

## **Truth Is Not A Mental Concept. Christian Raw Recruits (Chapter 2, Jesus Life is THE Example..., Spiral page 27; PB page 46)**

We must be careful not to limit our application of God's Truth to being mostly just thinking about it. While we must think upon the things of God (Philippians 4:8), we must also put God's will into practice (James 1:22-25). Acting in accordance with God's will is the goal for us in each of our trials. To act on God's Word in a trial we have to transform our hearts during the trial. This enables us to discern how God's Word applies to us in that trial. Satan actively seeks to deceive us on how we apply God's Word to a particular trial by keeping our hearts disturbed and not centered on the peace and love of Christ. When Satan is successful, our minds might think about serving God, but our hearts will not be inclined toward Him; our actions will follow our hearts, not our thinking.

If we forget that God's Truth involves actively transforming our hearts during trials (1 John 3:18-24), we might end up acting as if knowing some of God's Truth means we will automatically do it. When that happens, we are treating God's Truth as if living according to it mainly deals with what we think. This can lead to two things:

1. Acting as if we ourselves are Christian "raw recruits."
2. Influencing new believers to be Christian "raw recruits."

### What is a Christian "raw recruit?"

The Bible is full of many analogies comparing the life of the faithful to various aspects of a soldier's life. This is because there are many similarities between spiritual war and physical war. The concept of the Christian raw recruit is simply an analogy from the military that we (authors) felt lends itself to speaking to the issue of not reducing God's Truth to simply a collection of thoughts and mental concepts that we think about.

One of the greatest challenges any leader or commander faces is seasoning new, or raw, recruits. What do we mean by "seasoned?" Christians might refer to this as maturity, or spiritual maturity. When recruits finish basic training they have basic skills, but are still "raw" compared to seasoned soldiers who have gone beyond the basics by learning how to apply their skills in actual combat.

### Special Consideration:

We will talk more about "seasoning" in a moment. First, it is important to acknowledge that while the analogy of a Christian raw recruit can be helpful, it is also limited. There are differences between a Christian and a military recruit. The military recruit is trained in a "safe" environment away from actual combat conditions. The believer (along with every other person on the planet) is involved in spiritual battles on pretty much a daily basis. Though we may be believers, we have probably lost more spiritual battles than we've won in Christ, simply because we are all born into sin from the start. Regardless, we can count on the fact that Satan will seek to use our past losses and the habits of our old selves to influence us in the present. Satan tries to get us to resort to our old ways, and he likes to get us to do that without recognizing we are doing it... deception!

Among believers, seasoning, or spiritual maturity, is often measured in part by how long a person has been a Christian. Sometimes spiritual maturity might be measured by how much Christian training a person has. We have to be careful with this. Viewing maturity mainly in

these ways might cause us to focus on knowledge as the spiritual yardstick for spiritual maturity, as opposed to *application* of our knowledge as being the true yardstick. If we treat knowledge itself as the yardstick, this is like saying basic training is the same as combat seasoning. As with a military recruit, knowledge is basic; proper application of that knowledge under combat (spiritual battle) conditions brings seasoning.

Obviously we need knowledge of God's written Word, and of what the Lord wants of us in any given trial. This discussion is NOT meant to imply that the pursuit of spiritual and Biblical knowledge is of little or no value. In fact, it is hugely important! The point here is to weigh in a bit more strongly on the importance of heart transformation as facilitating application of our Christian knowledge. Again, this is important because sometimes we might slip into assuming our knowledge of the Bible will automatically lead to the application of that knowledge. We might slip into thinking we will do God's will just because we know what it is. Adam and Eve knew God's will and didn't do it. Abraham and Sarah knew God's will and didn't do it. David often knew but didn't follow. Solomon often didn't. The Israelites often didn't. Jesus' disciples often knew His will and didn't do it. Believers, to whom the New Testament letters were written, often didn't do God's will though they knew it.

The bottom line here is that Satan is called, "The deceiver," because he can frequently lure us into not acting on what we know or can discern of what God wants! In those moments of trial, we may have knowledge, but similar to a raw recruit in the military, we won't put it into practice in the spiritual battle if we don't transform our heart during the trial before we act.

#### What is Christian "basic training?"

Obviously what a person is taught and learns depends on the church and Body of believers the person associates with. It also depends on the person and their involvement level in the church and a church's training. Generally speaking, Christian basic training can include, but is not limited to:

1. Information about one's particular denomination
2. Learning its principles of belief
3. Learning its practices and/or rituals
4. Scripture memorization, memorizing certain prayers or learning how to pray
5. How to study the Bible, doing Bible Studies and/or hearing lessons based on the Bible's teachings
6. Learning principles and concepts about:
  - a. God
  - b. What is the problem of sin, how sin permeates the world, and why Jesus is the Savior
  - c. What our relationship with God does for us (in this life and the next)

- c. How we enter into a relationship with God
  - e. What our relationship with God should look like (things we do as a solid Christians)
  - f. Prayer and its importance in dealing with life, including trials
7. Hearing/receiving general lessons/messages about living for God
  8. Being encouraged to live for the Lord during trials
  9. In-depth study of themes, concepts or implications of the Bible's teachings

All or some combination of these things may be what you were taught being a Christian is all about. They are indeed part of discipleship. In doing those things, we are being discipled in the elementary, or basic, teachings of Christ and God's written Word. Hebrews 6:1-2 also gives examples of things like the above as being "the basics."

Being discipled *beyond* the basics involves learning how to skillfully examine our daily lives in terms of how we apply or fail to apply what we learn. Going beyond those basics involves responding to the Holy Spirit's counsel both from the Scriptures and within our hearts. The "going beyond the basics" part of discipleship involves transforming the heart during a trial *because* our sense of the peace of Christ is disturbed. When our hearts transform, we are then able to work toward discerning God's guidance to us in those trials. As a result, we stand strong for the Lord... we are at peace, we have confidence and are strong. Hebrews 10:32-39 speaks to this transformation of the heart.

#### Why is the "in-depth study" (# 9 above) included in the list of basic training?

Because it leads us to greater knowledge without necessarily giving us the tools to introspect to see how the Scriptural knowledge applies in a given trial. By increasing Biblical knowledge, some believers increase in their abilities to apply that knowledge. This is not due to the knowledge itself, but because the heart is actually changing. There isn't anything wrong with that. Unfortunately though, sometimes we might have gained in knowledge but we do not actually change our hearts in accordance with that knowledge during a trial. Sometimes we just know more. The required change of heart during trials is what the writer of Hebrews 10:32-39 talks about. The point is to make sure we, personally, are introspecting and examining ourselves to ensure that isn't happening to us!

#### What does it mean to survive spiritual battles?

When one has the kinds of Christian training listed above, we might think we are prepared to be in the world, fight the fight, live our lives effectively according to God's Truth... and survive. In part we are somewhat prepared because we are more intelligent about the things of God. But in war, including spiritual war, being trained enough to fight and survive does not hinge on basic training alone. Basic training is only the start. Fighting and surviving requires becoming seasoned based on the basic training.

In physical wars, many raw recruits die relatively quickly. This is because basic training only gives soldiers knowledge of what to do in combat. Raw recruits lack combat experience.

Raw recruits spend a lot of time training in conditions resembling combat. They spend a lot of time receiving instructions about what to do in combat. However, combat experience is what seasons a soldier.

As believers and disciples of Christ, our survival in spiritual battles is measured not in terms of whether we live, but whether we live according to Truth/God with increasing and intentional consistency during trials. This cannot be accomplished with mental knowledge only. We need more than that; we must be able to hear our instructions from the voice (Spirit) of the Commander (Christ) each time He seeks to get our attention, i.e. when Satan is attacking and our hearts are disturbed (John 16:12-15).

Jesus also made the same point when He spoke to those who, to the Jews, often appeared most "right with God," the Pharisees (Matthew 23, Matthew 15:8-9). In other words, Jesus says the Pharisees had a lot of knowledge and could verbalize God's written Word, but the Truth was not being embraced in their inner being; their fears, their righteous concerns, and their hearts revealed this. Jesus also made this point to the Disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:40-41).

When we think about how we should act to please God, we often focus on what we think we are supposed to *do*, as if the action itself is the Truth. This is like following a "law." However, Jesus (Matthew 23, Matthew 15:8-9) says that an action is only according to Truth when the Truth is held properly in both the mind *and* heart of a person. This is because the "spirit" of the action is defined by how these aspects of our human spirit work together. Without being disciplined by God's Spirit to change the heart, believers may fall to making religious or moral judgments and not even realize it. (See Supplemental Information Q&A for more about "What Are Religious/Moral Judgments?")

The mind cannot change the heart, but our hearts can change our minds  
when we interact with God's Spirit in our hearts.

To be effective in warfare, knowing our enemy is important to defeating his attacks. It is not enough to know Satan will attack; we must analyze our own specific weaknesses and understand Satan's tactics in trials. We can see this lesson in another comparison to being a soldier. In the military, there are 5 parts to every plan for a battle. The 1<sup>st</sup> of 5 parts is completely about the enemy and the enemy's intentions. Based on that, the other 4 parts deal with what the friendly forces intend to do to defeat the enemy. Put another way, 4 out of 5 parts of any military plan of action focus on "the good guys," but figuring this out happens *after* recognizing the real-life specific threat the enemy seeks to bring to bear.

Spiritually speaking, our focus must include examining our old self, as well as the new self. This helps us to respond to God's Spirit within to defeat UNtruth when we are being lured and baited by it. To draw on God's power, we must gain the personal experience of recognizing Satan's attacks in us in the moments of trial. As Jesus' and New Testament believers' lives indicate, Christian seasoning, or maturity, is about Satan-influenced thinking which is corrected by a Spirit-influenced heart. Our part of discerning God's guidance can increase by seeking out how Satan is trying to get us to decrease in Christ!

When we aren't examining our hearts through the eyes of Christ, then we can't effectively evaluate our own application of our knowledge of Him and His will during a trial. When we transform our hearts in a trial, Satan's influence over our minds is removed from the King's chair and we can discern how God would have us surrender the thinking of our old selves. We cannot

do this with knowledge alone; we NEED to hear the Holy Spirit's voice in the heart. The Worksheet Questions and Exercises in *Feelings 101* are designed to help you to tune into the Lord's guidance to you in your own heart. They are designed to help you recognize how Satan seeks to cultivate your old self during your trials. They are designed to help you see and respond to the Lord's discipleship during trials, as part of cultivating your new self in Him.

The spiritual war that wages between God and Satan, good and evil, is depicted everywhere. It is the subject of the Bible, of course, and of movies, books, and music. Often times one of the most meaningful aspects of our Christian lives is the fervor and motivation that comes from seeing ourselves as participants in that battle. But sometimes we might notice that Satan seems to have one particular advantage (although ultimately he will lose). When a person is born, it is as if they start on Satan's side in the sense that we are all born in sin. In this sense, it is as if Satan is the "home team" and has the "home-court" advantage. It makes sense then that the Gospel must be spread. Leading others to Christ is like creating mutiny among the enemy's (Satan's) ranks. When a person becomes a believer, that person is choosing to change sides in the spiritual war. This is a strong motivating thought that can often help focus our efforts on winning others over to the Lord.

Sometimes, however, believers (both old and new) can inadvertently function like Christian "raw recruits" when they are not being disciplined beyond the elementary teachings of Christ.

Discipleship beyond the elementary teachings deals with learning how to apply what we know about God's Truth to our trials. Without that, we can end up lacking the practical application skills of seasoned soldiers of God. We each need to take responsibility to check ourselves before the Lord and make sure that we are not being the Christian equivalent of a "raw recruit."