in my lifetime I have seen that happen all too often: WWII, Korea, Vietnam, the Cold War with Russia, Bosnia, Desert Storm and now the long war that we've been fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan against Islamic terrorism. This paper concerns a cosmic war that has waged since the Lord first expelled Satan from heaven for wanting to usurp His sovereignty. The impetus for the paper stems from many of your expressed and appreciated concerns and prayers for me that have been voiced in regard to the recent *Vindicator* blogger's false charges concerning a paper I wrote after Hurricane Katrina had devastated our southern border states of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. The article I had written was entitled *God and Katrina* and the blogger totally missed the point. If you have not read it, go to www.oldnorthchurch.org and look under resources. I assured those who had concerns for my feelings that I was used to such attacks because I had enlisted the army of God over 37 years ago and right from the get-go the demonic shells began to fly, the land mines started to explode beneath my feet, and the bombs commenced dropping. When such accusations are hurled at me, I know that I have done something right for a change.

In His sermon on the mountain Jesus said, *Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you* (Matthew 5:11-12). When that blogger chose to speak out against me falsely, and incite others to blast me and complain about the work God is doing at Old North, he simply made a deposit in my living trust account at the First Celestial Savings Bank in my heavenly home. I am blessed and I thank him for his contribution to my eternal well-being.

General George Patton of the WWII European battles, claimed success against his tank commander counterpart, the brilliant German General Irwin Rommel because he had read his

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books on the strategy of tank warfare and thus knew him well. We should be equally familiar with the enemy of our souls. These verses tell us whom we are up against in the cosmic war.

How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the

stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, I will ascend above the tops of the clouds. I will make myself like the most high on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit (Isaiah 14:12-15). Notice how many times Lucifer (literally morning star) said "I will," and compare that arrogant attitude with the humble words that Jesus uttered as He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. *Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done (Luke 22:42).*

In Ezekiel chapter 28 we learn more about this fallen angel called Satan, Lucifer or the Devil, who has taken up arms against the Lord and His followers. *This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz and emerald, chrysolite, onyx and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared. You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones (Ezekiel 28:12-17).* God had made him chief angel, but he wanted to be God.

That is how the battle for truth began and that is the combat for which many of us have taken up arms in order to wage a frontal attack against the enemy of our souls and the accuser of the brethren. Paul puts it this way in one of his letters to the church in Corinth: a city that was a literal cesspool of degradation, lechery and sinful practice of every stripe. *For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 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 (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).*

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While offensive weapons are most effective in any military skirmish, protective armor is also a necessity. Paul points that fact out in his letter to the church at Ephesus. However, like all capable military leaders (i.e. General Patton) he first informs the troops as to just what kind of enemy and conflict they're going to be up against.

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

(Ephesians 6: 12). Paul had just described the levels of a demonic chain of command, Satan being the five star general (chief of operations) in the evil army of the occult. This is no confrontation for the weak of faith or the biblically uninformed. This is vital information, which in times of a physical war is known as intelligence gathering. In spiritual war that information is attainable only through the Scriptures. As Christians we know far too little about the devil and his schemes; and sadly many do not even bother to seek that information. It is our first order of business to learn who he is and how he functions before we can know how to fight.

Next the apostle moves on to discuss our protective gear. You will have a mental picture of a knight in shining armor as he illustrates our outer defensive attire. *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. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation...*

The belt of truth is the Holy Bible. The late Francis Schaeffer called it "true-truth," to exemplify its absolute verity. That is how Jesus referred to it in His prayer to Yahweh, the Father, as recorded in John 17: 17. Therein He said, *Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.* David also testified to the veracity of God's word when he averred, *All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal* (Psalm 119: 160). In this Pauline perspective the Word of God is utilized as a defensive apparel; somewhat like a cummerbund in a formal attire, it protects our

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mid section from Satan's arrows; for he is truly *like a madman shooting firebrands or deadly arrows* (Proverbs 26: 18). Used improperly, however, it is no defense at all. We should never take Scripture out of context or add to that which God has said; after all, *The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple* (Psalm 19: 7). It certainly doesn't need any editing on our part. That was Eve's first mistake when she was confronted by the devil in the Garden of Eden. When the serpent (then embodied by the devil) posited the first question ever put to the mind of any human he said, *Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?* (Genesis 3: 1). Eve promptly answered with these words, *We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die'* (Genesis 3: 2;

emphasis added). God had never told Adam that they were not permitted to touch the fruit. They could have juggled it, tossed it around like a soft ball or kicked it as if it were to be used in a soccer game. The command was specifically stated much differently by Almighty God who said to Adam, *You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.*

The breast plate of righteousness stands for that which was imputed to us by Jesus Christ when we received Him as Lord and Savior. It is not of our own doing, our so-called good works. *All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags* (Isaiah 64:6). If we could ever think of or list all the allegedly "good" things we have ever done in our lives before we were born again, in God's eyes they amount to nothing but foul-smelling trash and they may as well be put out at the curb with the rest of our garbage to be picked up by the refuse collectors. One of the reasons that Jesus came to earth was to live a perfect life, a life without sin, a life that was in utter compliance with the will of God and in total obedience to every law of God. By doing so, He earned for Himself and us a perfect human righteousness; something none of us are capable of doing. We read in John 17:19, *For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.* To be sanctified is to be made holy in the sight of God. Paul explained it this way, *Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation* (Colossians 1:21-22).

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While Christ, the 100% divine and 100% human being, was residing here on earth in a physical body, He prepared the robe of righteousness by virtue of living His perfect, obedient and sinless life, a robe with which He would clothe us at the very instant of our new birth. We can thus say with the saints of all time, *I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness* (Isaiah 61:10). As a metal breastplate (or a bullet proof vest) guards our physical heart (the most vital physical organ in our body) the breastplate of righteousness guards our spiritual heart, as we are admonished to do by wise King Solomon, who had to ward off his share of satanic arrows. He astutely warns, *Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life* (Proverbs 4:23). Given the fact that the heart pumps our blood, the very essence of our physical life, and the fact that Dr. William Harvey (April 1, 1578 – June 3, 1657) was an English physician who is credited with being the first scientist in the Western world to describe correctly and in exact detail the systemic circulation and

properties of blood being pumped around the body by the heart, Solomon's inspired words, written 950 years BC are quite impressive and prescient. Of course, being inspired, they had come from the very One by whose hand we were *fearfully and wonderfully made* (Psalm 139:14) and thus they should be of no surprise to us.

No warrior would ever take on a scuffle or a brawl of any sort with bare feet, unless he might be engaged in one of the martial arts. Paul tells us that we must protect those lowest of all appendages by having our *feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace*. Readiness for spiritual warfare is only possible if we are shod with the gospel of peace, God's perfect Word. This is the second use of the Bible as a defensive tool. Peter put it this way, *But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect*. That preparation comes through a prayerful, persistent, tenacious and in-depth study of the Bible. We will never have the answers until we have familiarized ourselves with scripture. Furthermore, since God knows everything about us, He will not send folks our way who ask the questions if they cannot benefit from the answers we offer.

Once again we heed the words of wise king Solomon. *My son, if you accept my words and store*

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up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God (Proverbs 2:1-5). The first order of business is to accept the truth of God's Word without question; we must believe that it is inerrant, infallible and inspired. Next, memorizing key verses is important. However memorization apart from comprehension is an exercise in futility. By Solomon's use of the phrase "store up" when he speaks of God's commands, he implies an understanding and a readiness to put those commands into practice each day of our life and to be able to repeat them and explain them, if not verbatim, at least in the proper context. We are teachable when we "turn our ear to wisdom" or apply our "heart to understanding." To "call out for insight" and to "cry aloud for understanding" means we are praying as we study: "Show me Lord what this means and how it applies to me. Enable me to put this lesson into action for your glory and my good."

In the days of King Solomon's mines, those mine workers had to dig for gold and silver on their knees and light the dark passageways with oil lamps. It was hard and uncomfortable work. So it is with searching the pages of God's holy Word by the light of the Holy Spirit who *made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ* (2 Corinthians 4:6). When we have prayed and searched long and hard enough God will give us more understanding of His will, His ways and our responsibilities as His children. Then when the accuser of our soul, the enemy of God and His Word attacks us, our feet will be shod with *the peace of God, which transcends all understanding and which will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus* (Philippians 4:7).

The shield of faith is a gift from God, the means by which we have been saved from an eternity apart from our heavenly Father, our Savior, friend and brother, Lord Jesus and our Comforter and guide the blessed Holy Spirit. *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God* (Ephesians 2:8). Faith is not only essential in matters of salvation but in our every day walk with God, the former is saving faith and the latter sustaining faith. It is a vital aspect of spiritual warfare. In Paul's lesson from Ephesians 6:13-14 he uses the

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word "stand" three times in this short span of words; *so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to **stand** your ground, and after you have done everything, to **stand**. **Stand** firm then...* When you seemingly have exhausted all possible means, every bit of your energy and resources, then just stand still and wait for God to act. He said, *Be still, and know that I am God* (Psalm 46:10). The prophet Isaiah put it this way, *If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all* (Isaiah 7:9). A man of faith does not walk by sight but by what he believes to be true in the Word of God. And that is because *faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see* (Hebrews 11:1). By standing firmly on the reliable truth of God's Word, we can ward off any attack, withstand any ridicule, endure any assault, cope with any slander and actually rejoice in any and all forms of insult because we know that what we believe in is absolute truth that will survive when everything else is gone. Jesus said, *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away* (Luke 21:33).

The final piece of armor that the apostle lists is the helmet of salvation. That protects our brains, our thoughts, our emotions, our intelligence and our personality. It is there that Satan will attack us and attempt to discourage, depress and defeat us and then put fear in place of courage (the

literal meaning of discouragement). That is where prayer comes into the picture. We are instructed by God, *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus* (Philippians 4: 6-7). That is the very reason for Paul's caveat in Ephesians chapter 6 after he talks about the defensive armor and the sword of offense. He went on to say, *And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints* (Ephesians 6: 18).

Having put on all of the defensive armor, we are now ready to take up the only offensive weapon we have at our disposal, *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God* (Ephesians 6: 17). And what a weapon it is. The author of Hebrews (who many think was also Paul) described the Bible in this manner, *For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and*

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attitudes of the heart (Hebrews 4: 12). This spiritual weapon has the capacity to defend against any and all foes. It is not only living, it is becoming more alive every day in the hearts of those who have plumbed its depths for profound truth. It is not only accurate in what it has to say theologically but is completely verifiable when it touches on matters pertaining to history and science as well. For proof of that I would suggest that the reader take up two of Josh McDowell's masterful, apologetic works, Evidence That Demands a Verdict and the sequel to that work entitled (not very originally) More Evidence That Demand's a Verdict. The former deals with evidence that supports the deity of Christ and the inerrancy and inspiration of the Bible and the latter challenges the erroneous notions found in "documentary hypothesis" and its partner "form criticism." Those liberal theological arguments arose in Europe following the so-called Age of Enlightenment in the second half of the 18th century when biblical truth came under serious attack.

Marching orders for God's spiritual fighting force have been issued in Psalm 149: 4-6, which reads as follows, *For the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation. Let the saints rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds. May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands*. The Psalmist encourages us to consider it an honor to wage war against the *spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms* (Ephesians 6: 12). He also persuades us to sing joyfully as we fearlessly go forth, praising God and always armed with our only

offensive weapon, the Bible, at our side.

One of the most important parts of basic military training involves a familiarity with one's weapon. Young recruits are taught to tear down, clean and reassemble their rifles in a minimum amount of time. So it is with the *sword of the Spirit*. We need to be so familiar with the construction and assembling of the Holy Book that we can take it apart and put it back together (That implies cross referencing to prove our point) whenever we are called upon to defend something we have said or done that is called into question. We must be ready to back up every truth concerning Christ, His church and the precious Word of God. It has been rightly asserted that the best commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself. We must *demolish strongholds* such as the totally unproven theory of evolution that has a firm grip on the teaching of science in our

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public schools, those religions (Islam in particular) used by Satan to discredit our true faith and we need to question *every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God*, mostly those that dishonor the veracity of the Bible: the only real piece of literature that enables us to know God, His attributes, His character and His will. Paul warns against the adverse effect that educational institutions can have on young minds in his letter to the church at Colossi. *See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ* (Colossians 2:8). Atheist Richard Dawkins, author of [The God Delusion](#), credits the teaching of evolution in England, when he was 15 years of age, for making him an atheist. He said that Darwin's theory had made the notion of God utterly unnecessary and he was thrilled that it had.

Finally, just as fighting men and women take must take prisoners of war, *we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ* (2 Corinthians 10:15). That is done through means of a patient, gentle, respectful and gracious education of, and discussion with, those who are less fortunate than we are in matters of biblical truth. We must remember this principal lesson that Paul has taught regarding the ability, or inability as the case may be, of some people to comprehend biblical truth; *We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.* (In my humble opinion, that is probably the best definition I have ever read concerning the Bible). Paul continues, *The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually*

discerned (1 Corinthians 2:12-14). We must be sensitive to the place where people are living in their understanding of God. We should also wait for the questions to arise before we feel the need to offer the answers. Recall that the admonition given by the apostle Peter in 1 Peter 3:15 was to *always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you* any and all questions concerning your faith.

As I earlier explained in regard to the greater numbers of support personnel than fighters that a military operation requires in the maintenance of the front line warriors, so it is in the army of

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God. I know that I, and every other fox hole, submarine or cockpit occupant in this spiritual battle, am utterly dependant on the other gifted Christians who are enlisted in God's army, but who are manning positions behind the lines. There are those who have the spiritual gifts of administration, giving, mercy, faith and prayer who are just as vital to the cause as any teacher, evangelist, preacher, or missionary. That lesson is taught very well by Paul as he describes the absolute necessity of every member in the body of Christ in terms of a metaphorical, anatomical perspective in a human body. *The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other* (1 Corinthians 12:12-25).

In case the reader might be unaware of the importance of every organ or body part, allow me to cite one example of the importance of a seemingly insignificant little toe. Besides being the most commonly stubbed and broken appendage because of its location, that tiny attachment on the foot offers balance to our body when walking; its is one of those parts, as Paul would say, that "*seem to be weaker*"...but "*are indispensable.*" I became acutely aware of that fact when one of my diabetic patients had lost a little toe due to his disease. It had become gangrenous and had

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to be amputated. That man who had been quite steady on his feet, had to undergo a great deal of attention and gait training in a physical therapy department before he could negotiate a normal way of walking. Just as God has placed every anatomical portion of our bodies in its respective position and serving its respective, interdependent role, He has chosen to place you and me in the body of Christ and to provide us with spiritual gifts in order to fulfill some very distinct and important functions. *All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines* (1 Corinthians 12:11).

I certainly appreciate the loving concern of those who have expressed that feeling to me after the *Vindy* blogger had his say and I am truly grateful for that apprehension on my behalf. However, you need not worry about those of us who are, teachers, pastors, evangelists and other warriors for Christ and who confront the world with truth, because we would not have it any other way. It was for this purpose that we were saved and we would never be fulfilled if we were not serving that purpose. I am confident that each one of our pastors would agree with me on that score. *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do* (Ephesians 2:10). You see, every one of us has been saved for a purpose and we have all been drafted into the army of God. You cannot be a conscientious objector in that conflict because there is a place for you. If your role is not fulfilled in a fox hole then in it's the mess tent stirring the bean soup - metaphorically speaking. The latter role is just as vital to the overall process of spiritual warfare as any other. I would encourage those who have not been assigned to the frontlines, where the demonic ammunition repeatedly sails above our heads, to do what Paul told the church at Ephesus to do for him. After encouraging those to pray on every occasion of their spiritual battles, he said, *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* (Ephesians 6:19-20).

We Christians are not yet in chains (as Paul was), but gradually our ability to speak and teach the truth is being thwarted at every turn. Our first amendment rights are being usurped by numerous activist judges. The First Amendment of the United States Constitution specifically

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protects our right to freedom of religion and freedom of expression from government interference. Freedom of expression consists of the rights to freedoms of speech, press, assembly and the additional privilege to petition the government for a redress of grievances, and the implied civil liberties of association and belief. Unfortunately, and insidiously, those constitutional rights are being whittled away. But as long as we are able to speak, may we never be silent when it comes to defending the truth of God's Word. There is no "wall of separation" clause in the constitution. That is a fallacy of major proportions. It was used as a figure of speech by Thomas Jefferson when writing to the pastors of the Danbury Baptists in assuring them that the newly formed US Government would never establish a state church such had been the case in England; the Anglican Church. The government is not permitted to establish religions, and that is wonderful, but it is likewise not supposed to suppress our freedom to express our religious convictions. That was never the intent of the founding fathers.

Putting this all in its proper perspective at this point is decidedly essential. Whatever inconveniences you and I may experience because of our firm, visible and vocal stand for Christ and the gospel pale in comparison with the persecution of those Christians around the world who have been imprisoned or martyred for their witness. In two millennia of Christian history, about 70 million faithful have given their lives for the cause of Christ, and of these, 45.5 million, fully 65%, were sacrificed in the last century alone. This is what the author of the book of Hebrews said about such people, *And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains,*

and in caves and holes in the ground (Hebrews 11:32-38).

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We Christians in America have thus far been spared such persecution, but with the rise of Islamic Facism and the intense hatred which those fanatics have for Christians and Jews, we can no longer assume that we will be spared from such conflict much longer. It has been said that by some that because those Islamic fundamentalist fanatics only amount to 10% of the entire Islamic population, we have nothing to fear. However, 10% of one billion (the current world population of Muslims) is 100 million people. If those numbers are distributed equally among 100 nations that are populated with a preponderance of nominal Christians and Jews, we in American could well have one million Islamic extremists residing in terrorists cells and distributed throughout each of our 50 states. That represents 20,000 Jihadists in Ohio alone. Ohio has 88 counties. Breaking the numbers down further means that in Mahoning County alone (with equal numbers in our contiguous counties of Trumbull and Columbiana) 227 Islamic hate mongers, tenaciously set on our death and destruction, could now be planning their own brand of Hitler's "final solution," this time directing their hatred at Christians as well as Jews.

Aside from the events of December 7, 1941 and September 11, 2001 our borders have been spared the threat of war inside our blessed homeland since the Civil War ended in 1865, and we have been living in a relative state of peace. But complacency is dangerous in such times, especially given the warnings we find in God's Word regarding the signs of the times in the last days before the return of Christ; read Matthew chapters 24-25. In such a time as this the apostle Paul offers this caveat, *Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape* (1 Thessalonians 5: 1-3). While that verse specifically applies to the return of Christ, we also know that His enemies will be attacking the faithful prior to that victorious event. *At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold...* (Matthew 24:10-12). The birthing pains will begin gradually, as they are known to do in the imminent labor and delivery of a new life. We may already be experiencing those early signs of our Lord's return and that is just one more reason to be grateful for the miniscule oppositions that we face, such as

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those sent our way by the *Vindy* blogger who had no idea that he was being used by our enemy, Satan.

With that in mind, I leave you with this eternal perspective offered by one who suffered much more persecution in his life than you or I have, the details of which he delineated as follows, *I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked* (2 Corinthians 11:23-27).

Earlier in that letter Paul urged us to put an eternal spin on whatever trials we face when he wrote, *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal* (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

Soli Deo Gloria

