

Are You a Man of Shovel and Sword?

Christian men today, myself included, suffer from a particular problem that has resulted from the many, fragmented doctrines and focuses among the various churches and sects of Christendom.

The problem is this: We don't know what the heck we are supposed to be doing in many practical matters of life. We are confused about when to be patient and when to take action. Are we supposed to hear from God before we seek a new job, move, marry, have kids, go to college, go on a diet, take a whiz ... you get the idea, right?

And, what does that "hearing from God" really look like? Is it a feeling? Does an obvious door open while others shut, thereby pointing us in the blessed direction?

At the same time, life isn't waiting around for us or for God's supposed timing. That mission trip is coming up. Should you go? Your car just broke down. Do you buy used or new? College will be starting soon. Do you go? To which one? What major? And so on.

There are men, who by nature of their personality, are slow and methodical decision makers. However, that is not what I am talking about. I am talking about a fear that Christian men have that keeps us from acting unless we are certain we are on the God-ordained path. This, I believe, is both a poor representation of Christianity and simply un-manly!

Nehemiah 4

There is a passage in Nehemiah that has stuck with me over the years. Here's the setting. The walls of Jerusalem have been destroyed—not even the supporting structure exists; it was

burned by Israel's enemies. Nehemiah has it on his heart to rebuild the wall from rubble, in essence, to refortify and reclaim Jerusalem, and he sets out to do so. Nehemiah 3 tells of the families involved in the rebuilding, and they are making steady progress.

Without getting into the politics of the time (which is really cool), Jerusalem's neighboring enemies don't like this very much and have made it quite clear they are going to attack Jerusalem if necessary to prevent the rebuilding. Here's where we jump into scripture:

"When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, 'What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble—burned as they are?' Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, 'What they are building—even a fox climbing up on it would break down their wall of stones!' Hear us, our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders. So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart" (Neh. 4:1-6, NIV).

I love this: "For the people worked with all their heart!" Notice it doesn't say, "The people waited for God to tell them what to do." or "Not knowing if God was for them or against them, they worked half-heartedly." They put their heart into their work. All of it.

Of Sword and Shovel

"After that day, half of my servants did the work while the

other half handled the spears, shields, bows, and body armor. Commanders were *appointed* to support every house of Judah. Those rebuilding the wall and those hauling the loads were working with one hand doing the task, but with the other hand holding the weapon. For the builders, everyone had his sword bound to his side, even while rebuilding. " (Neh. 4:16-18, MEV).

I haven't read anywhere in this story where Nehemiah has received the green light from God on this project. Sure, he's prayed, but ultimately he is going on his gut; it just seems like the right thing to do and, he's a godly-enough man to know right from wrong. In fact, if you read the full account, you will see that he receives a good deal of opposition. Not only is the work hard, but the people have to do it under the constant threat of attack, hence they carry on their work with one hand and keep their weapon ready in the other.

Men of the Shovel

The man of the shovel is the man of action. He sets to work, not because he is sure of his path, but because he is sure of the work. He believes in the rightness of the task itself and knows he is made for movement. We receive a certain kind of clarity when we are working that we don't have when idle.

Men of the Sword

The man of the sword is prepared to defend himself, his family, his property, and his endeavors, because he believes them to be good. He may, on occasion, see it fitting to use his sword to fight the good fight, to keep peace, to render justice, or to protect others. He is aware there is always an enemy, whether physical or spiritual, that is set against him, because there is always an enemy of *good*.

What Really Keeps Us Idle?

I believe there are a number of things which have led men to

live as apathetic and passive creatures rather than daring and strong men of the kingdom, yet I'll limit it to a few which pertain directly to this topic.

We Want an Easy Path, Not God's

Many believe that if God has ordained a certain road to travel upon, there will be no thieves to rob us or ditches to fall into. In other words, when we are waiting on God to give us some inspiration or direction, what we are really looking for is the path of guaranteed success and least effort or discomfort. We aren't really waiting on God, we are playing a game which keeps us in a state of procrastination.

We Aren't Experienced Workmen or Swordsmen

"... a well-grounded confidence begetteth attempt; whereas the supposing of power does not, and is therefore rightly called vain." —*Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes, English Philosopher (1588-1679)

Our lack of experience makes treading into the unknown frightening. We aren't experienced with the blessings of failure. We spend so much time hearing about the wickedness of our hearts and the deceitful nature of man that we forget our connection to Christ; that the truth shall set us free; that we may have life more abundantly.

There is a reason those Christians who were the most ardent Atheist or Hell-raising pre-converts are the most effective in terms of their representation of Christ and impact for good in their community: they've had mud on their boots and blood on their knuckles, and they look back and see God meeting them and saving them in the places and situations no good Christian man would go.

Final Thoughts

Even as I was writing this, I was constantly tripped by these

sort of thoughts: “Wait, aren’t we called to be men of peace?” and “Well, isn’t it good for men to be patient and wait on God?” or “What about new Christians? Shouldn’t they get ‘trained up’ or ‘built up’ before taking action?”

There’s nothing wrong with level-headed caution; we are supposed to use wisdom in our decision making. However, we aren’t called to be passive, whether it is in relation to our personal growth, families, career, or community. God has called us to be fully men and often times that means stepping out in faith with both our sword and shovel, ready for whatever comes our way.

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