

The Importance of Remembering

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Memorial Day is a day of remembrance for Americans who have died in military service to our nation. To remember the sacrifices of those in our past is not only right and good, but essential. Without such sacrifices, we would have no present freedom, security, or stability. And without the willingness of those who remember and imitate by continuing to fight, we would have no future as a nation.

Think of the importance of sacrifice and remembrance in terms of the ongoing war we fight as Christians—the spiritual warfare that rages between the kingdom of God and the armies of Satan. As Paul said, “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:11-12). Though this battle is not ultimately against people (i.e., “flesh and blood”), people are employed as pawns in Satan’s army. And the soldiers loyal to the Lord Jesus Christ frequently die physical death at their hands.



The annals of history are filled with moving and often disturbing accounts of martyrdom—Christians who suffered torturous and often gruesome deaths as a result of their stand for Christ and the true gospel. Beginning with the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7, followed by James’ execution “by the sword” in Acts 12, Christian martyrdom quickly became a normal and visible aspect of this spiritual battle.

Paul was decapitated under the reign of Nero. Timothy was beaten to death by a crowd of pagans when he rebuked them for their idolatry. Ignatius, a disciple of John, was fed to wild animals. Polycarp, a disciple of Ignatius, was stabbed with a sword and burned at the stake after refusing to renounce his loyalty to Christ. Others were roasted alive on red-hot chairs of iron. Still others were killed by bulls, torn to pieces by lions and tigers, or tied down to be trampled and eaten alive by wild pigs. Untold thousands more were beheaded, drowned, crushed to death, cast from cliffs, or crucified.

On and on it went, with varying intensity. And it has never stopped. Rather, it has increased. More Christians were martyred in the twentieth century than in the nineteen previous centuries combined. Beginning with the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, for example, the slaughter of Christians in China continued for over fifty years. Worldwide, it is estimated that Christians are being martyred today at an average rate of one every fifty minutes—nearly thirty per day—10,512 per year!

Why is it important to remember the Christian soldiers who have died fighting in Christ’s army? Is it just sentimental, or is there a purpose?

First, we remember them because we may someday stand in their shoes. This doesn’t seem likely in 21st century America where we are experiencing what some would call a season of peace. But the battle could someday heat up to the point of outright persecution, and if it does, we must be prepared to stand strong if we are to overcome (cf. Rev. 21:7-8). Just as accounts of military heroism spur men to great acts of bravery with sword or rifle, stories of Christian heroism embolden us to do brave battle with “the sword of the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17).

Second, we remember these heroes of the faith and give glory to God. The fact that a small band of weak and frightened men became what the true church is today is *not* a testimony to the natural quality of fallen man or the resilience of the human spirit. As Jesus told those first disciples, “Without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Fallen man apart from Christ is *useless*—even *counter-productive*. The endurance and growth of the true church, despite all satanic efforts to destroy and pervert it, is a testimony to the power and purpose of God. It is as Jesus said: “I will build My church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.”

Lastly, we remember them because their zeal and sacrifice shows us the importance of believing and defending what they believed and defended. People who believe and teach a culturally sanitized or watered-down version of the gospel are no threat to Satan. They do more work *for* him than *against* him, and so he generally leaves them alone. After all, why would you want to eliminate some of your best secret operatives? No, the ones he hates and persecutes are the ones who unflinchingly affirm and live biblical truth—people who refuse to broaden the road to heaven for the sake of social acceptance. Could this be why America is experiencing this “season of peace”? Is it because there are so few professing Christians whom Satan views as real threats?

It has been said that those who forget history are doomed to repeat it. This is true. We must remember the *mistakes* of our forbears so as not to repeat them. But it is also true, in another sense, that we must remember the past so that we *will* repeat it. A nation may be *made* strong and free by a few dedicated and sacrificial men. But that nation will not *remain* strong and free unless those who remember, imitate.

And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Hebrews 6:11-12

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