

# Veteran's Day

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*Veterans deserve their holiday.*

## Part 1

Veteran's Day is a holiday that probably doesn't get all the respect it deserves. Few people look forward to Veteran's Day with the same anticipation that they do for Thanksgiving, or Christmas, or sadly, Halloween. To many people, Veteran's Day is just a day that I get off from work because somebody else joined the military.

Veterans really deserve to be honored—and not just one day a year. Veterans have put their own lives on hold for at least a few years—and in some cases most of their adult lives—to serve and protect the rest of us.

When someone joins the military, he or she makes the commitment to do whatever his or her commanding officer orders, regardless of whether or not he or she wants to do it. Soldiers have little or no say about where they will live or what they will do when they get there. A soldier's only response is, "Sir! Yes! Sir!" Veterans have sacrificed a great deal for all of us. They really do deserve a day dedicated to their honor.

Just as joining the military requires making a life-changing commitment to a higher purpose, so does becoming a Christian. In both cases it is a commitment to be prepared to fight. Nobody should join the military and expect that it will be easy, and they will never have to fight. Nobody should join the Christian church and expect it to be easy, and not to be engaged in a spiritual battle with physical consequences. Sinful people hate Christians. Jesus gave this warning to all who follow Him:

**"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. [John 15:18-20, NIV]**

Jesus promises His followers that they will have conflict—and victory. That victory may, or may not, be achieved in this life; but victory certainly will be achieved if you are fighting on God's side.

The history of the Christian church is a history of persecution. The classic work describing how Christians have been persecuted over the centuries is Fox's Book of Martyrs. Since it is in the public domain, you can download it for free from Amazon.com<sup>1</sup> and read it in your Kindle reader. As you might expect, it contains the name, date of death, and method of execution of many obscure Christian martyrs; but it also contains inspiring biographic information about some of the more famous martyrs.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.amazon.com/Sufferings-Triumphant-Primitive-Protestant-ebook/dp/B0082Q3L0U/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1382970534&sr=1-1&keywords=foxe%27s+book+of+martyrs](http://www.amazon.com/Sufferings-Triumphant-Primitive-Protestant-ebook/dp/B0082Q3L0U/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1382970534&sr=1-1&keywords=foxe%27s+book+of+martyrs)

Another excellent resource, which puts the Christian life in the larger context of the battle between Christ and Satan, is The Great Controversy by Ellen White. This book, too, can be read without cost on the Internet. Here is a short inspirational excerpt from Chapter 4, titled, "The Waldenses." It describes the trials and tribulations of the Waldensian church in the Dark Ages.

The history of God's people during the ages of darkness that followed upon Rome's supremacy is written in heaven, but they have little place in human records. Few traces of their existence can be found, except in the accusations of their persecutors. It was the policy of Rome to obliterate every trace of dissent from her doctrines or decrees. Everything [Rome considered to be] heretical, whether persons or writings, she sought to destroy. Expressions of doubt, or questions as to the authority of papal dogmas, were enough to forfeit the life of rich or poor, high or low. Rome endeavored also to destroy every record of her cruelty toward dissenters. Papal councils decreed that books and writings containing such records should be committed to the flames. Before the invention of printing, books were few in number, and in a form not favorable for preservation; therefore there was little to prevent the Romanists from carrying out their purpose.

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In lands beyond the jurisdiction of Rome there existed for many centuries bodies of Christians who remained almost wholly free from papal corruption. They were surrounded by heathenism ... but they continued to regard the Bible as the only rule of faith and adhered to many of its truths. These Christians believed in the perpetuity of the law of God and observed the Sabbath of the fourth commandment. Churches that held to this faith and practice existed in Central Africa and among the Armenians of Asia.

But of those who resisted the encroachments of the papal power, the Waldenses stood foremost. ... They were determined to maintain their allegiance to God and to preserve the purity and simplicity of their faith. A separation took place. Those who adhered to the ancient faith now withdrew; some, forsaking their native Alps, raised the banner of truth in foreign lands; others retreated to the secluded glens and rocky fastnesses of the mountains, and there preserved their freedom to worship God.

The faith which for centuries was held and taught by the Waldensian Christians was in marked contrast to the false doctrines put forth from Rome. Their religious belief was founded upon the written word of God, the true system of Christianity. ... Theirs was not a faith newly received. ... They contended for the faith of the apostolic church,--"the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." Jude 3. "The church in the wilderness," ... was the true church of Christ, the guardian of the treasures of truth which God has committed to His people to be given to the world.

Among the leading causes that had led to the separation of the true church from Rome was the hatred of the latter toward the Bible Sabbath. As foretold by prophecy, the papal power cast down the truth to the ground. The law of God was trampled in the dust, while the traditions and customs of men were exalted. The churches that were under the rule of the papacy were early compelled to honor the Sunday as a holy day. ... They demanded not only that Sunday be hallowed, but that the Sabbath be profaned; and they denounced in the strongest language those who dared to show it honor. It was only by fleeing from the power of Rome that any could obey God's law in peace.

The Waldenses were among the first of the peoples of Europe to obtain a translation of the Holy Scriptures. Hundreds of years before the Reformation they possessed the Bible in manuscript in their native tongue. They had the truth unadulterated, and this rendered them the special objects of hatred and persecution. They declared the Church of Rome to be the apostate Babylon of the Apocalypse, and at the peril of their lives they stood up to resist her corruptions. While, under the pressure of long-continued persecution ... [they] held fast the truth. Through ages of darkness and apostasy there were Waldenses who denied the supremacy of Rome, who rejected image worship as idolatry, and who kept the true Sabbath. Under the fiercest tempests of opposition they maintained their faith. ...

Behind the lofty bulwarks of the mountains ... the Waldenses found a hiding place. Here the light of truth was kept burning amid the darkness of the Middle Ages. Here, for a thousand years, witnesses for the truth maintained the ancient faith.

...

The mountains that girded their lowly valleys were a constant witness to God's creative power, and a never-failing assurance of His protecting care. Those pilgrims learned to love the silent symbols of Jehovah's presence. They indulged no repining because of the hardships of their lot; they were never lonely amid the mountain solitudes. They thanked God that He had provided for them an asylum from the wrath and cruelty of men. They rejoiced in their freedom to worship before Him. Often when pursued by their enemies, the strength of the hills proved a sure defense. From many a lofty cliff they chanted the praise of God, and the armies of Rome could not silence their songs of thanksgiving.

Pure, simple, and fervent was the piety of these followers of Christ. The principles of truth they valued above houses and lands, friends, kindred, even life itself. These principles they earnestly sought to impress upon the hearts of the young. From earliest childhood the youth were instructed in the Scriptures and taught to regard sacredly the claims of the law of God. Copies of the Bible were rare; therefore its precious words were committed to memory. Many were able to repeat large portions of both the Old and the New Testament. Thoughts of God were associated alike with the sublime scenery of nature and with the humble blessings of daily life. Little children learned to look with gratitude to God as the giver of every favor and every comfort.

Parents, tender and affectionate as they were, loved their children too wisely to accustom them to self-indulgence. Before them was a life of trial and hardship, perhaps a martyr's death. They were educated from childhood to endure hardness, to submit to control, and yet to think and act for themselves. Very early they were taught to bear responsibilities, to be guarded in speech, and to understand the wisdom of silence. One indiscreet word let fall in the hearing of their enemies might imperil not only the life of the speaker, but the lives of hundreds of his brethren; for as wolves hunting their prey did the enemies of truth pursue those who dared to claim freedom of religious faith.

The Waldenses had sacrificed their worldly prosperity for the truth's sake, and with persevering patience they toiled for their bread. Every spot of tillable land among the mountains was carefully improved; the valleys and the less fertile hillsides were made to yield their increase. Economy and severe self-denial formed a part of the education which the children received as their only legacy. They were taught that God designs life to be a discipline, and that their wants could be supplied only by personal labor, by forethought, care, and faith. The process was laborious and wearisome, but it was wholesome, just what man needs in his fallen state, the

school which God has provided for his training and development. While the youth were [subjected] to toil and hardship, the culture of the intellect was not neglected. They were taught that all their powers belonged to God, and that all were to be improved and developed for His service.

[Their] churches, in their purity and simplicity, resembled the church of apostolic times. Rejecting the supremacy of the pope and prelate, they held the Bible as the only supreme, infallible authority. Their pastors, unlike the lordly priests of Rome, followed the example of their Master, who "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." They fed the flock of God, leading them to the green pastures and living fountains of His holy word. Far from the monuments of human pomp and pride the people assembled, not in magnificent churches or grand cathedrals, but beneath the shadow of the mountains, in the Alpine valleys, or, in time of danger, in some rocky stronghold, to listen to the words of truth from the servants of Christ. The pastors not only preached the gospel, but they visited the sick, catechized the children, admonished the erring, and labored to settle disputes and promote harmony and brotherly love. In times of peace they were sustained by the freewill offerings of the people; but, like Paul the tentmaker, each learned some trade or profession by which, if necessary, to provide for his own support.

From their pastors the youth received instruction. While attention was given to branches of general learning, the Bible was made the chief study. The Gospels of Matthew and John were committed to memory, with many of the Epistles. They were employed also in copying the Scriptures. Some manuscripts contained the whole Bible, others only brief selections, to which some simple explanations of the text were added by those who were able to expound the Scriptures. Thus were brought forth the treasures of truth so long concealed by those who sought to exalt themselves above God.

By patient, untiring labor, sometimes in the deep, dark caverns of the earth, by the light of torches, the Sacred Scriptures were written out, verse by verse, chapter by chapter. Thus the work went on, the revealed will of God shining out like pure gold; how much brighter, clearer, and more powerful because of the trials undergone for its sake only those could realize who were engaged in the work. Angels from heaven surrounded these faithful workers.

... God designed the Bible to be a lessonbook to all mankind, in childhood, youth, and manhood, and to be studied through all time. He gave His word to men as a revelation of Himself. Every new truth discerned is a fresh disclosure of the character of its Author. The study of the Scriptures is the means divinely ordained to bring men into closer connection with their Creator and to give them a clearer knowledge of His will. It is the medium of communication between God and man.

While the Waldenses regarded the fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom, they were not blind to the importance of a contact with the world, a knowledge of men and of active life, in expanding the mind and quickening the perceptions. From their schools in the mountains some of the youth were sent to institutions of learning in the cities of France or Italy, where was a more extended field for study, thought, and observation than in their native Alps. The youth thus sent forth were exposed to temptation, they witnessed vice, they encountered Satan's wily agents, who urged upon them the most subtle heresies and the most dangerous deceptions. But their education from childhood had been of a character to prepare them for all this.

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The spirit of Christ is a missionary spirit. The very first impulse of the renewed heart is to bring others also to the Saviour. ... They felt that God required more of them than merely to preserve the truth in its purity in their own churches; that a solemn responsibility rested upon them to let their light shine forth to those who were in darkness; by the mighty power of God's word they sought to break the bondage which Rome had imposed. ...

They secretly carried about with them copies of the Bible, in whole or in part; and whenever an opportunity was presented, they called ... attention ... to these manuscripts. Often an interest to read God's word was thus awakened, and some portion was gladly left with those who desired to receive it.

The work of these missionaries began in the plains and valleys at the foot of their own mountains, but it extended far beyond these limits. With naked feet and in garments coarse and travel-stained as were those of their Master, they passed through great cities and penetrated to distant lands. Everywhere they scattered the precious seed. Churches sprang up in their path, and the blood of martyrs witnessed for the truth. The day of God will reveal a rich harvest of souls garnered by the labors of these faithful men. Veiled and silent, the word of God was making its way through Christendom and meeting a glad reception in the homes and hearts of men.

To the Waldenses the Scriptures were not merely a record of God's dealings with men in the past, and a revelation of the responsibilities and duties of the present, but an unfolding of the perils and glories of the future. They believed that the end of all things was not far distant, and as they studied the Bible with prayer and tears they were the more deeply impressed with its precious utterances and with their duty to make known to others its saving truths. They saw the plan of salvation clearly revealed in the sacred pages, and they found comfort, hope, and peace in believing in Jesus. <sup>2</sup>

This is just small part of Chapter 4 of The Great Controversy. Other chapters tell the inspiring stories of more well-known martyrs from the Dark Ages. But deadly Christian persecution persists today, as the Coptic Christians in Egypt are painfully aware. For them, simply going to church is a death-defying act.

But what does this mean to Christians in twenty-first century America? We will talk about that after this short musical break.

[music – “Thy Word is a Lamp Unto My Feet”]

## Part 2

Before the break we were talking about Christian persecution. Fox's Book of Martyrs tells not only of persecution of Christians by non-Christians, but also tells of persecution of Christians by the organized church. Although persecution of Christians in America is not nearly as bloody as it was in Europe in the Middle Ages, it still exists. Furthermore, the verbal attacks come from those who claim to be followers of Christ. Liberal Christians join with atheists to defend the teaching of evolution in public schools, and ridicule anyone who believes in a literal six-day creation a few thousand years ago. Liberal Christians and atheists criticize Bible-believing Christians who oppose abortion and homosexuality. You should not be surprised that some of the most vile verbal attacks against Christians come from other people who call themselves Christians. Jesus said this would happen.

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<sup>2</sup> Ellen White, *The Great Controversy*, Chapter 4, “The Waldenses”, <http://www.whiteestate.org/books/gc/gc4.html>

**“All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them. [John 16:1-4, NIV]**

Bible-believing Christians are labeled as “legalistic” and “intolerant bigots” by those who consider themselves to be more enlightened children of God. They say Jesus nailed the law to the cross, and replaced it with non-judgmental love. But John said,

**We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did. [1 John 2:3-6, NIV]**

Compared to other times and other places, there is very little persecution of Christians in America today. That is because Christianity has been so diluted by tolerance of sin that there are hardly any real Christians left to persecute. The devil has convinced many modern Christians that God doesn’t care if you sin or not—He will save you no matter what you do. As a result, many people who call themselves Christians participate in a worldly lifestyle and don’t oppose sinful practices. There is no need to persecute Christians who are Christians in name only. But John tells us that you must be born again and overcome sin. You can do it.

**Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God. [1 John 3:4-9, NIV]**

Christianity brings the true believer inner peace; but that inner peace is usually surrounded by external conflict. That’s why Jesus said,

**“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn**

**““a man against his father,  
a daughter against her mother,  
a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—  
a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.’**

**“Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. [Matthew 10:34-39, NIV]**

**Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.” [Luke 12:51-53, NIV]**

**“You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.**

**“Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. [Mark 13:9-13, NIV]**

If you stand firmly for your beliefs, there is a very good chance that you will make some of your friends and family members mad. Your natural reaction might be to doubt yourself. Don't faint in the face of opposition. Listen to Peter when he says,

**Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. [1 Peter 4:12-17, NIV]**

Persecution is not proof of piety. As Peter just said, you might suffer because you are a murder, thief, or meddler. There is no merit in that. But if you aren't persecuted, you should ask yourself, “Why not?” Are you not Christ-like? If you aren't persecuted for being like Christ, you are missing out on a blessing. In the Sermon on the Mount 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.**

**“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot [Mt. 5:11-13]**

Are you going to be blessed for your saltiness—or will you be thrown out and trampled underfoot?

On Veteran's Day we honor those who signed up for military service, knowing full well that it would not be easy, and would be dangerous. When you sign up for Christian service, you should know it will not be easy, and could be dangerous. But don't be afraid. Take comfort in these words:

**But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.” But in your hearts revere 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, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. [1Peter 3:14-18, NIV]**

**What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him,**

**graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:**

**“For your sake we face death all day long;  
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”**

**No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. [Romans 8:31-39, NIV]**

**God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you. [2 Thessalonians 1:6-10, NIV]**

[music – “Stand Up, Stand Up For Jesus”]