

# HOLD THE LINE

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It was on a stiflingly hot day in July that Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, formerly a college professor, found himself on a wooded hillside in southern Pennsylvania. His dark blue woolen frock coat must have been uncomfortably hot and itchy, but he was by now accustomed to the uniform he wore and the rigors of life in the Army of the Potomac.

His superior officer, Colonel Strong Vincent, only a few minutes earlier, had positioned the Lieutenant Colonel, with his 300 men, the remnant of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine Regiment, on the southern slope of Little Round Top. Little Round Top was a small hill at the southern end of the Union line. Chamberlain protected the left flank of the Army of the Potomac. He guarded the hill from which the entirety of his army could be surveyed. From its heights, the Army of the Potomac could be blasted to pieces by Confederate artillery. He had been charged to hold this ground at all costs. To lose this ground would mean the loss of the battle, loss of the army, the loss of the war, the loss of the Union. It was July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1863, the second day of the Battle of Gettysburg in the American Civil War.

Chamberlain and his men had to ***hold the line*** at all costs. He and his men awaited the assault on his position which was sure to come within a few short minutes. He took stock of his assets and liabilities. The 20<sup>th</sup> Maine held the superior position. They were defending a hill. Their attackers would be at a disadvantage as Chamberlain's men fired down on them from concealment behind the rocks and trees. Chamberlain's men were experienced war veterans. They were committed to their cause. He knew he could depend on them to follow orders and stand their ground. On the other hand, their ammunition was limited. Additionally, they were facing a force of unknown strength. Their attackers were also experienced in battle and had the advantage of extreme confidence, born of their many victories against the larger and better equipped Union Army.

The stakes in the contest for Little Round Top could not have been higher. From its summit, Confederate artillery would command the entire Union line. Several batteries of Confederate cannon positioned there would have no difficulty in destroying the Army of the Potomac. It was imperative for the Union Army to retain possession of this terrain. Chamberlain told his men they would need to be stubborn. They must not allow themselves to be pushed back. They must not relinquish their position. They had to hold the line. The fate of all they had been fighting for could be decided in the next hours.

Shortly, Confederate troops were seen advancing up the slope. The attack had begun! The attackers were the 15<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry commanded by Colonel William Oates. Although outnumbered, Chamberlain's tactical advantages allowed the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine to repel the initial attack. The Rebel forces retreated and regrouped for a second assault. Again, they were driven back down the slope of Little Round Top. Yet a third time, the defenders repulsed the enemy's advance.

Attempting to flank the Union position, the 15<sup>th</sup> Alabama prepared for a fourth assault on the hill. The 20<sup>th</sup> Maine was now nearly out of ammunition and had lost a third of its complement. The men had recovered all the cartridges they could from their fallen comrades, but there was not enough to hold out against another charge. Chamberlain quickly convened a meeting with his officers and told them his plan to meet the next assault. He surmised that the attackers must be near exhaustion from repeatedly charging up the hill and should be low on ammunition as well. The 20<sup>th</sup> Maine would re-deploy the line to counter their opponent's flanking maneuvers and then, with bayonets fixed, they would charge the advancing Confederates.

Here is Chamberlain's account of the bayonet charge:

"I stepped to the colors. The men turned towards me. One word was enough- 'BAYONETS!' It caught like fire and swept along the ranks. The men took it up with a shout, one could not say whether from the pit or the song of the morning sat, it was vain to order 'Forward!'. No mortal could have heard it in the mighty hosanna that was winging the sky. The whole line quivered from the start; the edge of the left-wing rippled, swung, tossed among the rocks, straightened, changed curve from scimitar to sickle-shape; and the bristling archers swooped down upon the serried host- down into the face of half a thousand! Two hundred men! ...Ranks were broken; some retired before us somewhat hastily; some threw their muskets to the the ground- even loaded; sunk on their knees, threw up their hands calling out, 'We surrender. Don't kill us!'"

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Those two hundred men with empty rifles routed the five hundred men of the 15<sup>th</sup> Alabama. Their dogged determination to hold their position defeated the enemy and made them flee before the advancing tide of fixed bayonets. The retreating Confederates threw down their weapons in terror as they fled back down the hill or surrendered.

The brutality and horror of war is senseless and ugly, yet there are lessons to be learned from it. The inspiring example of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine's stand on Little Round Top contains lessons for the Christian. Christians ARE at war and we have been admonished by the Bible to fight. We have an adversary, the Devil.

*1PE 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:*

He is a ruthless killer who seeks to deny us eternal life. Christ describes him as a murderer.

*JOH 8:44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.*

Like the Confederate attack on Little Round Top, Satan attacks us with wave after wave of persecution, troubles, attacks on faith, character assassination and temptations to give up the Christian way. He tempts us to disobey God. He pressures us to renounce our relationship with God and to accuse Him of evil. He delights in destroying good relationships among people. His goal is to force us to relinquish our position, to give up our tactical advantage against him.

Perhaps you are surprised to read that we have an advantage over a powerful spirit, the ruler, the god of this world, Satan, the Devil. What advantage could we possibly have? First, like the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine, we hold the high ground.

*PSA 18:2 The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my **high tower**.*

*PSA 144:2 My goodness, and **my fortress; my high tower**, and my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust; who subdueth my people under me.*

Colonel Vincent placed Chamberlain's unit in a defensible position. In a similar manner, God has placed us where we can fight. We are in a defended position, in a high tower, a fortress. Next, we have protection from God. Both these verses from the Psalms describe God as our shield, or buckler. God outfits us for battle with spiritual armor. Ephesians describes our field kit:

*EPH 6:10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. 11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. 13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*

Paul admonishes us to stand, to hold the line and not retreat. We need the armor of God to be able to hold out.

*14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; 15 And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: 18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;*

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Volumes could be written about this passage, but let's just summarize our assets for now. Our equipment for spiritual warfare is composed of these seven items:

- ❑ The truth
- ❑ Righteousness (obedience to the commandments)
- ❑ The firm footing or foundation of the Gospel (the good news of God's coming kingdom)
- ❑ Faith
- ❑ The hope of salvation
- ❑ The word of God
- ❑ Prayer

These are the Christian's weapons and armor. These are the implements of spiritual warfare that help us to defend our position against repeated assaults. The truth, righteous obedience, the Gospel, faith and hope are our high ground, our tactical advantage. If our enemy can make us give up the high ground, he will possess that advantage over us. The word of God and prayer are our offensive weapons.

Christ entered into single combat with and defeated Satan at the beginning of His earthly ministry. The record of this battle is in Luke 4:

*LUK 4:1 And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, 2 Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered. 3 And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread. 4 And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. 5 And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. 6 And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. 7 If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. 8 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. 9 And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: 10 For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: 11 And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. 12 And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. 13 And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.*

A study of this encounter with the enemy will show that Christ was wearing His battle dress, the armor of God that Paul described, and that His weapons were gleaming and ready. He defended Himself with prayer, with the truth, with His knowledge of the Gospel of the Kingdom, with righteousness. He used His sword, the word of God, to parry Satan's strokes. In the end, Satan had to retreat, defeated. Christ knew He was on the high ground with a significant tactical advantage. He didn't relinquish this advantage, He exploited it to win the battle. He didn't give Satan a chance! He did this to show us that we could do it too!

*JOH 16:33 These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

Christ overcame Satan, the ruler of the world, to show us how it could be done. He is the Captain of our salvation. The Captain is the one who leads by example. Therefore, we can follow Christ in battle against Satan. We can hold the line against Satan and when we do, he has to retreat from us as he retreated from Jesus. He will retreat like the Rebel soldiers on Little Round Top. That sounds amazing, but James tells us it is so:

*JAM 4:7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*

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Satan will flee from us if we stubbornly resist, holding the line against him. We must be determined not to let him force us off our hill, out of our tower. Here is an interesting scripture dealing with tactical advantage in spiritual warfare:

*EPH 4:27 Neither give place [ ( Gr) Topos Topography, ground, space, opportunity, room] to the devil.*

Paul tells us not to do the things which would give Satan the advantage of topography, or room to do his work. How might we apply that admonition? There are several things we can do and things we can avoid. We can stubbornly refuse to submit to temptations to do wrong. To sin is to remove the breastplate of righteousness. Satan's modus operandi is to divide and conquer. We can steadfastly refuse to do anything that would cause division in the Church. God hates those who sow discord among the brethren (Proverbs 6:16-19). Causing dissention gives Satan an opportunity to fight. Therefore, we must be patient and forbearing with each other. We must do the things that maintain unity, not destroy it. We can intensify prayer for hope and faith. We can wield the sword, the word of God. We can read and study our Bibles, knowing them intimately. Christ knew the scriptures and used them against Satan to refute his temptations. We must be able to employ this tactic as Christ did.

While we are fighting our spiritual battles, we can begin to feel like Chamberlain's men must have felt as their ammunition was spent. We tend to feel as if we are out of bullets and we will be over-run in the next charge. Fortunately, the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine had unseen resources and so does the Christian. We have all of God's ammunition, but it's invisible.

*2CO 10:3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)*

Even when we may be thinking that the fight is lost, we still have access to God and to His unseen resources. If we hold on to faith in God and His resources, His spiritual bullets, we can continue to fight, we can hold on. Remember, the tide of battle does not depend on the physical resources we can see. Satan will manipulate physical circumstances to demoralize us. The battle is in the mental and spiritual realms, not the physical one. This is where we must fight him. Stubbornly hold on to faith and hope and trust in God and His righteousness.

*1TI 1:18 This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; 19 **Holding faith, and a good conscience;** which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck:*

If we relinquish faith and conscience, our position will be overrun. Hold the line on faith. Keep it strong!!! If we pray and study and our spiritual fortifications will remain strong.

The entire Union Army could have been destroyed on that day in July 1863 if Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain and the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine had not stubbornly resisted the Confederate assault on Little Round Top. Had the Union army lost that battle, our nation and our world would be vastly different. His determined resistance eventually caused his enemy to flee and preserved the Union. He held the line.

In like manner, we are in a war, but with invisible and devious foes, a war with much higher stakes. We must also stubbornly refuse to give ground to our adversary. He wants us to move back off the high ground of the vital principles of life. He wants us to relinquish the bond of unity among ourselves. He wants us to back away from our relationship with God.

**Don't do it, don't give an inch! Don't ever give up!!  
HOLD the line!!!**

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