



Disciple of Christ!

by Mark Brunner

Widow-Makers! (Ephesians 6:16-17)

BEECH TREES TEND TO BEND AND GROW AT ODD ANGLES. When it comes to felling one, you have to do a bit more than simply cutting it down. First you need to determine which way the tree is leaning. Then you need to size-up the other nearby trees toward which the felled tree is destined to fall. If the crown of the tree passes into the crown of another you will hang it up. A tree “hung-up” on another is very dangerous. Weighing up to a ton or more and suspended by only a few branches, loggers call these unfortunate mistakes “widow-makers” because they are accidents just waiting to happen.

I recently hung-up a Beech tree I was trying to fell. It cradled itself right into the crown of a nearly maple. At this point I knew my choices were two. I could retreat from the job and hope that the wind and the weight of the tree would eventually pull it to the ground. Or, I could attack the tree from the bottom up, always with an eye on the crown lest it slip while I was cutting and snap back and take out the woodsman as it was going down. While being on the defensive is imperative for safety, taking the offensive is necessary to prevent an even greater danger.

In like manner, Christian soldiers must always mix a good defense with a great offense when dealing with Satan, the world and our own sinful flesh. Martin Luther wrote: “For it is not enough to have defended ourselves against the

enemy, and to be able to stand against him when he attacks us, so that we are not defeated; that is called defense. We must also be able to take the offensive—that is, to pursue the enemy, and put him to flight. Similarly, here it is not enough to ward off the devil with faith and hope as our shield and helmet, but we must draw the sword, hit back at him, hunt him down, and make him flee, thus gaining the victory ourselves.” (Sermons from the year 1531--W.A. 34. II 402 ff.)

Quite often in life we will find ourselves faced with those tough decisions. Problems aren't always solved so easily and sometimes we find them stubbornly hanging on, unwilling to succumb to our best efforts to cut them down to size. What is a Christian to do? We always, of course, have the choice of backing up and hoping that eventually the problem will take care of itself. Perhaps, in time, it will. But, in the course of that time, how many other people, including ourselves, might be affected by it. God implores us to take up the “sword of the spirit” with the “shield of faith” and attack our problems, always moving forward, with an eye on the foe and any crafty move he might make and our hands on the only weapon that can cut him down to size. It can be dangerous work. But widow-makers can't be left to chance.

“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt 6:34)

Head-up and Head-on! (James4:7)

WHEN YOU ARE AFRAID to take an action, it's the first step that's the hardest one to take. Our little dachshund Webley is a living example of that. Webley has always been afraid of stairs. It doesn't matter if he is going up or coming down them. He fears them.

Dachshunds are built low to the ground to enable them to be good tunnelers. They can pass through some of the tightest places, squirming, wriggling and just plain pushing. But put them on a flight of stairs, and their tunneling bravado is of little worth to them. Built with a deep chest and very short legs, dachshunds have a very difficult time negotiating anything that is stepped. Webley will park himself at the foot or landing of a staircase, look sadly around, and then let out one, lonesome yelp for help. And, with just a little push on his haunches, the

first step is negotiated. After that, the rest, thought challenging, are negotiated one at a time. It's that first step that is critical. After that, however clumsily, the rest are conquered with head-on aggressiveness.

Reports the Denver Post: "Like many sheep ranchers in the West, Lexy Fowler has tried just about everything to stop crafty coyotes from killing her sheep. She has used odor sprays, electric fences, and 'scare-coyotes.' She has slept with her lambs during the summer and has placed battery-operated radios near them. She has corralled them at night, herded them at day. But the southern Montana rancher has lost scores of lambs--fifty last year alone. "Then she discovered the llama--the aggressive, funny-looking, afraid-of-nothing llama. 'Llamas don't appear to be afraid of anything,' she said. 'When they see something, they put their head up and walk straight toward it. That is aggressive behavior as far as the coyote is concerned, and they won't have anything to do with that . . . Coyotes are opportunists, and llamas take that opportunity away.'" (Barry McGee.)

The moment we sense Satan's attack through temptation is the moment we should face it and deal with it for what it is. Like Webley, however, we often need that reassuring touch of the Master to get our attention and embolden us to action. The devil would like us to stay put, filled with fear, not wishing to take that first step. And, if we believed that our power was equal to his and he could be defeated by our might, that first step might be disastrous. But, God gives us a faith founded in Christ that causes us to put head up and face the foe head-on. The devil, like a coyote, is an opportunistic foe. Take the opportunity away and his power is muted. Putting that first step behind us is the key to overcoming our fears.

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Don't Step On The Name! (John 8:48-49)

ONE OF THE MORE PRACTICAL THINGS that I learned growing up was to pick my battles wisely. Since as a boy I was not blessed with great stature or physique, it was probably a forgone conclusion that I would not prevail in most

fight. I made it my practice, therefore, to embrace the essential skill of the graceful retreat. There just was no point in getting pummeled when you could live to fight another day.

Although the “honor of my body” would often suffer due to my unwillingness to get clobbered, there was a point beyond which I could not go; that line in the sand that no one, no matter how big or menacing, was allowed to cross. And that line was the “honor of my name.” You could dishonor me physically, but should you dishonor my name, I was always ready to do battle. “Don’t step on the name!”

As Christians we are often open to attack by the world. For some of us, that attack may occur more often than others. But, when is it right to be passive and when is it right to be aggressive? Martin Luther wrote: “. . . when they attack the Gospel they attack God’s honor. Then love and patience must end and we must not remain silent, but we also must speak out and say: I honor my Father, therefore you dishonor me, but I do not ask about you dishonoring me because I also do not seek my own honor. But take heed, there is One who seeks my honor, and He will demand it of you, and judge you, and He will not let you go unpunished. He does not seek His honor only, but also mine, because I seek His honor, as He says ‘those who honor Me will I honor’. And that is our comfort, that we can be cheerful if all the world heaps upon us shame and disgrace, for we know that God will demand our honor, and for the sake of it He will execute judgment, punishment, and vengeance.” (Sermons from the year 1525--W.A. 17. 233.)

There is a time when every Christian needs to take a stand. That is when the good name of their Heavenly Father is at stake. Jesus was often attacked personally by his foes. They called Him names and besmirched Him personally. But, when they crossed the line and attacked the honor of the Father, that is where Jesus, in love, would let them go no further. Dishonoring the name of the Father, either by using His name in vain or by holding to doctrine that casts God in a false light, is serious business and we as Christians need to know that God expects us to intervene, in love, to correct the error. God’s name is good and it is our responsibility to keep it that way. We do this humbly, never seeking personal honor. We do this out of love for the one who is in danger of God’s judgement. In so doing God is honored as well as us.

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Coil And Spring! (Ephesians 6:10-17)

AS I WALKED WITH HER THIS MORNING in the dim morning light, she trotted obediently at my side. There was no pulling on her part. She simply walked obediently at heel anticipating each new smell that wafted through the nearby meadow grasses. Then, without warning, she snapped the leash back, wrenching my shoulder behind me. Tail alert, ears lifted, she stared at the shoulder of the road just several feet in front of us. Something had spooked her and she was in a defensive position, uncertain of what she had to do.

I still could not see what she had seen and was irritated a bit with her sudden lurch. I spoke to her quietly and stroked her back. “What is it, girl?” She looked up at me and then quickly returned her gaze to the shoulder. Then, as suddenly as she had gone into that lurch backward, she leaped forward with a growl and a snap. Defense suddenly become offense and I now found myself pulled forward as opposed to backward. Finally I saw it; white stripes vaguely visible against the dark background of the gravel. A big old skunk was waddling in our direction and Jetta was not about to let it pass. A reassuring word from me was all that it took to transform her fear into aggression.

As Christians journeying through this world, we are often confronted with evil that suddenly comes from out of nowhere and threatens our peaceful walk. Like Jetta, we are often pushed back and afraid when it is something we can't see clearly or understand well. What does God want us to do when we are

faced with evil threats? Martin Luther writes “(Christians) must be warriors, always equipped with their armor and weapons, and that the lot of a Christian is no leisurely existence, nor one of peace and security; rather he is always on campaign, attacking and defending his positions. . . ‘(you) are in my army and under my flag; see to it that you are on the lookout for the enemy, ready to defend yourselves against his angels, for he is never far away from you.’ As long as you do that, you need have no fear.” (Sermons from the year 1544--W.A. 49. 583 f.)

Jetta and I finished our walk. Her defense as well as her offense saved the both of us from getting sprayed. The skunk ambled down the shoulder and disappeared into the meadow. A Christian’s walk is no different. God certainly expects us to be ready to defend ourselves against the evil in this world. Yet, He also wants us to go on the offensive and attack that evil whenever and wherever we can. When it comes to the evil in this world, Jetta’s example is a good one. There is nothing wrong with recoiling from that evil; as long that recoil is a springboard to action, not retreat.

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