

M-I-A'S OF THE LORD'S ARMY

The Lord's concern and love for spiritual MIAs is seen in his exhortation to those still fighting the good fight of faith to identify, restore and convert people who continue to be important to the Savior.

World War II, which many of us vividly remember, resulted in millions of deaths, multitudes of physical and emotional wounds, thousands of widows and orphans, shattered dreams and broken hearts that never healed. In the course of the years, many grieving fathers, mothers, wives and children had their hurt taken to "the silent city." But for others, the pain of MIA loved ones still lingers.

According to the Dec. 13/20, 2008, issue of *World*, more than 50 years after the global tragedy of WWII, some 72,500 Americans are still classified as missing in action ("Rest in Peace," 13).

The New Testament often uses the metaphor of warfare in explaining the Christian life (Ephesians 6:10-18; 2 Timothy 2:3-4; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5). The statistic of wartime MIAs makes one wonder how many in the Lord's army are currently missing in action.

In any city or community where the Lord's church has existed for any length of time, there are those who have wandered away spiritually. If the MIAs could be identified and restored or converted (Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20), membership in the Lord's army would probably nearly double. The Lord's concern and love for spiritual MIAs is seen in His exhortation to those still fighting the good fight of faith to identify, restore and convert people who continue to be important to the Savior.

Many people are now missing in action because the unfairness of life with its trouble, illnesses and heartaches got them so discouraged that they wandered astray. God's people often suffer trials, pain, disappointment and illness (James 1:2; 1 Peter 1:5-9). Paul knew the potential blessings of perseverance, character and hope that could come from a proper reaction to the trials of life; therefore he could say "We glory in tribulations" (Romans 5:3 NKJV). However, if people blame God for the pain and trials of life that come from Satan, they may indeed become MIAs in the Lord's army (1 Peter 5:8-9).

In Scripture, the Holy Spirit warned God's people of the danger Christian soldiers face. God's soldiers are admonished to refuse the efforts of the world to win conformity to its distorted values (Romans 12:1-2). John warned, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world" (1 John 2:15 KJV).

This age is a time of intellectual confusion because of such philosophies as humanism, secularism, materialism, hedonism and relativism. How many young people are now MIA because some atheistic professor robbed them of their faith or some pleasure-seeking and pleasure-preaching peers led them into a sinful life? No wonder the Bible warns of the danger of human philosophy (Colossians 2:8).

The world is not only intellectually confused but also characterized by moral corruption (2 Peter 1:3-4). The salient characteristics are identified as works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). The morality of this age is as corrupted as in the time of Isaiah when people were calling evil good and good evil (Isaiah 5:20).

Killing children in the name of abortion is supposedly good. If not, why have some 50 million been so abused? Rejecting God's plan for marriage (Matthew 19:1-9) for an

THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

"...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel..." (Amos 7:8)

RESTORING OUR JOY

Text: _____

I. Stop _____

Notes:

II. Stop _____

Notes:

III. Stop _____

Notes:

WALKING IN TRUTH

Text: _____

I. John's _____ in Gaius

Notes:

II. John's _____ of Diotrephes

Notes:

III. John's _____ of Demetrius

Notes:

alternative lifestyle is supposedly good, but taking God's Word to show the sanctity of marriage of one man to one woman is evil or homophobic.

Can you imagine the suffering of parents and spouses whose beloved soldiers are unaccounted for? If so, perhaps it will give an insight into the "longsuffering of God" when some of His children are MIA. Can we not see why there is "joy in heaven over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:7 NKJV)?

Organizations are now actively seeking the mortal remains of MIAs from WWII. On one South Sea island, the bodies of 139 sailors and Marines have recently been recovered (*World*, p. 13). Now is the time for elders, preachers and all Christians to seek actively to find, reclaim, restore and convert the MIAs of the church (Galatians 6:1). May we be moved to action by the possibility of bringing joy to heaven because, as our Savior declared, "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10).

-Tom Holland

I DREW MY CIRCLE AGAIN

When I first became a member of the church, my circle was very big...for it included all who, like myself, had believed and been baptized. I was happy in the thought that my brethren were many...but—having a keen and observant mind—I soon learned that many of my brethren were erring. I could not tolerate any people within my circle but those who, like myself, were right on all points of doctrine and practice. Too, some made mistakes and sinned. What could I do? I had to do something! I drew my circle, placed myself and a few as righteous as I within, and the others without. I soon observed that some within my circle were self righteous, unforgiving, jealous, and proud, so in righteous indignation, my circle I drew again, leaving the Publicans and sinner outside, excluding the Pharisees in all their pride, with myself and the righteous and humble within. I heard ugly rumors about some brethren. I saw then that some of them were worldly minded; their thoughts were constantly on things of a worldly nature, they drank coffee, when, like me, they should drink tea. So duty bound, to save my reputation, I drew my circle again, leaving those reputable, spiritually-minded within. I soon realized in time that only my family and I remained in the circle. I had a good family, but to my surprise, my family finally disagreed with me. I was always right. A man must be steadfast. I have never been a factious man! So in strong determination I drew my circle again, leaving me quite alone.

THE BOOK OF CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY

Christian hospitality seems to be a lost art. Many have turned to such a degree of backbiting, anger, and outright slander that hospitality appears to be to such an extreme that nobody even thinks about it anymore. That fact, though, does not negate the continued need for all children of God to show forth a spirit of hospitality to all men, and especially unto them who are of the household of faith (Galatians 6:10). And it is the one whom John is addressing, one named Gaius, who stands in this epistle as a foremost example of what Christian hospitality is supposed to be.

In John's third general epistle, he addresses this topic of Christian hospitality by penning a portrait of three men, two who were splendid examples of God's expectations for man, and one who was nothing but bold, brash, and belligerent toward God's faithful servants. However, it is John's preliminary remarks that really set the tone for how the three mentioned men are remembered. John begins by saying, "*Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth*" (III John 2-4). Everything mentioned from henceforth is a reflection of that individual's reaction to that truth. Would they accept it or would they reject it? The deep recesses of the heart are unveiled by the outer workings of our lives. Thus, who are these three men whom John mentions, and what did their hearts reveal?

First, John refers to the one whom he is addressing, Gaius. There are four Gaius' mentioned in the New Testament, three who were close associates of Paul, and this one, a close associate of John. It cannot necessarily be assumed that any of these were the same, but some might have been. Regardless, John reveals some important things about this Gaius. In verses five through eight John says:

"Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well: because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth."

First, as mentioned above, Gaius walked in the truth and allowed that to direct his steps in all areas of life, leading him to the commendations that John would grant. Second, Gaius was a man given to hospitality. And his hospitality was not prejudiced, but was freely extended to all, whether brother in Christ or not. It was that hospitality that was not only of physical help to strangers, but was of spiritual because they saw what he did and it granted them a positive impression of the church. Then, third, John viewed Gaius' life as a great example for all children of God to achieve in their own, seeking to be fellow helpers to the truth. Thus, all things considered, Gaius served as a great example of what Christian hospitality is supposed to be.

Second, John refers to a man name Diotrefes. There is no other mention in scripture to this man, but he remains one of the most known characters of the Bible because of that for which he is recognized. John said:

"I wrote unto the church: but Diotrefes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church. Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God" (vs. 9-11).

Diotrefes stands, and will stand, through history as a thorn in the side of God's will. Wherein His expectation is that we love and help one another, looking toward the common good, Diotrefes rather despised what was good and right for his own self-righteous will. He rejected truth and thus rejected simple Christian hospitality, and continues to serve as an example of what Christian hospitality is not to be.

Then, third, John mentions briefly a man named Demetrius. About Demetrius, John wrote: "*Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is truth*" (vs. 12). Demetrius was known by all men, and a comparison to the standard supported the fact, as having a good report. There was nothing that could be held against Demetrius and John mentions him as one who could serve as an example to Gaius in his extended efforts to do good. Thus, like Gaius himself, Demetrius is a godly model of Christianity.

Too far have we moved away from the New Testament principles of Christian goodness. Let us, like Gaius, commit ourselves to Christian hospitality and realize the tool that it can be in seeking to evangelize the world. The fact remains, supported by III John, that without practicing Christian hospitality, we are not walking in truth.

-Andy Brewer