

Bethel Christian Church
Growing in Grace

Studies in the Book of Acts

Study 6

Peter Draws the Proper Sword

Acts 2:22-36

Peter's Sword

Peter was a man of two swords, his own sword and the sword of Christ's word. In the Garden of Gethsemane Peter drew his sword to fight for Christ. Before Jesus could stop him Peter slashed off the ear of Malchus, the High Priest's servant. Jesus rebuked Peter and restored the damaged ear in order that the Disciples would be protected from the large mob. There were hundreds of Roman soldiers present, along with the Chief Priest's henchmen. Peter had yet to learn that Christ's battle was not going to be won by a military sword. None would doubt Peter's bravery. Had Jesus not restrained him he would have died there for his Master. But the Lord had a different sword for Peter to wield, one which would also lead to his death, but one which was for the healing of the nations not the destruction of the body. Through the millennia since that event the Church of God has often taken up the wrong sword. It may have been a literal sword or gun or a political 'sword'. Any attempt to effect the cause of God by any other weapon than the sword from the mouth of Christ has not only failed but left a terrible extra legacy of hatred against the Church. It is a fallacy to think that if we can enforce or encourage democracy, if we can get Christian legislation through parliament or legislate against the depravity of the world then the Gospel cause will be extended. Democracy may be preferable, good legislation from Christian politicians may be desirable but the Kingdom of God is not advanced by any of these. Think how the Church has grown in China and other oppressed cultures when none of these 'swords' were used.

The Messiah's Sword

When the Apostle John saw the vision of the reigning Lord Jesus Christ, he saw a sharp two-edged sword coming from his mouth.

In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength (Revelation 1:16).

The sword (word) from the mouth of Christ was to do with the defeat of the nations and the way Christ would rule over them. We must always remember that the resurrected Lord had been promised the nations, not as some bloodied trophy of his brute military power but so that the nations would be brought into God's garden, God's Temple, the renewed heaven and earth (Revelation 22:2). Way back in Isaiah 49:2-6 God revealed that his 'servant Israel' would accomplish his mission to Israel and the nations. God would place his words in his Servants mouth. His words would be a strong sword. By these words the nations would be judged and saved. Many years later Jesus was revealed as this very 'Servant' to John. It would be Christ's words which would fulfill this old prophecy.

From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty (Revelation 19:15).

The word of God, proclaimed by the Apostles and then the Church would penetrate where mere sword could not. It would cut through the self deception of sin, lay bare the disguises worn by the nations. Those seeking to rid themselves of any need of God would find their actions exposed by the Gospel. The word of Christ would penetrate to the full depths of sin within nations and people. The sword of armies and politics can only deliver external change and conformity. The sword of Christ deals with the heart.

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).

Peter's True Sword

So Peter stood to preach to the nations gathered in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. God was about to reveal the double edged sword, the word from Christ, the Messiah they had crucified. Peter's words cut straight through to the issue in their hearts. They had nailed to the cross the One God had demonstrated to be their Messiah. They must see through their blindness (*They know not what they do*), and be faced with their sin as it was in God's eyes. But the penetrating word revealed something even more confronting. Behind their delusional execution of the Son of God lay a predetermined plan to save them from all their sins. The sword/word cut through to their deepest heart needs, to be forgiven for crucifying their Lord and receive the Spirit of adoption which would establish them again as Father's true nation. They cried out in utter heart breaking clarity. At the crucifixion they had cried out deluded and beguiled by sin's deception. But after the sword/word had penetrated they saw things clearly. They were understood. Their sin was named and exposed. Their salvation was applied. So three thousand people, many of whom had cried for his crucifixion, now cried for the joy of his grace. They found themselves not simply washed from their sins but united with others who had received the same grace. Now it was grace and love which bound them together, not the madness of trying to justify killing the Son of God.

A Salutary Warning

What of those who refused the word? The word had exposed their sin, exposed Father's mercy. To reject such a revelation would be to find ones self in a place of utter hopelessness. To ignore such a word would be to feel the wrath of a graceless existence. To be handed back to the delusion, the deception of sin is to be again subject to the wrath of God which is found in the death and pollution of our sin. To be found in this place on the day of judgement is too frightening to comprehend. To stand before the Lamb of God, having refused his gift of judgement and mercy, will be to hear the unthinkable words, "*Depart from me I never knew you.*" The wrath of the Lamb then is the most fearsome wrath. It is to finally "Behold the Lamb", to see the truth of the Lamb and be removed from any possibility of his blessing. This is the two-fold action of the Gospel as Christ speaks it into the hearts of Israel and the nations. Some it softens and redeems, others draw back, are hardened in the deceit of sin and doomed to a Lamb-less experience of eternity in the presence of the Lamb they rejected (Revelation 14:10).

