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## SOLDIERING ON ?

How did you observe Veterans Day? Maybe you just didn't get your mail. Maybe you attended an observance at your school or community center. Maybe you skipped it.

This national holiday began as Armistice Day -- 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918, when truce was called between Germany and the American allies, leading to the end of World War 1. In 1926, Congress declared the day to be observed with prayers and thanksgiving. In 1938 it became a legal holiday. In 1954, Congress officially changed its name to Veterans Day, to honor all Americans who served in any of our wars.

Veterans Day honors living people, while Memorial Day, observed in May, honors those who have died. But now we live in day when some people aren't sure what to do with veterans. One school even wants to ban the 21-gun salute, so as not to "scare children." Some in our country think it unwise or even wrong to honor veterans. Hmm.

This makes soldiers a good illustration of persecution. How so? The great theologian John Calvin referred to soldiers as "*agents of God's love.*" He said soldiering is a "*God-like act*" because "*restraining evil out of love for neighbor is an imitation of God's restraining evil out of love for His creatures.*"

In John 15:13, Jesus said, "**Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.**" That's the ultimate expression of the Great Commandment (Mark 12:30-31) - to love God with your whole being, and your neighbor as yourself.

Sounds like sacrifice? You're right. The Apostle Paul used the word-picture of a soldier to drive home that point in his writings. In 2 Timothy 2:1-4 he writes, "**be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus...and...share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.**"

Soldiers endure hardship, from boot camp to active duty to discharge. Most entered military service with a sense of pride of country and devotion to defending the freedoms and values that our country was founded on. These values come directly from the pages of the Bible, which informed our Founders, who put their own lives on the line in their Declaration of Independence. But many veterans today have never been thanked for their service and sacrifice. Many cannot get the medical attention they need to deal with battle scars of every description, mental and physical.

Being a soldier requires discipline. Putting aside personal pursuits in favor of higher principles. Some people take offense at that. They're not about to sacrifice themselves. But they say you should sacrifice yourself, your beliefs and principles and your very life, for them. They don't like Jesus, and they don't like you. In John 15:20, Jesus said, "**if they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.**" Count on it.

Being a soldier is tough. Many passages in the New Testament liken the Christian life to warfare. Believers are encouraged to "**wage the good warfare**" (1 Tim 1:18) and "**fight the good fight of the faith**" (1 Tim 6:12). God promises we will conquer, because "**the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but have divine power to destroy strongholds**" (2 Cor 10:4) and by trusting "**the whole armor of God**" we will stand firm in spiritual warfare (Eph 6:10-20).

In the rest of 2 Timothy 2, the Apostle Paul encourages believers to endure evil and suffering, so that others can also obtain eternal glory in Christ. That's the reason we serve as soldiers of the cross.

So then, what should Christians do with veterans? Love them. Honor them. Thank them. Pray for them, that their labors will not be in vain, and that we would learn from their devotion to duty, sacrifice, and the principles of freedom flowing from God's Book of truth and grace.

Beyond that, find a good soldier of Christ, and thank him or her for their sacrifice and example. Then, be a good soldier, yourself, of the cross of Christ.