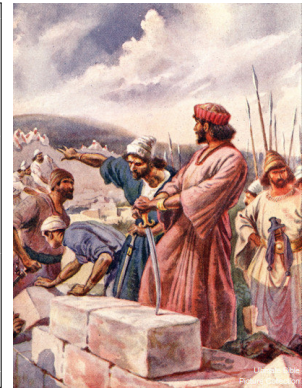


The Sword and The Trowel

They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded (Nehemiah 4:17-18)

Volume 1, Number 1

October, 2008



Welcome to The Sword and The Trowel

This is a new adventure for us at the church in Tuckerman. The plan is for this to be a monthly publication appearing on the first Lord's Day of each month. Unlike our weekly bulletin, this is not designed to be mailed out. It is a handout which will consist of longer and more in depth articles for the benefit of our members.

I have "borrowed" the name for this publication from a magazine of the same name published by Charles Spurgeon from 1865 until his death in 1892. Spurgeon preached in London, England for the Metropolitan Tabernacle, an Independent Baptist Church. His magazine was continued by other editors and evolved into the present day "Sword and Trowel."

At the top of this page are the words from Nehemiah 4:17-18. These serve as the "inspiration" behind the name. Nebuchadnezzar had carried off the majority of the Jews in Judah into captivity in Babylon. The city of Jerusalem had laid in ruins for many years. A recent report of this brought great distress to Nehemiah (Neh. 1:3-4) while he served the Persian king in Sushan. Nehemiah prayed to God about this situation and the cause of it (Neh. 1:5-11).

The Persian king Artaxerxes notices Nehemiah's distress and grants him leave to rebuild the city (Neh. 2:1-9). After Nehemiah surveys the ruin of the city, he proposes that they first rebuild the wall. This wall (actually a system of walls) surrounded the city and served as protection from attackers as the first line of defense. Rebuilding the city would be futile without this wall. There were those who opposed the project (Neh. 2:19). They knew of the importance of rebuilding the wall and that once built

Jerusalem could return to power. Two of these opponents, Sanballat and Tobiah, mocked what the Jews were doing under Nehemiah's supervision (Neh. 4:1-3).

Two things now happen that make the rebuilding a success. First, God was providing time and circumstances that allowed for a lot of work to be accomplished. The opposition spent all of their time mocking and planning an attack that never materialized. Second, the success was also aided by the peoples' willingness to work (Neh. 4:6). Many a work today does not succeed because one of these two important factors is absent. God is not necessarily behind every plan conceived by man. Man, on occasion, is not willing to do the Lord's work. Nevertheless, both must be engaged for any real success to appear.

The enemies of the rebuilding project conspired to attack and halt the construction effort (Neh. 4:7-8). Nehemiah then proposed that those who worked on the wall be armed as they built (Neh. 4:17-18). Thus, they were suited to defend and/or build, whatever was required at the moment. They had a sword to defend against an enemy attack and the trowel to spread mortar for the stones.

We find ourselves in similar circumstances today. We must be ready, at all times, to defend and/or build. We need the sword and the trowel for this work. The sword is the word of God (Heb. 4:12). The trowel is the tool used in building up and that is also the word of God (Acts 20:32).

We are to fight the good fight of faith (1 Tim. 6:12) and we are to build ourselves up in the most holy faith (Jude 20). There is a time to defend and a time to build. May we never think that either one ought to be laid by for then comes destruction and/or decay. Let us

keep using the sword and trowel in the work of the Lord. I fervently hope and pray that this publication will contribute in some small way to that end.

+++++

Faith Comes By Hearing

"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"
(Rom. 10:17)

I think we understand that a majority of folks are willing to affirm that they have some kind of faith based on some kind of internal decision. Very few would be willing to say something different. What constitutes that faith and how it comes about greatly varies. In order to have the kind of faith that pleases God one must follow what God has revealed as matters of faith. Those matters of faith can *only* be found in His word—the Bible. Thus, we are told *"faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God."*

Paul's words in Romans 10:17 actually constitute a conclusion to some previous remarks. He has mentioned *"the word of faith which we preach"* (Rom. 10:8). He also said that one is to *"believe in your heart"* (Rom. 10:10). Obviously, then, one is to *believe* what is *preached*. When this is done the product will be faith. That faith will move one to *"call upon Him"* (Rom. 10:12). To call upon the Lord is to surrender oneself to His will in a conscious decision to obey His word. And then—*"whoever shall call upon the name of the LORD shall be saved"* (Rom. 10:13). The salvation which is spoken of here does not come about by accident.

Paul points out that one cannot call on Him without believing and that be-

believing is not possible unless one has heard the gospel being preached (Rom. 10:14). So, men were sent forth with what is sometimes called the foolishness of preaching (Rom. 10:14-15; cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-25). Some may not believe (Rom. 10:16), but *some do*. When they do believe it is because they have *first* heard the word of God!

Faith, we are told, is the “*substance of things hoped for*” (Heb. 11:1). We have hope in things which are promised, things we are to one day receive. This is what Paul is writing about in Romans 8:24, “*For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?*” Here Paul is referring to deliverance in eternity. This is something we *hear* about in the word, *believe* it in our heart, and *hope* for it to be ours in the end. Faith and hope are inseparable, one needs the other to exist or it will be incomplete by itself.

We are also told that faith is the “*the evidence of things not seen*” (Heb. 11:1). What does this mean? It means a belief in something that we may not have physically experienced. I call your attention to what is said about Abraham in Hebrews 11:8, “*By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.*” Abraham had no physical experience of his destination. He only had what God had said (Gen. 12:1). That is why he did what he did “*by faith.*” Faith may be believing in approved testimony from credible sources. For example, I have never been to Africa. It is beyond my physical experience. However, I can read the record of the explorers of Africa. I can watch documentaries on television. I can find Africa in an atlas of the world. I can look it up in the encyclopedia. With all this evidence from credible sources I can believe Africa exists even though it is beyond my personal experience. Likewise, I can believe that Jesus lived and died and rose again because of the testimony of credible eyewitnesses (1 Cor. 15:3-8; Heb. 2:3). I can believe that on Pentecost there were about three thousand who became Christians by repenting and being baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38, 41). I can believe this even though it is beyond my personal experience. I may not have

seen it, but it is still incontrovertible evidence to produce faith.

A common accusation delivered toward those who claim to have faith is that folks are expected to believe in what is referred to as a “leap in the dark.” This “leap in the dark” faith is little more than an accident. There will be little concrete evidence upon which to base such faith. This faith is likely to be based more on emotion than evidence. Indeed a number of people are guilty of having that kind of faith. However, faith as our text plainly shows, is to come through hearing the word of God. Once again this is based on the testimony of credible witnesses. The things found in the New Testament are written with the express purpose of producing faith in those who hear it (Jn. 20:30-31; 1 Jn. 5:13). Faith, according to the New Testament, is not a “leap in the dark.” We need to challenge those who claim faith is a “leap in the dark” to prove their assertion. God does not expect us to have faith in anything not revealed in His word.

Another error that often occurs among religious minded people is where faith ends and opinion begins. There is nothing inherently wrong with opinions. Opinions are fine unless they supplant faith. A person may have the opinion that Jesus was six feet, two inches in height with blue eyes. Fine, but that is not a matter of faith because it is not found in the New Testament. Unfortunately, some are prone to say something like this, “I cannot find it in the Bible, so I will just believe it by faith.” Think about that statement in light of Romans 10:17. How can anyone believe something by faith after admitting it cannot be found in Bible? You cannot say that and be consistent with New Testament teaching. However, it may be permissible to believe what you cannot find *by opinion* if that opinion is harmless. There is a real need to be careful lest we find ourselves making a mistake in this fashion as so many often do. So many make opinions *equal to* faith. They are not equal. The former originates with man and the latter is revealed by God. Anytime it is suggested that opinions of men are equal to the word of God, a quick examination ought to be made of Matthew 15:1-9. There one can easily see the result of substituting the word of man for the word of God. It will only

produce something that is useless.

The courts in our country will accept the written testimony of credible witnesses. There is overwhelming evidence in the New Testament to prove that Jesus Christ is the Son of God even in a court of law should such a thing ever be necessary. If courts could be convinced, why can't one person—perhaps you—be convinced also?

The New Testament letters cover written history and discuss how churches either did or should go about their work and worship. There are plenty of instructions as to how Christians ought to live each day. All of these are to provide us with information about walking by faith.

Yes, faith is truly a process. It is rooted and established in the word of God. Like all processes it has a finished product. This is explained in 1 Peter 1:9, “*receiving the end of your faith; the salvation of your souls.*”

+++++

Those Baptisms at Pentecost

Once in a while someone will make a big deal out of what is said in Acts 2:41 about the number who were baptized. They claim it was impossible to baptize that many in such a short time.

There may be a failure to realize that there were twelve apostles present (Acts 2:14). Folks sometimes think that Peter was the only one there since his was the only speech preserved. The amount is reduced considerably when spread out over twelve men. I read a biography of an old time gospel preacher named W. W. Otey. He said that he once held a meeting in Clark's Mill, Virginia and baptized forty people in forty-five minutes. If twelve men performed at that rate that would be four hundred and eighty in forty-five minutes. If a few others who had been baptized joined, it could have easily been completed in the allotted time span.

A monthly publication for the Church of Christ in Tuckerman. The editor is Terry Sanders. Unless otherwise noted, all articles are written by the editor.