

DOES THE CHURCH GET IT

American society “hasn’t gotten the message that we are at war.” That statement was made by Phillip Carter, a former army captain and advocate of reinstating a military draft in the United States, at a symposium in Washington, D.C., on Wednesday, March 30, 2005. Carter was debating Lawrence Korb, a draft opponent and assistant defense secretary in the Reagan administration (article entitled, “Another year in Iraq may force a draft,” analysts say; The Tennessean, Thursday, March 31, 2005; 10A) Korb noted that since only a tiny segment of the populace is sacrificing, there is no political pressure to change the system.

The point of this article is not to argue for or against the need for a military draft. But statements made by participants in the symposium bear reflection by members of the church of Christ. Have we “gotten the message that we are at war” when a third to half of those in the pews at a Sunday morning worship service don’t come back for the same purpose Sunday or Wednesday evening? If a lop-sided portion of the work and giving and teaching of a congregation gets done by a small percentage of the membership, who can deny that “only a tiny segment of the populace is sacrificing?” Jude 3 leaves no doubt that those baptized into Christ have also been conscripted into the Lord’s service. “Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” The Greek word for “contend” here is a very strong one which means “to struggle, literally to compete for a prize, figuratively to contend with an adversary; to fight (Strong’s Concordance). Christians are commanded to “put on the whole armor of God ... fight the good fight of faith ... endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 6:10ff; I Timothy 6:12; II Timothy 2:2). John Bright describes the casual, get-along-with-everybody Christianity so commonplace today: “We are parade-ground troops, reluctant to dirty our uniforms; we are soldiers who refuse orders, sleep on duty, serve when convenient, and often traitors to the cause ... We do not like to think of the church as militant at all, but rather caught up in a stream of fraternal progress. We are men of tolerance and goodwill who find it hard to believe the God of the Bible (though infinitely more loving) is not necessarily as tolerant as we. Feeling no animus towards the enemies of God, we fraternize with them until we no longer recognize them as enemies, and are ready to make almost any compromise with them in the interests of peace! Some questions are in order. Has the 21st century church gotten the message that we are in a full-blown spiritual war? Or are we parade-ground troops, relaxing in Jesus and demanding that faith be fun? Are we actually fighting the good fight of faith? Does the church really get it?

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