

Memorial Day: The Mental Attitude of the Winner Believer

25 & 29 May 2022

I. Introduction

The observance of Memorial Day began shortly after the War Between the States. Its purpose was to honor the war dead of both North and South.

Originally commemorating soldiers killed in the American Civil War, the observance was later extended to all U.S. war dead. Most states conform to the federal practice of observing the holiday on the last Monday of May, which began in 1971, but a few retain the long-established day of celebration, May 30.

The custom itself of honoring the graves of the war dead began before the close of the Civil War. In the South, the town of Columbus, Mississippi, claims origination of the formal observance for both the Union and the Confederate dead in 1866. Waterloo, New York, is cited as the birthplace of the observance in the North in the same year.¹

Beginning with the War for Independence, our military services have been engaged in 13 major conflicts:

Independence	25,324
1812	2,260
War between the States: North	363,020
War between the States: South	119,110
Spanish-American	2,893
Philippines	4,273
World War I	116,708
World War II +	408,306
Pearl Harbor	2,388
Korea	54,246
Vietnam +	58,219
Tet Offensive	7,040
Iraqi Freedom	<u>4,486</u>
Total:	1,232,074 ²

Added to this total are over 1,578,534 wounded. These totals only address the major conflicts in which American forces have been engaged.

¹ *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaedia* (2010), 7:1040–41.

² <http://www.americanwarlibrary.com/allwars.htm>.



We pause in our studies today in order to commemorate the sacrifices these men, and some women, made for our freedoms, the most important of which is the privilege of gathering together freely for the study of Scripture. Today we will briefly examine the mental attitude needed for victory, be it on the battlefields of human history or in the more sophisticated combat in the prevailing struggles common in the Angelic Conflict.

II. Definition: ἄσκέω (*askéō*) and ἄσκησις (*askēsis*)

The mental attitude can be summed up with the Greek word for asceticism: ἄσκησις (*askēsis*) which is derived from the verb, ἄσκέω (*askéō*): “to apply oneself with commitment to some activity, *practice, engage in*; practice of athletes.”³ In our context it refers to the practice of an athlete with the idea transferred to martyrs.

ἄσκέω. In the New Testament this is found only at Acts 24:16. In taking pains to have a conscience void of offence towards God and man, Paul is careful to listen constantly to the admonishing and warning voice of conscience in order not to offend God or man and not to neglect any obligations towards them.

The Greek world was already familiar with spiritual asceticism in the sense of exercise in the taming of the passions and the doing of righteousness acts, or of conscious and almost technical exercise in the control of thoughts and impulses. We can see this in the older Sophists, who singled out ἄσκησις as a third factor in the process of education. (494)

Apart from Acts 24:16, Paul never uses the word. Yet in substance we already find in Paul this training in bodily and spiritual self-discipline and renunciation, e.g., in 1 Corinthians 9:25–27, ... obviously depict the ἀσκεῖν of the spiritual athlete. This meaning is not so dramatically expressed in Acts 24:16. It is obvious, however, that the concern of the apostle to have a conscience void of offence is a definite task which fully occupies him from morning to night in all the situations in which he has dealings with God and men.⁴ (495)

1. Heródotus, the fifth-century B.C. Greek historian, brought its meaning into the spiritual sense of exercising a virtue.
2. The word later came to be associated with activities that demanded self-control, self-discipline, and adherence to a system. Further, it meant to exercise; to be meticulous; to labor; to strive.

³ “ἄσκέω (*askéō*); ἄσκησις (*askēsis*) in Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed., rev., and ed. by Frederick William Danker (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 143.

⁴ Hans Windisch, “ἄσκέω (*askéō*),” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed., Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), I: 494, 495.



3. Paul used the word in his defence before Felix in:
Acts 24:16 “I strive [the durative, retroactive, progressive present indicative of ἀσκέω (*askéō*)] always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.” (NIV)
4. Paul was speaking of a quality of behavior of which not only God would approve but mankind as well.
5. There is a cosmic asceticism that we denounce because it promotes the heresy that by being a nice guy or by doing human-good works you can earn your salvation or attain spirituality or spiritual maturity.
6. But this apostasy is not how the ancient Greeks used the term nor was it what Paul meant in Acts 24:16.
7. Paul is speaking of a mental attitude which requires the believer to exercise self-discipline and utilize self-restraint.
8. There are things the believer is free to do, but he does not exercise those freedoms because he has a responsibility before God as well as his fellow man.
9. Such asceticism requires a person to deny himself certain desires in order for him to reach a given goal.
10. Every discipline in life demands submission to a system which limits one’s freedoms. Volition is free to choose any option. Integrity is not.
11. Limiting freedom, means that in order to excel in a given endeavor, one must not allow distractions to draw attention away from the chosen objective.
12. Such asceticism places the burden of strict denial of certain freedoms.
13. This denial must come from self-restraint and self-control.
14. For example, in athletics, asceticism means strict adherence to the training rules.
15. You must train yourself mentally to ignore distractions that might hinder your physical development and the sharpening of your skills.
16. There were two kinds of athletes in Greece, the ἀγωνία (*agōnía*) and the ἀθλητής (*athlētēs*).
17. *Agōnía* is a noun from which we get the English word “agony.” *Athlētēs* were the athletes who trained for the purpose of playing in the national games.

18. The *athlētēs* had a reason and a purpose to train and to become ascetic regarding certain personal desires: The prospect of winning among very stiff competition.
19. To be a winner, one must sacrifice many personal freedoms and isolate many personal desires. These athletes went into strict training for ten months before the beginning of the national games.
20. They were to exercise under the authority of a *γυμνάσιάρχ* (*gumnásiarch*): “superintendent of athletic training at Athens and elsewhere.”⁵ The biblical application of this illustration is the pastor-teacher.
21. During the 10 months the athlete could not leave the training complex, i.e, the seminary with emphasis on the divine dynasphere.
22. All were on a very strict diet: Bible doctrine only; no human viewpoint.
23. All athletes exercised and trained in the nude—*γυμνάζω* (*gumnázō*): “commonly in literature of gymnastic exercises in the nude: ‘exercise naked, train’; but also figurative of mental and spiritual powers: to train, undergo discipline.”⁶
24. Trumpet calls were made each day at different times for the athletes to assemble for training (daily intake of truth: *ἀλήθεια* (*alētheia*)).
25. If any of these rules were violated on just one occasion, the offender was disqualified from participating in the games, even if the offense occurred after nine months and 29 days.
26. Consequently, those who arrived to compete in the games were worthy to participate. They had paid their dues by isolating all distractions.
27. If they won in the competition, their victory was well deserved and the lavish gifts that befell them were well earned.
28. A win at the national games resulted in a crown of ivy leaves presented at the arena (escrow blessings in time).
29. On his return to his hometown, other phenomenal blessings awaited him:
 - a. A special gate was cut into the city’s wall through which he would enter on his return.
 - b. After his entry, the wall would be sealed shut and a plaque placed on it in his honor.
 - c. In this procession through the city he rode in a royal chariot.

⁵ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed., rev. and aug. by Henry Stuart Jones and Roderick McKenzie Scott (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940), 362.

⁶ Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 208.



- d. He received a lifetime pass to all future national games.
 - e. He was the recipient of a very large monetary reward.
 - f. The city's poet laureate would compose an ode in his honor.
 - g. A statue of him would be unveiled in the ἀγορά (*agorá*), the public square.
 - h. His children were cared for and received their education at public expense.
 - i. He became exempt from paying all income taxes for the rest of his life.
 - j. All these rewards are symbolic of escrow blessings for eternity.
30. What was true for the Greek athlete was also true of the Roman soldier.
31. In the military, soldiers train for warfare by isolating any distractions which might cause them to be at a disadvantage in combat.
32. The motivation is to win, to be the best, to defend the national honor, to maintain freedom, to preserve prosperity.
33. The grand strategy of the Roman Empire was based on the tactical superiority of the Roman Army.
34. Nineteenth century French military historian Charles Ardant du Picq [Árdánt dū Pick] wrote that the Roman Army's superiority was because of an esprit de corps among the troops.
35. Esprit de corps, definition: "The regard entertained by the members of a body for the honor and interests of the body as a whole, and of each other as belonging to it."⁷
36. Charles Ardent du Picq described the mental training of a good army as follows:

The determining factor is an organization that best assures esprit, reliability, confidence, and unity is the quality of troops. Man will not really fight except under disciplinary pressure. The purpose of discipline is to make men fight in spite of themselves. No army is worthy of its name without discipline. Discipline cannot be secured or created on a day. It is an institution, a tradition.

⁷ *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), s.v. "esprit de corps."



37. Arther Ferrill comments in his book, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*:

Romans normally fought in close order in waves of thin lines. The advantage of the Roman tactical system was that all available manpower could be brought into direct action along this line. Roman soldiers were not expected to fight to the death before being replaced by men from the rear. There was a regular rotation of fighting waves. Obviously such a system demanded good fighters throughout. There was no place for weak troops in a Roman legion.

Although the efficient use of manpower in the Roman army was obviously important, the psychological advantages of such a system were enormous. Because Roman soldiers in the front of the line could expect to be reinforced in the course of the fighting, they fought confidently, and knew in the depths of their souls that their comrades-in-arms to the rear would not leave them in the lurch. As a result, Romans inflicted heavy casualties even when they were defeated. Against untrained troops, they simply could not be defeated, even when they were greatly outnumbered.⁸

38. Biblical history proves this point with regard to famous Israeli victories cataloged in Scripture.
39. In Genesis 14, we see Abraham's victory over the Mesopotamian Allied Forces under King Chedōrlāōmer of Élam.
40. Verses 1–7 describe the invasion into the Jordan Valley by the coalition army. Historical records place the size of this army at about 100,000.
41. Verses 4–9 describe the Jordan Valley Campaign of the Mesopotamian Allied Forces which lasted one year and involved seven major battles.
42. The final battle was fought at the southern end of the Jordan Valley where was located the Pentapolis cities of Ádmah, Zēboím, Zóar, Sódóm, and Gomórrah. Lot, the nephew of Abraham, lived in Sodom.
43. During the battle, which is called in verse 10, the Battle of the Valley of Siddim, Lot was captured and taken hostage.
44. Verse 14 informs us that when Abraham heard of his nephew's capture, he immediately mobilized the Confederate Rapid Deployment Force which had been organized by Mámrē, Éshcōl, and Āner along with Abraham.
45. Genesis 14:15–16 describe a night assault in which Abraham's Delta Force attacked Chedōrlāōmer's Mesopotamian Allied Forces at the headwaters of the Jordan River. Here 318 Rapid Deployment Troops infiltrated the camp, secured the hostages, and then routed the 100,000-man army, pursuing it to the north of Damascus.

⁸ Arther Ferrill, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: The Military Explanation* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1986), 29.



46. In Joshua, chapter 6, Joshua led an assault on Jericho by marching the priesthood around the city for seven days. On the seventh day, they circumvented the city seven times followed by a collective shout from the people. The city's walls fell and the Israelites captured the city.
47. Gideon captured the superior allied forces of the Míidianites and Ámalekites in Judges, chapter seven. Verse 12 states that they were as numerous as locusts. The actual number of the army is given in Judges 8:10 as 135,000 men.
48. Consequently, Gideon's force of 301 men [see Judges 7:8] defeated, again in a night assault, the vastly superior allied armies.
49. We could also consider the invasion of Judah by the combined forces of the Moabites and Ammonites in 2 Chronicles 20.
50. Jehoshaphat's prayer to God in verses 1–13 reflects the fact his Israeli army is vastly outnumbered. In light of these odds, Jehoshaphat concludes his prayer in **2 Chronicles 20:12** by saying:

“O our God, will You not judge them? For we are powerless before this great multitude who are coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are on you.”

This paragraph ends with this observation in **2 Chronicles 20:13**:

All Judah was standing before the Lord, with their infants, their wives, and their children.

51. The Hebrews were victorious without firing a shot as per the after-action report in verses 20–24:
 - (1) Jehoshaphat stood and said, “Listen to me, O Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, put your trust in the Lord your God and you will be established. Put your trust in His prophets and succeed.” (v. 20)
 - (2) The Levite choir's artillery was their singing to the Lord and those who praised Him who said, “Give thanks to the Lord, for His lovingkindness is everlasting.” (v. 21)
 - (3) As they sang and offered thanks, the Lord set ambushes against the sons of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; so they were routed. (v. 22)
 - (4) For the sons of Ammon and Moab rose up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir destroying them completely and then set about destroying each other. (v.23)
 - (5) Afterward, the people gathered to observe the battlefield:



2 Chronicles 20:24 When Judah came to the lookout of the wilderness, they looked toward the multitude, and behold, they were corpses lying on the ground, and no one had escaped.

- (6) While in this passage, let's note the event that took place once the Jews returned to Jerusalem:

2 Chronicles 20:26 Then on the fourth day they assembled in the valley of Berácah, for there they blessed the Lord. Therefore, they have named that place "The Valley of Berácah" to this day.

52. How can we overlook young David's triumph over the colossal Goliath? His response to the giant's challenge in 1 Samuel 17:45–47 reflects his courage motivated and sustained by doctrine:

1 Samuel 17:45 Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted.

v. 46 This day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you.⁹ And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel,

v. 47 and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not deliver by sword or spear; for the battle is the Lord's and He will give you into our hands." (NASB)

53. What the Jews may have lacked in knowledge of military science, they made up for it with courage and delegated omnipotence.
54. Rarely was the Israeli army larger than its opponent and so it was with the Romans. Arther Ferrill writes about this subject in *The Fall of the Roman Empire*:

From the days of the Republic, strategists had taken it for granted that Roman armies might easily be outnumbered by barbarian tribes. Discipline and training, sophisticated logistics, the techniques of siege warfare, military engineering, a professional system of command, and high morale based on justifiable confidence had given the Roman armies an edge no barbarian horde could hope to match.¹⁰

⁹ 1 Samuel 17:51a, Then David ran and stood over the Philistine and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him, and cut off his head with it.

¹⁰ Ferrill, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 127.

