

## Uniforms

When I arrived at my deployment location in Kabul, Afghanistan, the first thing I noticed was all the different uniforms. This is a NATO base with over 2200 soldiers from 42 different nations. The U.S. military is in the minority, and my particular service branch (the Air Force) is a small piece of that group. With so many different uniforms, it is easy to recognize the Air Force service members. You might even say the Air Force members stick out like a sore thumb. This actually serves as a source of comfort to me. When I look around and find myself surrounded by people from different nations, the sight of just one U.S. Air Force member makes me feel a little safer, a little reassured, a little more confident, and a little braver.

When I see all these other soldiers here, I'm fairly confident that they are here to defend freedom like I am. But the U.S. Air Force member is my true brother-in-arms, for he has received much of the same training I have received and has the same perspective on many things as I have. I have many things in common with other U.S. Air Force members. I have several things in common with members of other branches of the U.S. I have a few things in common with the soldiers of our allied nations. And of course I have almost nothing in common with those who are enemies of freedom.

While I am here, I am required to always wear an authorized uniform. The command authorities prohibit me from wearing civilian clothes. In other words, I'm not supposed to look like the rest of the world. I'm supposed to look like a soldier representing the United States of America. And I'm supposed to do that all day, every day. Why? There are several reasons. This uniform reminds me of who I am; it reminds me of my duties and loyalties. It also identifies me to others. Other U.S. Air Force members may be comforted in seeing me nearby, just as their presence strengthens me. Members of other allied forces also know that the United States is represented by my presence. And the enemies know who I am too. To some, my presence in this uniform may deter them from a hostile act. To others, my presence in this uniform makes me a target. Either way, I wear this uniform proudly, and if necessary I may even die in this uniform.

Today is my second full day here, and since the only people I know here so far were busy with other things, this evening I went to supper alone. I walked down a poorly lit road and got in line with many strangers to enter the dining facility. I looked around, but did not see anyone I knew. So I sat alone to eat. When I finished, I went to dispose of my tray, and there at the trash can I ran into someone I knew from years ago at a previous duty station. I was surprised, and I almost wanted to hug him because I was so happy and comforted to see a friendly face. He said he recognized me when I entered, and he could tell I was new here because of the dazed and confused look on my face. (He was correct in his assessment!) But I was thankful to see him, and even if I never run into him again while I am here, I am glad to know that he is here too.

Perhaps it is a good thing that all the militaries in the world wear different uniforms. Otherwise how would I know the allies from the enemies? How would I know who I can trust and who I can count on to watch my back? I am thankful for this uniform and I consider it an honor that my country trusts me to wear it.

Christians wear uniforms too. The Christian uniform is his way of life...the behavior that he puts on display to the world. When we look around the world, we see many different people wearing many different “uniforms” in their religious and moral views. Even among those who claim the Christian faith there are different uniforms. I’m not talking about the tall hats of the Catholic Cardinals or the matching gowns of Protestant choir members. I’m talking about the way they live and the doctrinal beliefs they hold.

The Christian uniform serves the same roles as the military uniform. It identifies who you are and who you serve. Just like my military allies wearing uniforms from other nations, I can spot those with strong religious or moral views by their behavior, and I am glad to know I am in the company of basically good and law-abiding people. But spiritually speaking, my true brother-in-arms as a Christian is another Christian.

It is dangerous, even treasonous, for the Christian to take off his Christian uniform. Indeed, some people “put on” their religious uniform at certain times (to go to church service) and “take off” that uniform at other times to suit their desires. It makes me wonder whether they wear Christianity as a disguise over their true condition (Matt. 23:27-28). When I go into the world, I am surrounded by people of all sorts, some good and some not so much. But when I see another real Christian, it gives me strength, it gives me courage, it helps me remember who I am, and it comforts me to know that there are other Christians in the world with the same perspective on things as I have.

Here is why it is treasonous for the Christian to behave like he is not one: when another Christian is struggling with temptation or trials, he needs to know that he has support from other Christians. Perhaps he is trying to overcome some addiction, such as alcohol or immorality or gambling. If he knows another Christian is nearby, he may be encouraged to resist the temptation. But if the only nearby Christian has set aside his Christian uniform and is wearing the uniform of worldliness, that Christian has abandoned his brother in need and has delivered up his struggling brother to the clutches of Satan and sin. That Christian has committed spiritual treason against his God and his brothers. He has fled from the side of good and taken up arms on side of the enemy. Even if he is not actively encouraging sin, we must remember that all that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.

Remember the story I told about seeing the friend in the dining facility? He could have just as easily ignored me, and I would have never known. But I’m glad he didn’t ignore me. And when you and I as Christians go out in the world, we need to identify ourselves as Christians so that others can recognize us, for even a brief meeting between two passing Christians is comforting to them. Maybe you spot another Christian in the grocery store or the mall: greet them, let them know you are there, and take comfort in their presence as well. Consider that, as Jesus prepared to face the cross, even He was comforted by the presence of someone familiar: “An angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him” (Lk. 22:43).

The Christian way of life makes him a target. Satan doesn’t have to target people who are already lost in sin...they are already under his control. Satan is after those he does not control: Christians. Your behavior sets you apart from the rest of the world (1 Pet. 2:12). Non-Christians in the world may also target you for your beliefs and practices to persecute you. We are in good

company, that of Jesus and Peter and Paul, if we suffer for wearing this uniform properly. We are in poor company if we suffer for looking like the rest of the world (1 Pet 3:17).

Why wear the Christian uniform? “So that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world” (Phil 2:15). If you are a Christian, please know that when I am out in the world, I am looking for your light. Please don’t disguise yourself as the “gentiles” in the world. Please don’t take off your Christian uniform. There aren’t many of us in the world, and I need to know you are there. And I won’t know you are a Christian if you aren’t acting like one. Christians, wear your uniforms every day everywhere you go! If you die, wouldn’t you rather stand before God’s judgment seat (2 Cor. 5:10) wearing the Christian uniform than wearing the garb of worldliness?