

A crusading Christ and warriors of righteousness



Highland Views
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Guest columnist

Some people seem to believe they are the protectors of the unseen, defenders of the invisible. "Spiritual warriors" fighting "spiritual battles" against "spiritual forces." In this warfare mentality, anyone who challenges, questions or threatens their battlements of belief is an adversary, on the side of The Enemy — Devil, Satan, Evil. This fundamental fear-based faith is armed and ready for combat in our world today. A dark way to view the world and everyone in it. Dark, and quite dangerous.

Where does this thinking come from? As he mustered the troops of Christ's Army for war (in the name of the God of Love), the Apostle Paul instructed them to: "Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 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." General Paul is heating the blood of his

men: "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 and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (Letter to the Ephesians, chapter 6). This passage has given ammunition to generations of crusading warriors marching for God. "Hit 'em hard, brothers and sisters, you are the soldiers of the Savior."

Many of these self-appointed warriors appear to have important pieces of their armor missing. They may want to go back to the barracks or the armory to check their equipment. The "belt of truth" appears to be absent, since surrounding your center with what is true only has meaning when facing truthful facts. What about the "gospel of peace" on the feet? If one is balanced and stable, firmly grounded in a peaceful nature, they won't be so quick to use any sword, including the "sword of the Spirit." If the "helmet of salvation" is supposed to protect your head, we might

wonder why this isn't a call to duty in service of reason, to consider what an intelligent message ought to be.

The righteous warriors also overlook the fact that Paul is using defensive rather than offensive language. This isn't about attacking imagined enemies, but holding your position truthfully and peacefully. It also isn't about fighting other people who may be unarmed and mean no actual harm. Paul wasn't (intentionally) stirring up a holy war.

The only way to engage this campaign against "the spiritual forces of evil" is to dehumanize, demonize and spiritualize everyone and everything. The devilish enemy and his "flaming arrows" appear in every institution or government — or church — that doesn't acknowledge your personal beliefs — they are on the dark side and must be confronted. When violence in the name of God becomes virtuous, what is the cost...what is lost?

Can we imagine Jesus of Nazareth clothed in this fearful, defensive armor? Did he teach a battleground kind of discipleship, cutting people to pieces with his sword? Why would those who say they follow him, to obey his message of peace and compassion, cover it up with heavy armor and weaponry?

Let's make this contemporary and real. An extremist group of believers, armed with what they imagine is righ-

teousness, seem fixated on other peoples' bodies and other peoples' children. Ironically, their "spiritual war" is directed against very physical things. They see themselves as warriors against anyone who makes personal choices about their own bodies and families. The pious protectors claim they are defending "religious liberty," yet they only want it for themselves, to protect their own privileges, preferences and power. Believing they are ultimately protecting God Himself, they feel called by their Lord to fight the godly fight in His Name. What they ignore is our secular Constitution, and the foundational principles that protect all beliefs, including their own.

A defensive faith is a frail, fearful faith. The great peril is when this weaponized worldview becomes personal and physical. Relationships suffer, families are torn apart, the common good is neglected. The armor should be dropped (after all, don't these folks believe God can protect them and defend Himself?). Perhaps the strongest army consists of peacemakers and truth-tellers.

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