

Have you heard of Chuck Bednarik, the American professional football player known as “Concrete Charlie?” Now, I’m talking about *American* football, not soccer, because of course, what Americans call soccer is known as “football” around the world. Well, Concrete Charlie was the last full-time two-way player in the National Football League, the NFL, and he played his last season in 1962! Why the change to players playing only on offense or defense? Well, that’s because the rules allow that a player can do just one or the other, so every player became specialized, so that today, pro football has very specialized skill sets, for example, quarterbacks and wide receivers on offense and linebackers and safeties on defense.

Well, what about basketball? Well, the rules are different there, so players play both offense and defense until they are substituted out. Still, the very best offensive players focus on offense, of course, while typically being more average at defense. And it’s the same for the very best defensive players...you get the drift. But there have only been a very few who are great at both offense and defense. In the NBA, only three players have won both the Defensive Player of the Year and the League’s Most Valuable Player (MVP) in the same year: Michael Jordan, Hakeem Olajuwon, and Giannis Antetokounmpo, who’s affectionately nicknamed the “Greek Freak” by fans. Think of it, only three players accomplished that feat over many decades of pro basketball—that’s how hard it is to be at the top on both offense and defense in basketball at the same time!

Then, how about hockey? In the NHL, some positions on the ice naturally can contribute in both offensive and defensive ways while out on the ice, and the League awards the Selke Trophy to the player at the forward position who was the best at handling both defensive *and* offensive elements. That one player is recognized as a phenomenal contributor to the team on *both* offense and defense!

So, are you personally on offense or defense in your roles in the Kingdom of God, your workplace stewardship, and managing your vocation? Let’s work at gleaning some answers to that. Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians (6:13-20) paints a powerful picture for believers: either believers are totally unarmed, or we are on both offense and defense simultaneously. Here the quote, then we’ll do some unpacking of it. “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.”

How about *that*? Here’s a bit of a recap. First, we clearly must get in the contest, we must put on the armor of God or, apparently, we won’t “be able to withstand in the evil day.” So, we must prepare to get in the game! Second, we put on the breastplate of righteousness...this is certainly designed for us to have protection—to defend ourselves! Third, look at our role on offense...that we take up the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit and do other spiritual preparations to proclaim the gospel for which we are ambassadors! There you have it! In one of the most famous passages in the New Testament, we have instruction to be fully girded for defense and go forth on offense simultaneously. So, here’s the clear question for us today: as believers, are we to be on offense or defense? The answer? “Yes!” Indeed, by God’s grace and equipping, we are to be on offense and defense *simultaneously!* We are truly equipped to be like a Michael Jordan or a “Concrete Charlie,” but all of that for Jesus! Amazing!

Indeed, we are to be confidently moving forward as ambassadors for Christ and His Kingdom, and “as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.” So, as we go forth with the Gospel to our neighbors locally and globally (on offense!), we have breastplates and helmets (that’s

defense!). What a picture of effectiveness on both offense and defense, working hand in hand, from helmet to shoes! That is exactly how Spirit-led believers have blanketed so much of the world, especially the last century or so, going forth such that hundreds of millions of believers have been added! Offense *and* defense, wedded together in an astute fashion.

Now, how about your workplace organization? Is it on offense or defense? Well, you can be on defense for a while, but if you're never on offense, you will simply shrivel and die. Just as important, you can't just do a short-term push on offense and then just hunker down on defense for a long time and expect to have a viable enterprise. Let's take a look at a couple of business examples.

Nowadays, Amazon's delivery vans or trucks can be seen all day long on many streets in the larger cities of America. But it wasn't always that way. When Amazon started, it was a very small start-up company going on offense—just basically selling books—and hardly anybody cared. So they could be on offense marketing-wise, and they used common-carrier deliverers like FedEx, UPS, and the U.S. Postal Service to deliver their books. This worked great, because Amazon didn't have enough volume to justify buying delivery vans and hiring drivers, and this general supply-chain approach worked really well for deliveries. However, that approach was very expensive and, yes, Amazon lost money for years early-on, given its relatively low volume nationally and high delivery costs.

But we know now that Amazon was intent on changing how everyone shopped for *everything*, not just books! And that would require a low-cost, highly reliable supply chain...in other words, a highly-reliable delivery structure that was *not dependent on anybody that wasn't Amazon*. Would FedEx or UPS reliably put Amazon's needs above their other customers? There was certainly no guarantee, especially during Christmastime! So, Amazon started adding its own network of delivery vans...going on defense against the possibilities of poor customer service. All this helped to ensure that Amazon could consistently control the timing of its deliveries, and in so doing, delight its customers with both fast and reliable service! That's good offense! Plus, Amazon fully implemented this when its volume became high enough to make lots of deliveries economical to Amazon...far less costly than generally hiring FedEx or UPS for deliveries. With this huge migration to Amazon-controlled deliveries, Amazon drove its increasing volume to profitability overall! So, was Amazon's maturing approach offense or defense? Well, you know it was both!

And Amazon also went on both defense and offense digitally by creating its own cloud storage that it could rely upon without fail. After all, people come to expect Amazon to be accessible, fast, and reliable, 24/7. So then, Amazon then offered cloud storage to others, and that segment of Amazon's business became wildly profitable, with sparse competition for several years. So, of course, Amazon's cloud storage approach worked extremely well for both defense of its retail business and offense for the cloud business!

So, what about you in your stewardship role at work? Are you highly focused on your workplace being on both offense and defense? If not, your competition will be knocking at your door very soon. And how about you personally? What is your standing in your line of work? Are you the knowledge worker you need to be? Do you have a strategy that is just defensive in approach, kind of fearfully trying to just hang on to your job? Or are you constantly gaining proficiency in the latest technologies relevant to your vocation, such that you can be valuable to many enterprises, perhaps even in many industry sectors?

Paul wrote that "God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control." (2 Timothy 1:7 ESV) *No fear*, but we do have to do our part...we must respond well! In our Kingdom roles, we must be advance with power and love, putting on the "whole armor of God"—yes, that's offense *and* defense. For our stewardship roles in our workplaces, our witness as competent believers is such that we must focus on both offense and defense, often in the same strategy, like Amazon! And for stewarding our vocations, we must *own* and constantly further develop our giftings—yes, that *too* is both offense and defense! Hey, are you poised just like that?

A&A: Application & Action

1. So, is the whole armor of God in Ephesians 6 evident in the American church—is the typical church truly armored up? If armored up, what are the actions taken that indicate a church is actually moving forward with the gospel of peace? Elaborate.
2. Many workplaces nowadays seem to either be in victim status or trying to be “on defense” with regard to strategy in this fast-moving era. How is your nonprofit or business workplace doing—is it vigorously “armored-up” and successfully progressing on offense while positioned well on defense? Elaborate.
3. How’s your vocational positioning—as a steward of your gifting, are you well-positioned for the future, both offensively and defensively speaking? Be specific.