

Roman Military Coronae & Decorations; Importance of Experience in Battle Illustrates Stability of the Sophisticated Spiritual Life

1. We have recently noted wreaths awarded the victors at the four Greek Games. For gallantry in battle, Rome offered a number of wreaths for its battle heroes. Here's a list of the "crown" awards and the feat required for its presentation:

- 1) In 2 Timothy 2:5 this award is called a "prize" in the NASB while the NIV and KJV refer to it as a "crown." The Greek word is **στέφανος, *stephanos***, which is correctly translated crown and are actually floral wreaths. These must be differentiated from regal crowns.

2. The word for a regal crown is **διάδημα, *diadēma*** and is defined by W. E. Vine:¹

DIADĒMA (διάδημα) is derived from *diadeō*, to bind round. It was the kingly ornament for the head, and especially the blue band marked with white, used to bind on the turban or tiara of Persian kings. It was adopted by Alexander the Great and his successors. Among the Greeks and Romans it was the distinctive badge of royalty. Diocletian was the first Roman Emperor [284-305] to wear it constantly. The word is found in Revelation 19:12 in which it symbolizes the rule of Christ ["His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems ..."].²

3. The *stephanos* is given to the winner in the athletic contests of the games of Greece: (1) Olympic: olive, (2) Pythian: laurel, (3) Isthmian: pine, and (4) Nemean: parsley.
4. The Romans also had a system of awards for valor in battle. The Latin equivalent of the Greek *stephanos* is *corōna* which can be translated "crown" but wreath is better.
 - 1) The *corona obsidionalis* was given to the *legate* (general) who broke the siege of a beleaguered Roman army. It was made of grasses gathered from the site of the siege.
 - 2) The *coronae triumphales* were awarded to *legati* (generals) who had achieved an outstanding conquest against a strong enemy or in especially difficult circumstances. There were three categories:
 - a. *Insignis corona triumphalis*: worn by the commander during his triumph and was considered the most honorable of the three. Made of laurel leaves.

¹ See visual: Examples of Roman Diadems."

² W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, Jr., *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), 300.

- b. *Corona Etrusca* was held over the head of the commander during his triumph. Made of gold and often decorated with jewels.
 - c. *Corona provincialis* was carried before the commander in triumphal procession. Made of gold.
- 3) The *corona oleagina* was awarded to all soldiers under the command of the officer who had been awarded the *corona obsidionalis* or one of the *coronae triumphales*. Made of olive leaves.
- 4) Several others *coronae* were awarded to the rank and file and were made of gold plus adornments indicating the nature of the accomplishment:
- a. The *corona vallaris* was awarded to the first legionary to breach enemy lines. It was decorated with wood from the enemy barricade.
 - b. The *corona muralis* was presented to the first legionary to scale the walls of a besieged city and decorated with turrets, the small towers positioned along the walls of a city.
 - c. The *corona navalis* was given to the first sailor to board an enemy ship in a naval battle. It was decorated with a ship's prow.
- 5) The *corona civica* was the rarest award for a legionary. It was presented to the legionary who preserved the life of a Roman citizen in battle, slew his opponent, and maintained the ground on which the action occurred. Its rarity was due to the difficulty of documentation. Made of oak leaves and acorns.³
5. Having life-long impact, the *corona civica* was the highest honor for a legionary regardless of rank:

No act of bravery in battle was viewed as so important or so selfless as forcing back the enemy to save a fallen comrade. It was the epitome of comradeship, illustrating for whom the legionaries really fought: each other. This was the essence of the effectiveness of the army.

Marcus Helvius Rufus was famously awarded the *corona civica* by the Emperor Tiberius for saving the life of a fellow veteran legionary in a battle against Tacfarinas in AD 20.

³ <http://www.roman365.com/index.php>.

When ... the forces of Tacfarinas [Roman revolutionary] assaulted a stronghold named Thala [AD 17; in present-day Tunisia], they were routed by a detachment of legionary veterans not more than 500 in number. During the battle a common soldier, Helvius Rufus, earned the distinction of saving a fellow citizen, and was presented by governor Apronius with a *torque* [necklace] and spear. The civic crown was added by the emperor Tiberius, who regretted, more in sorrow than anger, that Apronius had not exercised his power to award this further honour. (Tacitus, *Annals*, 3.21)

Rufus is the last ordinary legionary known to have received such a spear, as the reward was soon confined to officers. An inscription from his hometown of Varia in Italy reveals that Rufus ... had added *Civica* to his name. Such acts of pride were not uncommon.⁴

6. Those who received crowns also received monetary rewards, freedom from taxes, children educated at public expense, and a statue erected in the public square in each soldier's hometown.
7. Polybius writes that, "After a battle in which some of them have distinguished themselves, the general calls an assembly of the troops, and bringing forward those whom he considers to have displayed conspicuous valour, first of all speaks in laudatory terms of the courageous deeds of each and of anything else in their previous conduct which deserves commendation." Only after this are the military decorations presented:
 - a. *Torque*: a necklace.
 - b. *Armillae*: gold armbands.
 - c. *Phalerae*: gold, silver, or bronze sculpted disks worn on the breastplate during parades.
 - d. *Hasta pura*: a ceremonial silver spear awarded to those who wounded an enemy in battle.
 - e. *Vexillum*: a silver replica of a standard or flag: a cup when presented to an infantryman and a horse trapping when presented to a cavalryman who killed an enemy in hand-to-hand combat.
8. These awards and decorations were not only recognition for doing one's duty toward a fellow soldier, the person's legion, or the Empire, they were also a source of motivation to excel in the art of war and enjoy all the rights, benefits, and privileges such an opportunity offered.
9. A final point on the Roman military: experience in combat enabled the Roman legionary to have great flexibility in battle.

⁴ Ross Cowan, *Roman Legionary: 58 BC–AD69* (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 20.

The Importance of experience in battle. Experience in battle was crucial. When attacked on the River Sambre (sam'-bra) in 57 BC Caesar states that his soldiers, by their training and experience in previous battles, knew best what to do in response and were able to devise their own commands. What is more, the legionaries working on the camp did not waste time in trying to locate their particular cohorts or centuries but formed up behind the nearest standard (Caesar, *Gallic War*, 2.20-21).

Appian [2d century AD Greek & Roman historian] asserts that the experience of each veteran legionary 'made him his own commander' (Appian, *Civil Wars*, 3.67-68). At the battle fought outside Bonn between the Batavian cohorts and the remainder of legio I (the First legion) Germanica in AD 69, despite being outnumbered, the combat experience and skill of the Batavians prevailed (Tacitus [Roman orator and historian, AD 56-120], *Histories*, 4.20). Tacitus also indicates that each soldier knew his place so that formations could be drawn up quickly (ibid. 2.42).⁵

10. The application from this paragraph focuses on the believer that has advanced to the sophisticated spiritual life:⁶ the believer that can "devise his own commands" when confronting a given situation.
11. This relates to spiritual autonomy where cognitive independence enables the believer to rely on his own inventory of ideas and his own personal experience for proper application.
12. At the battle near Bonn in AD 69, the outnumbered First Legion prevailed because of its legionaries' combat experience. Such is the case for believers who function in the sophisticated spiritual life.
13. Able to command themselves in times of stress and difficulty, they can keep their heads and function on a high inventory of ideas while others who have no wisdom fret about in fear and panic.
14. The ability of sophisticated believers to maintain soul tranquility, access personal wisdom and knowledge, and accurately discern the evolving Zeitgeist provides the stability that rookie or biblically illiterate believers do not possess.
15. This comment by Cowan summarizes the point:

Appian's account of the legio Martia and other veteran legions fighting at Forum Gallorum [In April 43 BC during the Roman civil war following Julius Caesar's assassination, Antony's legions collided with those of Pansa, in this north Italian village] is also instructive. The legio Martia ordered the five cohorts of recruits accompanying it not to join in the fighting in case their inexperience caused confusion.⁷

16. In times of increased and intensive hostilities from the Dark Side it is best that believers, inexperienced in the cosmic battle or oblivious of its presence, not join in the fighting.

⁵ Ross Cowan, *Roman Legionary: 58 BC-AD69* (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 50-51.

⁶ See visual: "Sophisticated Spiritual Life."

⁷ Ibid., 51.

17. Presently, biblically illiterate people – including both believers and unbelievers – are fighting the wrong battles. They pick hot-button issues such as abortion, suppression of speech, gun rights, or civil unions and organize opposition against them.
18. These are brush fires and each has its constituency backed by powerful special interest groups. The secret to overwhelming organized opposition from the Dark Side is for the Christian church to rally 'round biblical standards and convey them to a lost and dying world. This won't happen overnight.
19. The odds of attracting large numbers to the fight are slim and none because so many have taken sides in the cultural war. But the gospel of Christ is our only offensive weapon. Once a soul is won then the sword of truth must penetrate into the human spirit with divine viewpoint.
20. What so many in Christendom don't grasp is that the fight's commenced. They need to get to fighting or get away. And they cannot fight unless they understand who they are fighting.
21. Paul clearly reveals the identities of our opponents in:
Ephesians 6:12 - Because our combat is not against blood and flesh, but against general officers, against commissioned officers, against special-forces guerrillas and fifth-column spies of the Dark Side, against the demonic rank-and-file warriors of evil who populate the atmosphere.
22. To be effective in this conflict the believer must prepare his soul to enter the battlefields of the Invisible War, which takes us to Part II of our study of "The Full Armor of God."