

## An Unequal Comparison

Christ's Sacrifice Vs. A Soldier's Sacrifice

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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I saw a meme on Facebook not too long ago that snagged my attention. It was not the first time I had seen this meme or something like it, but this last time I saw it, it struck me in a way that it had not before. I have a great many friends on Facebook, so I don't remember who posted it. I don't know at all who it was—and besides, a good third or more of my Facebook friends are not in the church or are no longer in the church, so it could easily have been one of them. If you are on Facebook, or you have Instagram or some of the other ones where they show memes, you may have seen it at some point too. You can also find it on bumper stickers, T-shirts, beach towels, wall plaques, and all kinds of stuff that people sell to make money.

Anyway, in searching for it on the Internet just to make sure I got the quotation right, I noticed that it comes in many varieties. Sometimes, it's just a quotation on a plain field. Sometimes it is a little bit more ornamented, sometimes with a picture behind it. The one I saw the other day, though, had two pictures—one on top, one on bottom. The top picture was an illustration of Jesus Christ dying or dead on the cross, and the bottom picture was a soldier in his military gear. Arranged around these pictures were these words:

“Only two defining forces have offered to die for you. Jesus Christ and the American soldier. One died for your soul. The other died for your freedom.”

This is attributed to Dennis Edward O'Brien, Sergeant, USMC. Evidently he did this at the funeral of one of his comrades as a eulogy.

On its face, the words seem true enough—factual in their own right—although it doesn't take a whole lot of thought for you to begin to see that there are holes in the sentiment and in the facts. I think it is important that we consider these sayings a bit more thoroughly before passing them on, because this quotation—when it comes down to it—makes a false or unequal comparison that casts Jesus Christ and His awesome sacrifice, which we will commemorate here in just a few weeks, in a poor light.

Now, I realize that in America, the military is regarded as the protectors, not only of our borders and interests and physical lives, but also of our freedoms under the Constitution. Our military has gained a hallowed status through the wars the country has fought, and perhaps especially by the Civil War in which one side fought for some sort

of principle. On side fought for their rights and the other side fought to protect the Union. We cherish both of these principles—unity and our rights and freedoms. Both sides felt their dead sanctified by their sacrifices to preserve the principles they held highest.

This idea or tradition of sacred service has come down to our time. Over the past few years, it has certainly become part of the secular religion of American patriotism, where people believe that America is the closest thing to the Kingdom of God. To some—or many—it has become sacrosanct and inalienable that the military holds this position in our society. "All military men and women are heroes"—I hear that frequently. "All military men and women are role models." "All military men and women are Captain Americas." Those who have died or lost a body part are saints in this secular religion, their memories undefiled, their service honorable—and as the meme purports, the people in the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, the Marines, have all been raised to a Christ-like level. Their sacrifice in war—as this meme has shown—is put on par with Christ's sacrifice.

Before I offend anyone who was a soldier or who has family members who died in service to this country, I sincerely recognize the debt we owe those who have done these things, who do such work, who made sacrifices so we can live in peace, safety, and freedom. I get it. That was a hard thing to do, a hard thing to bear, a hard thing to take. In this world, such a sacrifice is commendable. Their service is praiseworthy, their sacrifices gratefully appreciated. My point, though, is that, in the end, their *human* service or sacrifice does not at all compare to *our Savior's* sacrifice to pay for our sins and open the way to eternal life in a relationship with God. The two are not the same. To compare them brings Christ down.

I'm sure a few recruits join the military for altruistic reasons—they are ready to give their lives. But most do not. For some, it is a family tradition or even a family expectation. For others, it is the only option, because their grades or their skills or their opportunities just don't reach a level to go to college, or what have you.. For some, it is a way to pay for college. For others, it is a path to citizenship. For some, it is a career path to work their way up the ladder and become somebody in the military. For others, they simply like firearms, explosives, and battle.

Yet, Jesus Christ became a human being for the express purpose of becoming the sacrifice to pay for human sin. His whole life was one of struggle and sacrifice, of overcoming temptation to sin and setting a flawless, godly example for those who would follow Him. Except for the help of His Father—which was immense—He was entirely alone in all His struggle for His entire life. He was the only one who got it, except for those few near the end of His life who were finally beginning to catch on. Only He saw

the real, eternal, profound reasons for doing what He did. He voluntarily gave up His life, knowing what was coming. Not to win a battle or even a war, and certainly not for any specific human nation, but for the salvation and good of every human being on the face of the earth who would eventually believe in Him.

To me, there is no comparison between Christ's sacrifice and a soldier's sacrifice, even though they both end in death. The one death is far superior to the other. The former (Christ's sacrifice) so outshines the latter that the unequal comparison actually demeans the importance and glory of what Christ did. Like I said before, it brings Christ down to the level of a profane soldier—our Holy God down to the level of a mere man, dying for some earthly and ultimately futile cause.

A verse that has really struck me of late is Psalm 50:21.

**Psalm 50:21** [God says] These things you have done [He is talking about all their sins; all the sins of Israel], and I kept silent; *you thought that I was altogether like you*; but I will rebuke you, and set them in order before your eyes."

The whole psalm is about the vast difference between the glory and righteousness of God and the sinfulness and disloyalty of men. Because of our limitations, we think of Him in human terms—and as far as it goes, it is fine to do that. But we need to understand that He is altogether NOT like us. He is absolutely transcendent in every respect! We should never let that fact get very far from our minds.