

# THE BAND OF BROTHERS

Pastor Montgomery | 29 Jan 2021

In our first post, Pastor Patton emphasized a Christian man is a man *on a mission*. But not just any mission; God calls us to join the epic quest of *his* mission. God made all things, sustains all things, and owns all things. God is the source of all good things, and all things owe him praise. When we live for God, therefore, we have found life's best and truest goal. This is what we were made for!

Yet living for God is *war*: war in our hearts, and war in the world. It is war in our hearts because there is sin in our hearts: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9); "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do," (Gal. 5:17). Living for God is also war in the world – because the world is set against God: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life – is not from the Father but is from the world," (1 Jn. 2:15-16).

The Christian man is a man at war with sin: sin *around* him and sin *within* him. Like any war, success in the war on sin will require us to:

- *Know our enemy*. What are we up against?
- *Identify our vulnerabilities*. Where are we weakest?
- *Gather our allies*. Who can we rely on for help?
- *Have a strategy*. How do we enlist our allies to defend our flaws and defeat our foes?
- *Face our obstacles*. What might keep us from executing our strategy?

## Our Enemy: Satan and Sin

"We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places," (Eph. 6:12). "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour," (1 Pet. 5:8). In an ultimate sense, our enemy is the devil. He is real, he is evil, and he is out to destroy us – with all the malice and minions he can muster.

Yet the devil cannot be everywhere at once, and there are not an unlimited number of demons. Sadly, this happy fact does not deliver us from all danger – for in persuading our first parents to rebel against God, Satan succeeded in poisoning our own hearts. Sin is Satan's fingerprint in our flesh, a demonic deputy ever ready to draw us toward evil. As God warned Cain, "If you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it," (Gen. 4:7).

For Christian men, the first step toward victory in the war on sin is to recognize that this war is not an occasional battle, but an ongoing conflict. Satan and his demonic host don't just wait for us atop the cliffs on clear days; sin tunnels underneath us in the humid jungles of our heart. In this life, we will *always* be at war: our struggle against sin is relentless, even when no demon is present.

## Our Greatest Vulnerability: Isolation

German Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer (later executed in a Nazi death camp) provides us with a tremendous insight on the strategy of sin: "Sin wants to be alone with people. It takes them away

from the community. The more lonely people become, the more destructive the power of sin over them. The more deeply they become entangled in it, the more unholy is their loneliness.”<sup>1</sup>

Sin’s great strategem, our greatest vulnerability, is isolation. When we isolate ourselves, when we conceal our sins from others and cloak them in secrecy, we only magnify their power and enable them to draw us further into darkness. This is a serious danger for Christian men! Precisely *because* we know sin is bad, *because* we feel shame at it, we will be *all the more tempted* to hide our sins.

Just as lions will seek to separate their prey from the herd, so Satan and sin seek to isolate Christians from one another. Bonhoeffer warns us: “Those who remain alone with their evil are left utterly alone. It is possible that Christians may remain lonely in spite of daily worship together, prayer together, and all their community through service – that the final breakthrough to community does not occur precisely because they enjoy community with one another as pious believers, but not with one another ... as sinners.”<sup>2</sup> Isolation in sin is spiritual suicide.

### **Our Allies: Other Christian Men**

Friendship between men has fallen on hard times. The sexual obsession of modern Western society casts suspicion on any close same-gender friendship. As far back as 1960, C.S. Lewis had to write: “It has actually become necessary in our time to rebut the theory that every firm and serious friendship is really homosexual.”<sup>3</sup> We should ask ourselves: why is this the case?

Casting suspicion on male friendship is not a neutral cultural development, but a Satanic tactic intended to scare Christian men away from our strongest allies – one another. David was sustained in his trials by his friendship with Jonathan (1 Sam. 18:1-3). Jesus sent out his disciples two by two (Mar. 6:7, Luk. 10:1). The apostles worked in pairs (Acts 13:2-3, 15:39-40). The greatest heroes of literature always have allies: Frodo and Sam, Captain Aubrey and Doctor Maturin, etc.

In other Christian men we find exactly what we need: a “band of brothers” engaged in the same war. “Friendship arises... when two or more of the companions discover they have in common some insight or interest or even taste... which, till that moment, each believed to be his own unique treasure (or burden).”<sup>4</sup> If this is valuable in regular life, is it not essential in the war on sin?

### **Our Strategy: Regular Accountability**

If Satan succeeds by isolating us from others, and if sin gains strength by staying in the shadows, our strategy toward overcoming both is clear: “Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another,” (Jas. 5:16). This may not be easy, but it is this simple.

What happens when we confess our sins not just to God, but to each other? What is the real benefit of regular accountability? Bonhoeffer put it beautifully:

Who can give us the assurance that we are not dealing with ourselves but with the living God in the confession and the forgiveness of our sins? God gives us this assurance through one another. The other believer breaks the circle of self-deception. Those who confess their sins in

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<sup>1</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 89.

<sup>2</sup> *Life Together*, 87.

<sup>3</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (reprint, Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1988), 60.

<sup>4</sup> *The Four Loves*, 65.

the presence of another Christian know that they are no longer alone with themselves; they experience the presence of God in the reality of the other... The other Christian has been given to me so that I may be assured even here and now of the reality of God in judgment and grace. As the acknowledgment of my sins to another believer frees me from the grip of self-deception, so, too, the promise of forgiveness becomes fully certain to me only when it is spoken by another believer as God's command and in God's name. Confession before one another is given to us by God so that we may be assured of divine forgiveness.<sup>5</sup>

In accountability, our brothers ask us the *hard questions*: "Are you really sorry about the sin, or only for its consequences? What are you doing to flee and forsake this sin?" Our brothers can also *follow up* with us going forward: "Hey brother, how's it going with this? Making progress? Had any relapses?" Brothers in Christ help us drag our sins to the cross of Jesus and the power of his Spirit.

In addition to confrontation, our brothers in accountability also remind us of the *gospel promises*: "You've confessed this, and Jesus says you are forgiven. Period. His Spirit is in you as a seal of this promise. Even when you don't feel it, believe it! You're no longer a slave to this sin, either to its guilt or to its power. You are free, and we are in this together."

Accountability enables us *to truly know and be known*. How many of us really wish that we could have other men with whom we can be both open and safe, authentic and accepted? How many of us wish we could have trusted brothers speaking into our lives? This is the way.

### Overcoming Obstacles through the Gospel

To succeed with regular accountability, we must be honest about why we resist it:

- *Because we are afraid.* "What will they think?" "What if they betray my confidence?"
- *Because we are proud.* "I can handle this on my own..." OR "Look how humble I am..."

Trust is essential for accountability to succeed. We must be able to trust one another to guard reputations and keep confidence. We must be able to trust our brothers.

But we must also trust Jesus. Accountability is his plan for our lives. He knows the risks to which it will expose us – because he faced them himself. He knows what it is to be betrayed, and he certainly knows what it is to be humbled (Mk. 15:24) and judged (Mk. 15:34)! He also shows us the way to overcome these obstacles: by placing our reputation in God's hands (Lk. 23:46), and by recognizing that humility in obedience to God is the path to ultimate glory (Heb. 12:1-2).

Because Jesus faced the ultimate risks for us, we can face every lesser risk in him.

### Comprehension Questions

- Why is it so dangerous to hide our sins?
- Who invented the idea of accountability?

### Application Questions

- Why is trust important for accountability? How do we guard one another's reputations?
- What obstacle to accountability do you feel most strongly?
- What is one sin that you are willing to confess (and be accountable for) to your brothers?

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<sup>5</sup> *Life Together*, 92-93.