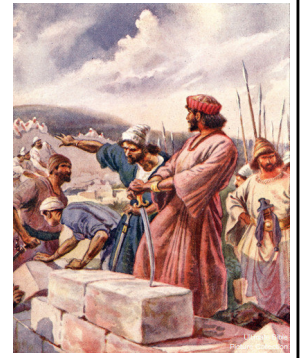


# The Sword and The Trowel

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)

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## Things I Have Learned

I obeyed the gospel at the conclusion of the morning service, January 11, 1981. That evening I was asked to lead the singing. I continued to lead the singing and teach every other Wednesday Bible Study. The only time I did not lead the singing was when I was preaching. I started preaching in March of 1981 (prior to this I had preached some while in the Christian Church). For a while I only preached once a month. However, a new work was started in our hometown and Martha and I became part of it. After July of 1982 I have been preaching regularly with the exception of a period of two months due to a serious health problem in 1985. Add to this the many Bible Classes and I have had a good number of opportunities not only to help others learn, but also to learn a good many things myself. I thank God for whatever good I have been able to accomplish. I appreciate my experiences. I am loathe to bring railing accusations no matter what has happened in the past. I do believe I have reached the place where I am able to offer some reflections on some of the things I have learned in my limited experience of being before the brethren.

I have learned that God so loved man that He gave His Son and His Son gave His life so that man could be saved from his sins and live eternally with God and His Son (Jn. 3:16).

I have learned that those who are saved are added to the church that the Son built (Acts 2:47; Matt. 16:18, and that in the church God is glorified (Eph. 3:12).

I have learned that God has provided man with every instruction needed to inform him how to conduct himself as a child of God and as a member of the church (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3; 1 Tim. 3:15). From the divine point of

view, the church is perfect with nothing missing; everything is just as it should be. Notwithstanding, I have learned that the greatest problems in the church are usually among those who are members of it. These problems are caused by many things; differences of opinion, lack of understanding, ignorance, bad attitudes, meanness, pettiness, anger, and lack of consideration, just to name a few. Until these are removed on the part of the humans in the church, the problems will only continue.

I have learned that an overwhelming number of brethren want someone else to do what they are supposed to do themselves and desire the few that will bear the entire burden of responsibility. They desire someone else to invite someone or to visit someone. The finger of guilt is pointed at everyone else, but is seldom turned toward its owner. Personal responsibility cannot be passed off like a basketball! Even Judas recognized his part in what had transpired (Matt. 27:4). Churches that are filled with people who expect someone else to do it get nowhere. *"For every man shall bear his own burden"* (Gal. 6:5).

I have learned that some brethren will quit attending only to later blame the church as though it forced them to quit when in reality they freely chose to do so. I have also learned that these backslidden brethren will seize every opportunity to lay railing accusations against the church. Those who visit such members must be careful that they are not seduced into chiming in with their own grievances (Gal. 6:1).

I have learned that a few brethren will sometimes miss for excuses that are inconsistent with their normal action. A couple of inches of snow can apparently paralyze brethren and cause them to miss services, but a foot of snow cannot keep them from work! *"For where your treasure is, there will*

*your heart be also"* (Matt. 6:21). I have also noticed that an infant in the family will be sick on the Lord's Day and require nearly every member of the family to render care. However, on any other day the infant may be sick and such overwhelming care will not be necessary. I have also learned that a can of peas dropped on the foot on Saturday hurts more than if it were dropped on some day farther removed from the Lord's Day. Being stoned and/or beaten by a mob is nothing compared to a dropped can of peas (Acts 7:58-60; 14:19; et al).

I have learned that a good number of brethren have no confidence in the Lord's plan for settling personal disagreements (Matt. 18:15-17). This divine plan is oftentimes jettisoned in favor of a telephone generated griping campaign with much lobbying to build an opposition. Apparently discussing your problem with everyone else except the one who involved is a better way than the Lord devised. Such is blatant carnality.

I have learned that there are a few brethren who do not want any kind of peace in the church. As a matter of fact, these same brethren will not be happy with peace and will generally try to keep some fuss going or start a new one. Troublemakers seemingly remain consistent in making trouble wherever they go. In case after case, it is only a matter of time until once again they are embroiled in trouble and found to be at the center of it. Those who have a notorious reputation for such antics and will not turn from them are to be rejected until they repent (Titus 3:10-11).

I have learned that nearly all brethren understand that there is no authority to tithe. I have also learned that there is a substantial number of brethren who have not learned what it means to give as they have been prospered (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

I have sadly learned that some brethren do not take the time to teach their own children at home nor set a good example of conduct at home for them. These same parents later send out a roar of outrage at the church when their children never obey the gospel or become involved in sin. Some parents seemingly are unable to learn that they are to be involved in the upbringing of their offspring (Eph. 6:4).

I have learned that a majority of brethren expect the preacher and/or elders to force others to meet responsibilities. "If he was any kind of preacher/elder, he would make them do it." How this forced submission is to be accomplished is anyone's guess. The complainers do not know and the Bible is silent as to how to make anyone do anything they do not wish to do. Forced submission is actually no submission at all. The church (members) are to be willingly subject to Christ (Eph. 5:24).

I have learned that some brethren are convinced that always being in the minority means that a person is always right. Such is romanticism turned into fantasy. Speaking of this same principle, Roy Cogdill once said of a certain man, "A preacher can be in trouble once in a while and be right, but he cannot be in trouble all of the time and always be right." There is much wisdom to consider in brother Cogdill's words.

I have learned that few male brethren set goals to one day attain the office of an elder. The desire should be early and often so the brother can serve in a profitable way (1 Tim. 3:1).

I have learned that a number of brethren are more interested in the physical qualifications of elders than in the spiritual ones. There is more concern over the number of faithful children he has than over his being apt to teach (Titus 1:6; 1 Tim. 3:2). Sometimes brethren set different standards for elders than those standards set by the Lord.

I have learned that some elders are highly skilled and ready shepherds of the building and the treasury, but woe-fully lacking when it comes to shepherding the flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2-3).

I have learned a minority of brethren will come forward in response to the invitation not to exhibit repentance, but to report sin. Sin may need to be re-

ported, but the Lord still commands repentance (Lk. 13:3; Acts 8:22).

I have learned that quite a few brethren actually do believe that godly sorrow is repentance (2 Cor. 7:10).

I have learned that some brethren have decided that certain Gospel Meeting preachers and/or certain papers are standards of truth (Jn. 17:17).

I have learned that there are double standards among brethren. The brethren and their family members are allowed to do things, but the preacher and his family are not allowed to do the same. I have also learned that some preachers practice the double standard in reverse by insisting that they are due certain considerations that brethren are not. There is no clergy-laity distinction of any kind in the New Testament! In addition, I have learned that some preachers practice this double standard among themselves. Did I mention that some preachers will, if given an opportunity, take advantage of almost everyone they encounter? Some preachers think more highly of themselves than they should. No one is supposed to do that (Rom. 12:3).

I have learned that brethren will sometimes hide information about some problem or illness and then complain when nothing is said or no action is taken (2 Cor. 8:21). It seems that once one becomes a preacher or an elder he is suddenly given the gift of being able to read minds - - even at a great distance. I cannot speak for all preachers and elders, but I am still waiting for my power in this area to engage as it would certainly be very handy in such circumstances.

I have learned that some brethren do not appreciate the work of a preacher. They are aware of what is said in 2 Timothy 4:1-5, but fail to comprehend it. The work of the preacher is erroneously believed by some to be similar to a CEO of some company. In some instances he is expected to be a social activities director for teenagers. Add to this that some hold him as the only one responsible when it comes to visiting the physically ill and spiritually weak members. While he may have *some* responsibility in *some* of these areas he does not have *more* responsibility than any other member does.

I have learned that preachers are seldom fired for anything doctrinal. Preachers will be fired for length of sermon, but not content. They will be

terminated for their choice of clothing or personal grooming habits. Some have been discharged for chewing gum! Preachers have been dismissed for "not being friendly enough" or "not showing enough love"; both of which are completely arbitrary judgments.

I have learned that sometimes brethren do not like to hear about the things they are involved in (Gal. 4:16).

I have learned that there is no substitute for studying the Bible for myself. One needs to make sure that what he is hearing is according to what is in the word (Acts 17:11). I cannot pass this responsibility along to another. I appreciate the many who have and who are helping me to learn more of the "unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8). I have learned that there is nothing to fear in investigating everything and anything related to the Scriptures. Truly "iron sharpens iron" (Prov. 27:17). We are made better when we are challenged to study more. Who can deny it.

I have learned that I have not learned nor seen everything yet. The Bible is a treasure that always has more in it to discover and learn. There is also much to learn from experiencing successes and failures with the brethren.

I have learned that if we do not learn from the past we will more than likely repeat our failures.

I have learned that it is a pleasure to work with elders who are truly shepherds of the flock and concerned first and foremost with the best for the brethren in their charge ((1 Peter 5:30).

I have learned that there is a goodly number of brethren who are not caught up in the things previously mentioned in this article. They are interested in serving the Lord and "making their calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10). I appreciate them immensely and hope and pray that their tribe will increase.

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