

In the impending wars, famine, pestilence and beasts that are upon us, there will be in God's army three levels of men. In the epistle of I John, these are addressed according to their level of spiritual maturity, or training. In a simplistic way, maturity in a man is equivalent to his degree of experience, personal discipline and focus.

The story of Gideon closely parallels today's social/spiritual war, in that his nation was in the throes of mature and pervasive evil. Gideon himself underwent a process of eliminating fear, then doubt, followed by being totally convinced that God had indeed spoken to him. Then there was a testing of his level of obedience, being filled with the Holy Spirit, and personal convincing (twice). Next came the elimination process and the sorting of men to be under Gideon. This process was based on rather nebulous factors. First was (here again) the element of fear; 22,000 out of 32,000 of the fearful went home. The next testing came in the form of personal discipline and focus, to see who watched while they drank. Of those, 9700 out of 10,000 went home; three hundred remained. When all was said and done, one out of one hundred passed Godly muster, a common ratio in His order of things.

While Gideon's army comprised the on-the-ground fighting unit, the ratio and levels of focus applied to a group of men I was honored to teach. I realized their level of training in spiritual matters was threefold. As we completed the first part of three stages of study, my mind was drawn to the military as an analogy. When in boot camp, the new recruits study the war manual; then they undergo simulated combat, but with blank ammo. The third phase is with live ammo, increasing the needed focus and discipline.

Carrying the military analogy a bit further, there is the concept of infantry, Special Forces and officers. The generals have to make decisions that affect tens of thousands of lives; whereas the Special Forces volunteer, so the decisions they make affect only themselves. What separates one level from another is the degree of focus, discipline and experience.

These same levels of focus, discipline and experience are what constitute John's addressing the three spiritual levels in I John 2:12-14. These three are: little children, young men and fathers. The qualifications given each are, respectively:

The *children*, "know the Father," and "have their sins forgiven."

The *young men* have "overcome the evil one," "the word abides in them," and "they are strong."

The *fathers* "have known Him who is from the beginning" (repeated twice).

What strikes me about the military analogy, in particular the "young men overcoming the evil one," is that while in training for the Special Forces, there is an elevated degree of overcoming personal mental limitations, such as fear under duress. A case in point is the younger brother of a friend of mine who volunteered for Special Operations. One of the first forays was to take the recruits 10 miles out into the Pacific off San Diego and kick them out to swim back to shore.

One of the young men swam until he was exhausted, then scared, began to sink. Another swam until he was very tired, and then turned over onto his back, floated until he was rested a little, and then continued swimming. Mental discipline and focus to the point of overcoming one's fears was the deciding factor as to who made the cut.

The same was true for Gideon's 300 men, and equally true of those called "young men who have overcome the evil one." What does this mean? Overcome what? We see the word *overcome* mentioned several times throughout Jesus' speeches, as well as His admonishments to the seven *ekklesia* in Asia Minor in the Revelation. "Overcome" is the Greek word *nike*, meaning to conquer, have mastery over, conquest, etc. One of the qualifications for an elder is that he "have mastery over himself." Peter refers several times to "self-control" being needed.

So what is "control over one's self?" What does "self" mean? That answer which satisfied me came in the early morning hours late last week. The "self" is the diseased part of the soul that I believe is housed in the middle brain, the limbic system. Therein are the roots of four "drives" common to man; they are reproduction (sex), food, water and sleep. Call them urges if you will. (Add drug addiction, unnatural fear and you have more.) They do not involve thinking, only reaction. When pushed to the limit, men (and women), as well as all beasts, will do anything, including killing their own babies, to fulfill these drives. This part of the brain is common to all animals, including *homo sapiens*. What distinguishes man is the third part of the brain, the cerebral cortex. This is the part that maintains control.

Overcoming one's "self," then, is controlling our urges. As that occurs, one passes from being a child to a young man. In the process strength develops. The Greek word *ischuros*, means strong or forcible.¹ The word incorporates the meanings of being valiant, mighty, and exuding strength. Now Jesus and John are differentiating here between children and young men. The same differentiation exists between regular infantry and the Special Ops. That inner strength is apparent in not only what they do, but also in their carriage. Look at a man's eyes and you can tell. The eyes will betray or reveal a man quicker than anything.

Going one step upwards, we find ourselves looking at a "father," or in the case of the military version, a general. He not only has self-control, he has experience tacked on. The inner self-control combined with experience is what enables the general to make tough decisions that affect tens of thousands. Again, look at a (true) general's eyes and his carriage. The younger naturally fear and respect him.

An insert here is necessary; in the training of a child, or adolescent, there can be some distractions such as noise, traffic, eating, talking, etc. Things are not as critical as they become in latter stages. Training, teaching to read, learning to talk, examining the natural world and the like can be accomplished in the midst of a minor distractions with some degree of success. But when the young child reaches high school or college, the level of distractions must decrease for serious learning to take place.

Using the military analogy, boot camp for the enlisted infantry incorporates a fairly high level of distractions (diminished by the drill sergeant). But ratchet up the degree of focus required for the job, and you need to diminish the level of distraction. When Special Ops go into training, they leave the barracks and head for the remote boonies so as to reduce to a minimum any distractions. Thus the intensity increases, bringing along with it a higher degree of focus.

As one compares the Special Ops and the three levels of spiritual maturity found in I John, there is also a third parallel, being the three compartments in the Mosaic Tabernacle, found in the Old Testament. In the Mosaic Tabernacle there is an open outer court, thence a covered second, the Holy Place, and finally a third inwardly covered section, the Holy of Holies. I would suggest these are closely related to the three levels of believers found in I John, as well as the three levels of the military analogy. This relationship would place the “children” and the “infantry” in the outer court, largely exposed and in danger. The “strong young men” and the Special Ops would place them in the Holy Place. If this is true, then the qualifying factor between the “children” and the “strong young men” would be the element of their self control of their urges and the sensitivity of their “hearing.”

The third room would then be the “room” of the strong, focused and experienced (read mature, trustworthy, and dependable, in command of self, totally dedicated with a singular objective). This is where the fathers are, who teach and train the young men, but in a remote, isolated place.

Teach and train for what? Since the analogies of the three levels of believers and military match fairly well, it would stand to reason there is a common factor, namely, an enemy.

So who is the enemy?

In the military, the enemy is more often than not a visible threat to national security, whether remote or nearby. But in the case of the believer, the enemy is a bit more obscure and covert. For the sake of brevity, let us go straightway to our common enemy, the Evil One, who is behind all conflict, destruction and death. He is against both military as well as civilians. But his objective is primarily to destroy that which is right, just and true.

Now; to further abbreviate matters, let us go to the primary entity that affects the *ekklesia*, or the ones who are *the called out*. These descriptions of the enemy came into focus, and are found in II Peter 2.

II Peter 2 lists:

False prophets	Despising authority	Revilers of the Godly
False teachers	Loud-mouthed	Adultery
False words	Self-willed	Enticers
False compassion	Irrational animals	Greedy
False mercy	Revelers	Waterless springs
Licentiousness	Blots and blemishes	Driven mists

Thus the Enemy being revealed, to what then are we called? Back to the military analogy, it depends on several elements, each applicable in the three realms. One is the particular talents each of us is given from birth, and the type of training to which we are exposed. The decision is from the Captain of the Host, but the hearing of the orders gets a bit more crucial as the nature of the task gets critical, just as in the Special Ops. In other words, Special Ops are just that, Special. Regular infantry is just that, Regular.

Those that settled in Gideon's army were sifted pretty thoroughly. Those that were called to David's side to make him king in I Chronicles 12:23-ff, had some rather awesome qualities.

I suggest some of us know our bents, or talents. Some of us also know, or at least suspect, our calling as it were, and the direction to which our innermost beings are drawn. This may be a bit out there, but the Captain of the Host has already decided, trained and deployed only those who have been trained to hear. Even these can turn their backs, go AWOL or settle in for the fight.

We know; it's just that we pretend we do not know. But we know; *we know*...

We **will** be waging war. We had better be well-prepared, and with a very sensitive ear. This time it will not be on a physical plane, nor by any might of our own.

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1. Strong, James, Strong's Exhaustive Concordance: Concise Dictionary of Words in the Greek Testament with their rendering in the King James Version, number 2478. Other definitions are also from this volume.