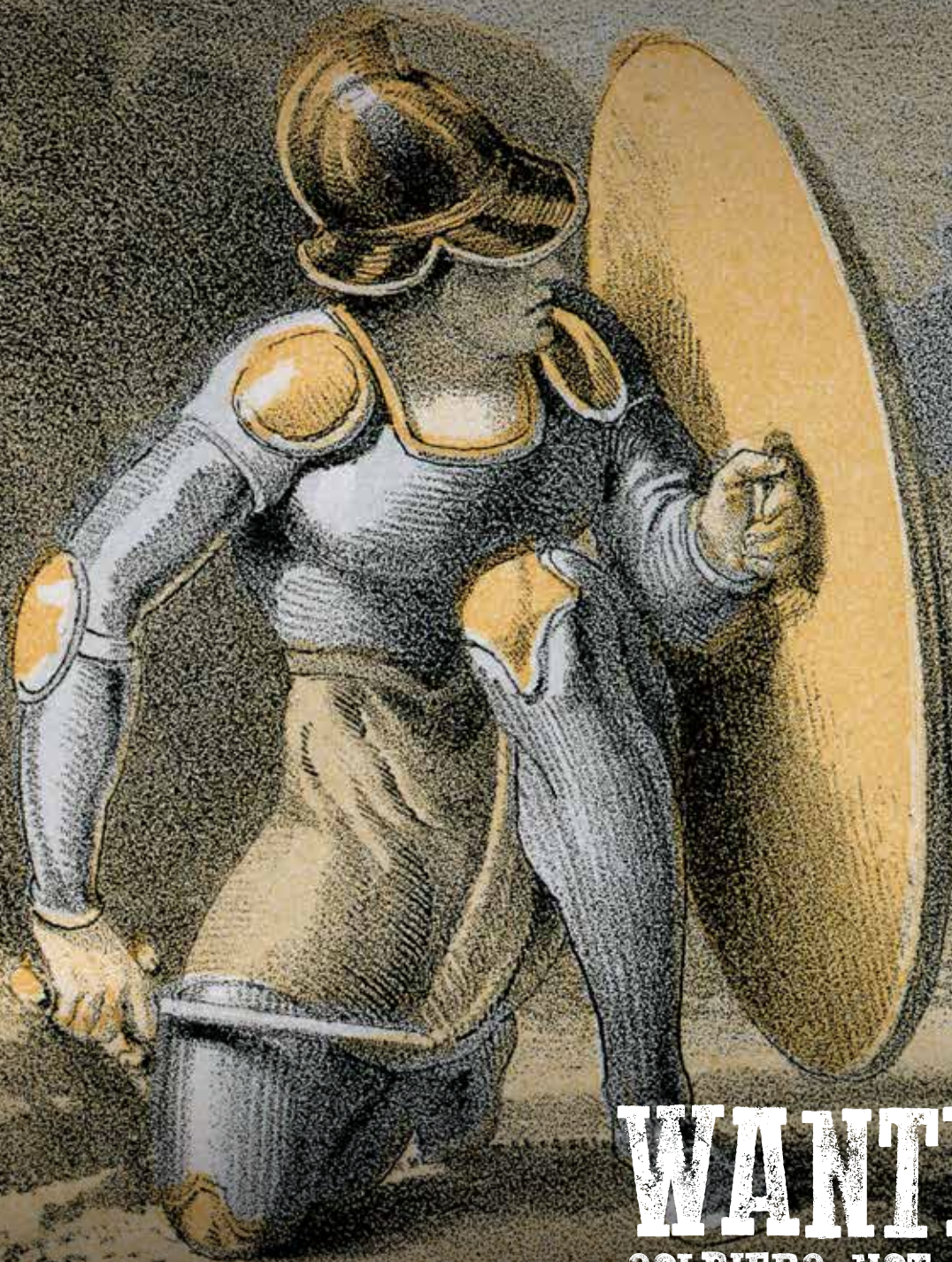


LAYMEN MINISTRIES

No. 216 A Journal Dedicated to Laymen

SPRING 2020



WANTED:
SOLDIERS, NOT ACTORS

BY JEFF REICH



WANTED: SOLDIERS, NOT ACTORS



When my children were growing up, I loved reading the book *The Pilgrim's Progress* to them. A Christian allegory portraying a man named “Christian” on his journey to the Celestial City, this beloved book was written by John Bunyon while he was in prison in 1678. I would change my voice with each character to add a nice dramatic effect. The kids loved to hear the story come alive!

Maybe more importantly, while making the various characters come alive for my kids, many scenes throughout the book left an indelible mark on me. There were so many great allegorical illustrations. For instance, I remember reading in chapter 2 a section about Christian coming upon the Goodly Palace. Along the way, Christian is accompanied by the Interpreter, who explains

the deeper object lessons of the things Christian witnesses.

The Goodly Palace is surrounded by great walls, a mote, and a large bronze drawbridge — all of which are seemingly protected by the most fearsome soldiers armed with lances, spears, swords, daggers, maces, clubs, and shields. There are catapults, trebuchets, and other great machines of war upon the walls.



There are also many battle chariots drawn by matched teams of mighty, black stallions. On the drawbridge sits a noble man with a ledger and a writer's inkhorn.

The palace represents heaven, and the mighty army are the forces of hell trying to prevent anyone from entering. As Christian observes, he notes that there are people standing around, desiring to go in but fearful of such a mighty army blocking the way. Many are scholars and theologians. Each is telling the other to enter in, but many make excuses for their cowardice, all lacking the faith to fight their way through.

Then along comes a man named Belief, who signs the ledger and then prepares for battle by putting on the armor, which is, in fact, the Armor of God found in Ephesians 6:13-20. He singlehandedly takes on this whole mighty army and defeats them as though they were no more than actors in a play, wearing masks, and having paper swords!

Christian marvels at what he sees! He and the Interpreter note two doctors of theology who have just witnessed this defeat. The story goes as thus:

So Christian turned to hear two doctors of theology commenting on recent events. Said the first to his companion with a genteel bow and a gesture toward the drawbridge, "After you, good sir."

"Oh no," demurred the second. "I have been teaching here only a few years. Common courtesy demands that I give way to seniority, dear doctor."

"Why do you quake and fear, lad? Yon brave man hacked his way through easily enough!"

"Aye, but did you see his armor? I have none such to protect my innards!"

"Well, does it look like I do?"

"Then do we stand here forever, dear colleague? Ever hoping and desiring to enter in, but never coming to the realization of it?"

"The time is not ripe, that's all," the wise one declared sagaciously. "We must wait for the promise of the latter rain, which will fit us up for the battle."

"Hmmm, yes. I believe so too," said his colleague, with a wistful glance toward the heavens, "but as yet, I see nary a cloud in the sky."

"Hmmm. Nor I," said the elder, scanning skillfully through a periodical. "And, looking here in the church paper, I see not so much as a forecast of clouds, let alone rain!"

"Hmmm," puzzled his colleague. "Strange that this illiterate and gullible underling was able to hack his way through before us."

"Aye!" added his indignant companion. "And that without one class in the use of the sharp two-edged sword!"

"Whilst we are veritable experts in its use," grumbled the first.

"Indeed. In fact, I went to an outside university to obtain my degree in swordsmanship."

"Eh! Did you now?" said his companion feigning disinterest. "Well, heh, heh, so did I. In fact, I

am licensed by the state to use my sword. How this blustering commoner hacked his way through is a complete mystery to me."

"Oh, beginner's luck, no doubt," surmised the second.

"Or perhaps brute strength," grouched the first. "I wonder if we should turn him in for using his sword without a license?"

"Say now! That might not be a bad idea. Well, whilst we're waiting for the clouds to form, shall we have a duel?"

"Yes! A splendid idea!" agreed the first eagerly. "Twill give us something to do and keep our swords sharp besides. En garde!"

"En garde!" said the second, drawing his foil.

So they earnestly began their oft-practiced and skillfully choreographed duel. Then Christian turned to the Interpreter and said, "They are afraid!"

"Aye."

"But the defenders are not real!"

"To those who will not take God at His word and move forward," said the Interpreter sadly, "the warriors are more real than you can imagine."

"'Tis a mystery, this faith business," said Christian, shaking his head.

To this the Interpreter nodded in agreement, saying only, "Aye."

"But now," said Christian, looking longingly at the pathway to the Celestial City, "I am ready to be on my way. May I go now?"

This story aptly illustrates what can happen when we hold onto a theory of truth yet do not possess the truth in heart and soul because of a relationship with Christ.

KEEPING A BALANCE

Before I was an Adventist, I studied the Bible with a number of people

from various churches. A common theme I heard was, “Doctrine is not important; you just need to love Jesus,” and “Theology and doctrine do not save anyone,” etc. These concepts are really dangerous, as doctrine is nothing more than “the teachings” and a “set of beliefs.”

As Christians, our belief in Jesus is a “doctrine.” And theology is simply “the study of the nature of God and religious belief.” So — are theology and doctrine important? Yes! Without them we have nothing — not even the teachings of Christ. It is sad to say, but few people take their religion seriously enough to study various subjects and to allow themselves to be rooted and grounded in the truth found in Scripture.

Yet at the same time, we can possess the truth without possessing He who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Or we can get so caught up in studying the deep things that we neglect the practical. *“That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love...”* (Ephesians 3:16).

WEIGHTIER MATTERS OF THE LAW

I love studying theology and writing about it. In the pages of this magazine, I have expounded on a variety of topics — even hot topics! I love digging deep. But one time I had an eye-opening experience that helped me to seek balance. Let me share this with you, as it is worth consideration.

In the late 1980s, I was digging deep. I would spend days, weeks, and months reading books and laying out photocopied pages on a table, chronologically trying to piece together end-time events. I was looking at the concepts of atonement, sacrificial

and final atonements and objective and subjective justification, to name a few. Yes, deep stuff. Interesting topics. I have never regretted studying any of it, nor looking for answers. All this study grounded me in truth.

I remember going to Bible symposiums. One was in the basement of Donald K. Short’s home, and there were a lot of well-known Adventist theologians there. If I started naming names, you might know a number of them. The subject at one particular symposium was “Final Atonement and the Last Generation.” In preparation for this get-together, I spent days in study.

After the symposium, I received a phone call from a really close friend who informed me his wife was near death, that he was exhausted from caring for her, and that he needed help. My wife, the two daughters we had at that time, and I immediately got in the car and drove the 1100 miles to where they lived. When we arrived, we were greeted by my friend with tears in his eyes — partly from

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exhaustion, partly from the happiness at seeing us!

I entered the house and went to the bedroom where his wife lay. I was shocked! There before me was my bedridden friend, weighing no more than 85 pounds. Her face lit up when she saw me. I sat next to her on the bed and held her hand and said nothing. I said nothing!! I could not think of one thing to say. I was overwhelmed. My head was full of topics such as the final atonement and all the other deep theology I had immersed myself in, and I could not think of a single encouraging word to say.

As I sat there, seeing this dear friend near death, the thought came to my mind, "Is she any different than any other person in the world?" We are all dying. We are all in need of a Savior. We all need words of encouragement and hope. The words of Scripture came home with a new light: *"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear"* (1 Peter 3:15).

From that time forward, I vowed that I would keep my balance in my Christian walk — that balance of the practical and the theoretical. I contacted a naturopathic doctor friend of mine, and we followed his counsel, as my friend who was dying did not want to go to a regular medical doctor. My friend's life was saved, and she is still alive today.

I felt like those two theologians outside the Goodly Palace. I needed to be like the man "Belief" and be willing to storm the gates of hell, which represent the challenges and difficulties of life that try to beat us down and discourage us from entering that Goodly Palace.

MAJORING IN THE MINORS

My heart breaks when I see people majoring in the minors. They are taking some theologies/doctrines that are not part of the foundations of our faith and dividing churches and families. Some people are adamant about their theology yet lack thoughtfulness, kindness and helpfulness. We need to keep our feet grounded in the truth and not allow the deeper, more speculative things to prevent us from doing a work God has called the church to do.

One debate I have been a part of more than once is, "Who comprises the 144,000?" I have concluded that those who worry about, argue, and debate the subject most likely will never be part of the 144,000, while those humbly going about helping and blessing others will be and will not even know it.

One other subject that always makes me shake my head in disbelief is that of the speculation over the Godhead/Trinity. We can study His word and examine the life of Christ. This gives us some understanding. But can we, as micro organisms on a dust particle out in the cosmos of millions of galaxies in the universe really understand all the aspects of God — the Creator of this all? Yet some people think they are so proficient in understanding and explaining this subject that it becomes a testing truth if you do not agree with them. I find that all but arrogant.

I have my own personal views from years of study, but I am certainly not going to divide a church or family over the subject! I find it interesting that while the pioneers of Adventism held varying views on this subject, they did not fight with each other about it, nor was it raised to the level of one of the pillars of our faith.



"The greatest deception of the human mind in Christ's day was that a mere assent to the truth constitutes righteousness. In all human experience a theoretical knowledge of the truth has been proved to be insufficient for the saving of the soul. It does not bring forth the fruits of righteousness.

A jealous regard for what is termed theological truth often accompanies a hatred of genuine truth as made manifest in life."

—The Desire of Ages, p. 309

I appreciate what J. H. Waggoner wrote, as a devout anti-trinitarian, in his book on the atonement: “‘The mystery of godliness’ the mystery of the incarnation, is great indeed. It is to be doubted whether a finite mind will ever be able to comprehend it. This does not speak against it as a fact; for we may accept a fact revealed, when we cannot comprehend the nature of the fact. We may believe that a certain star is thousands of millions of miles from the earth, but the human mind can have no just conception of such a distance. We believe in the being of the omnipotent God, but we cannot comprehend his being.” – *The Atonement*, page 179.

We held a Bible symposium at our home one Thanksgiving years ago. In the evening, a friend sat down next to me and started sharing all his new dual applications to Bible prophecy. I listened carefully as he systematically strayed from historical teachings. Eventually I said, “Wow, you have really done a lot of studying into these Bible prophecies!”

He smiled proudly at me and replied, “Well, yes. Hours and hours.”

“May I ask you a question? Has all this studying made you a better man, a better husband, a better father?”

His countenance dropped. Looking at the floor, he said shamefully, “I get your point.” The point was that he was on the edge of a divorce, yet he was spending every free moment immersed in prophecy.

There will always be those who will want a duel, sharpening their swords to debate interesting and speculative Bible subjects. But until they possess the actual faith to walk across the drawbridge, put their name down on the ledger with the writer’s inkhorn, and face the real enemy — well, they may never see inside the Goodly Palace. The Bible tells us:



Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:14-15).

Knowing how to rightly divide the Word of truth will help us to relate to the person on the street. If we can’t make friends because people can’t relate to the things we talk about, we may want to consider how we conduct ourselves. If people are repelled, that can be a good indicator there is a problem. Truth must remain practical. Let’s dig deeper into His Word, but let’s keep both feet on the ground while we do so. ♦

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