

The Tools of a Foolish Shepherd (1)

**“And the Lord said to me, ‘Next, take for yourself the implements of a foolish shepherd.’”
(Zechariah 11:15).**

These were God’s words to Zechariah the prophet concerning the instruments of a foolish shepherd. When we contemplate the nature of these instruments, we will discover that the same instruments belong to a wise shepherd and the only true difference resides in the way a shepherd uses those instruments and based on the usage he would be classified as a wise or foolish shepherd. In other words, the outward appearance of both shepherds are the same but inwardly they differ.

When God calls and entrusts someone for priesthood, He is responsible for supplying that person with all the means of shepherding while leaving to each person called the freedom to choose the suitable way of using those tools.

A Shepherd’s Tools

Generally speaking, these implements are:

1. Attire, symbolizing the specific priesthood attire
2. Voice, symbolizing a shepherd’s teaching
3. Stick, symbolizing a shepherd’s authority
4. Staff, symbolizing the work of grace in the life of a shepherd
5. Money bag, symbolizing the gifts of the Holy Spirit to a shepherd

Wrong use of those tools is manifest in:

- Abusing the tools. This results in marring the originally intended function of the tool.
- Confusing the functions of the tools by utilizing one instrument for the purpose intended for another.

For example, relying on sources and gifts instead of relying on the support of God’s grace.

With God’s grace, the coming articles will discuss each tool separately and how these tools will turn out to be either implements of a foolish or wise shepherd. (to be followed)

Our Wrestle is not Against Flesh and Blood

Some people interpret Jesus Christ's teachings about forgiveness and self denial as refraining from defending oneself. Others see self defense as of prime importance even to the extent of utilizing corporal punishment when need be. Where is the truth and what are Jesus Christ's teachings concerning this subject of self defense?

It is important to know that kinsman relationship is based on the principal of love as oneself. Even those who antagonize us are our kinsmen and any dissensions are from Satan. *"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places"* (Ephesians 6:12).

Loving the other as oneself is not a New Testament commandment only, *"'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.'"* (Luke 10:27), but has its origin in the Old Testament as well. *"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength"* (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

Therefore, this Old and New Testament commandment is old because it has been from the very beginning establishing God's right since His creation of Adam; and new because Jesus Christ has revealed its depth and dimensions through His incarnation, redemption and the sending of the Holy Spirit by whose help we can love God and our neighbor in spirit and truth.

It is important to differentiate between defending one's society, country, and family members on one hand and defending the self on the other hand. Group protection exemplified in military and police service to protect people is a requirement and a duty. Such a need for protection has led to the establishment of institutions of defense that can mandate the use of power. Some countries and legal organizations allow ownership of weapons for defense in proportion to danger. For example, a thief is not to be killed for theft or any of his family members.

Self defense is a natural inborn instinct for the purpose of survival. This instinct is manifested from early childhood as, for example, when a child hurries to restore his toy snatched by another child. At such an early age, such a behavior is not to be corrected under the principal of forgiveness or self denial; but is to be left to maturity. It is only when a child attacks another in a hostile manner that he is to be corrected in order not to allow the feelings of hostility to grow within him given the fact that a child's emotions are still in the maturing process.

Our Lord Jesus Christ taught us that escaping from evil is not to be associated with cowardice. He Himself fled to Egypt with His blessed mother and St. Joseph. But after He had declared the truth through His teachings and miracles and when the right time had come for Him to offer Himself on the cross on our behalf He did so willingly and courageously. That is why when the Jews fell on their faces because of His power; He said to them, *"I have told you that I am He.*

Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way,’ that the saying might be fulfilled which He spoke, ‘Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none.’” (John 18:8-9). He also wanted them to do no harm to His disciples.

However, in that situation and for two reasons, our Lord chastised St. Peter for raising the sword against one of the soldiers:

1. The arrest was an arrest only, though to be subsequently followed by a very harsh, unfair trial
2. He came specifically to die for our salvation

Therefore, trying to defend our Lord would be a futile attempt. For that reason He said to St. Peter, *“Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?”* (John 18:11). *“But Jesus said to him, ‘Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.’”* (Matthew 26:52).

It was out of absolute power that our Lord had taken that stance. Is not He the One who said, *“Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?”* (Matthew 26:53-54).

Is not He the One who drove out of the temple the buyers and sellers who made money transactions with the people coming to present their offerings?

Is not He the One who had confronted the servant who slapped Him before the chief priest and told Him, *“If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?”* (John 18:23).

At the time of truth, our Lord Jesus Christ declared the truth. At the time of presenting the other cheek, our Lord did so readily. Thus, truth and virtue reside in standing for the truth and declaring it. Defending the truth is possible and obligatory by whoever is capable of doing so. St. Justin says, “God will judge whoever is capable of revealing the truth but does not do so.”

According to St. Cyril, the Great, our Lord’s words concerning the sword is directed to the Jews in general who have rejected His teachings and denied all the miracles of healing and casting out of demons performed among them. *“Then He said to them, ‘But now, he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one.’”* (Luke 22:36). By such words, His intention was to reveal the difficult times the Jewish nation would go through. This intention is proved by His response to the disciples’ reiteration, *“So they said, ‘Lord, look, here are two swords.’ And He said to them, ‘It is enough.’”* (Luke 22:38).

Others see the Lord’s reference to the sword as an allusion to the need to be fortified with the sword of the word and *“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-*

edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12).

Another reference to the sword by our Lord was to forecast the opposition believers would face as a result of evangelism *“I did not come to bring peace but a sword”* (Matthew 10:34).

St. Paul appealed to self defense before many trials and called upon his Roman citizenship not out of fear; for he is the one who said, *“But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God”* (Acts 20:24).

In the Holy Book of Acts 21, *“And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. When he had come to us, he took Paul’s belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, ‘Thus says the Holy Spirit, ‘So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.’”* Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, *‘What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.’”* (Acts 21:10-13).

St. John Colobos (the Short) escaped from the Berbers not out of love of life or fear but because he did not want to be killed by one Berber and hence be a cause of that person’s perdition.

St. Athanasius fled from the heretics in order to continue his fight for the conservation and preservation of the true Faith; and for the support of the believers.

Therefore the question of defending or not defending oneself can be summarized in three contexts:

- Choosing not to defend ourselves not out of cowardice or submission. It is just enough to declare the truth and the truth is the source of our power and our power is God Himself.
- Having the power to defend ourselves but choosing not to do so for the sake of others; a virtue in itself and a proof that we love the other as ourselves.
- Defending ourselves for the sake of perpetuating the truth and continuing our spiritual message not out of fear of death nor love of the self; this in its essence is love for the other.

Articles on the Christian History - The Fourth Century

42- The Council of Sardica (Summer 343 AD)

Emperors Constans and Constantius II decided to convene a council that would bring together the Arian bishops from the East and the Western supporters of the Council of Nicea in order to resolve the issue. Emperor Constantine cordially invited St. Athanasius to discuss the idea with him in Milan, Italy. St. Athanasius welcomed the idea and a general council was agreed upon to be held in Sardica (present day Sofia, Bulgaria).

Facing the city of Philippopolis, Sofia is located along the Danube River on the border between the Eastern Empire under Constantius II and the Western Empire under Constans. One hundred and seventy bishops attended the council. The Western bishops came to defend their faith whereas a number of the Arians remained in Philippopolis refraining from attending the council in St. Athanasius' presence. Upon insistence on the presence of St. Athanasius and his fellow bishops, the Arian bishops departed leaving behind a letter of apology and excommunication for St. Athanasius. However, all this behavior did not stop the council from being convened.

The great turmoil caused by Eusebius and his followers in the churches and cities and the potential danger against the followers of the Nicea urged the emperors to ask for the council to meet without delay.

With the death of Eusebius, during the first few days of the council, the Arians were inflicted with despair because they had lost a strong supporter to their politics and an important influence on Constantius II who had a weak personality.

43. St. Athanasius' Narration of the Council of Sardica

St. Athanasius' wrote about the Council of Sardica which lasted two months (August and September 343 AD) saying, "We expected Eusebius and his followers to be submitted to judgment; but knowing their deeds and seeing their opponents present at the council they were afraid. When Conte Marcellus (a previous governor in the East) and Conte Asclepas (chief officer in the Eastern Empire) did not attend and the soldiers were denied presence in the council, the Arians got confused and their thoughts baffled and confounded and were faced with the inevitable truth that they had to accept. The bishops asked them not to abstain nor hide; for the council was summoned specifically for the purpose of convicting Athanasius. They addressed them saying, 'You came to judge Athanasius and his followers. Why are you withdrawing now? You should not have come at all rather than come and hide. By acting this way you are judging yourselves. Athanasius and his group whom you have accused behind their backs are here and you have to confront them face to face. By refusing to do so you are uncovering your intentions clearly and the council will decide against you.'"

“The council did condemn their dubious escape; but allowed us to present our case. After we had narrated the our documented and proven incidents against us, the bishops were surprised and it was obvious to them why our opponents escaped before they would be uncovered. Seeing how strong our case was, the bishops gave us their full support and accepted us as having been mistreated and falsely accused; and confirmed and asserted their brotherly love and kindness. Then they exiled Eusebius’ followers who more evil than he himself.”

44. The Council of Sardica Recommendations to the Church of Alexandria

With the grace of God, greetings from the four hundred bishops present at the Council at Sardica to the priests, deacons and all the beloved brothers in the holy church of God in Alexandria. Even before receiving your letters, we were very well aware of the conspiracies woven against our brother Athanasius by the defenders of the Arian heresy and which were to their own destruction and not the church’s. They had tried very hard through power and oppression to steal the innocence of our brother and comrade Bishop Athanasius in a foolish, arrogant and unjust manner even though they were not sure of the success of their tricks and had no true evidence of the documents they had presented against him. Because they were unable to present any sound proofs of their plans, they abstained from attending the council in Sardica or to meet with the bishops. Thus, it became evident to us the decision made by Bishop Julius of Rome to make unity with our brother Athanasius because he has the support of eighty bishops and through his messages and debates he could destroy all the conspiracies connived by Eusebius and his followers who relied solely on violence and authority without sound, legal discussions,

Therefore, based on Athanasius’ innocence, all the bishops throughout the world decided to form unity with him. Above all, we urge you dear brothers, to preserve the true faith together with the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church had gone through a lot of offenses and insults and you also have gone through a lot of trials “but whoever persists to the end will be saved”.

45. The Political strife between the Eastern and Western Emperors

After declaring St Athanasius innocent and convicting the followers of Eusebius of Nicomedia and the Arian bishops there remained a political problem which was the main cause behind sending Athanasius and other bishops to exile. This problem resided in relaying the council decrees to Constantius II, Emperor of the East and Alexandria in order for him to reinstate them. Emperor Constantius II delegated three metropolitans namely Euphrates of Koba, Vincent of Calinea and Epiphytes of Agrippina, France to carry the Sardica Council recommendations to his brother Constans in Antioch. Along with the creed, he attached a warning statement saying “rejection of Athanasius is a precedence to war”.

45. In Antioch

Satan does not give up easily. Disregarding the recommendations of the Sardica council, the Arians continued with their immoral, debased conniving ways. By the time the three

metropolitans arrived in Antioch, Stephen, the Arian Bishop of Antioch had already woven a new conspiracy (summer 344 AD). His followers hired a street whore to cause Metropolitan Euphrates to fall in sin with her. Finding the man very old, she deemed it impossible to seduce him to sin for the purpose of defiling his reputation. Therefore, she refused to carry out the plot. The incident became known in the city and in the following morning the news reached the emperor's ears.