

When It's "Hammer Time."

"But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name." (1 Peter 4:15-16, ESV)

There's a proverb, often claimed to be of Russian or Japanese origin, which states, "The nail that sticks up will be hammered down." Someone suggested to me that consideration of this proverb might lead to sound self-examination. I believe the person was correct in this assertion. Several possible applications come to mind for when you see the hammer fall.

1. Self-exalted nails get hammered. Remember in scripture when Pharaoh continued to exalt himself against Yahweh God's people? (Exod. 9:17) In this case, Pharaoh, whose heart was hardened, was a nail that Yahweh hammered down. This treatment is deserved in consequence to one's evildoing. One who exalts herself in this manner should expect similar treatment. Yahweh's self-declared mission is to raise the humble and to humble the raised. (Job 40:12) If you have been raising up your head like a haughty nail, consider this: "If you have been foolish, exalting yourself, or if you have been devising evil, put your hand on your mouth." (Prov. 30:32) In other words: Let a little air out. Yahweh has popped many balloons. (cf. Jam. 4:10; 1 Pet. 5:5-6)

2. Humble nails get hammered. Some people get hammered down for doing the right thing or proclaiming the truth. (1 Pet. 3:14) Peter teaches that such suffering, for doing good, is better than suffering the consequences of one's own evildoing. In other words, it's not right, but it'll be okay. Some people find themselves in the crosshairs of another's vendetta. Of course, such vengeance is unbecoming of godliness. (1 Pet. 3:9) In the course of rescuing another, one may perish in the fall of a burning building. If you bring the gospel to one house and it rejects the truth, hammering you as result of truth, apply the principle of Jesus's words to the disciples of the first commission: "As you enter the house, greet it. And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you." (Mat 10:12-13)

3. Mistaken nails get hammered. As Job could not perfectly imitate the perfect fault-finder, (i.e., God; Job 40:2), be careful in your own finding fault in others. How would you feel if you somehow found yourself hammering the nails of a righteous man? Certainly, you would not desire to be in the company of certain Roman soldiers of ancient memory, right? If, however, after self-examination, you find yourself being hammered undeservedly for the sake of righteousness, take consolation in the words of Peter: "If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." (1 Pet. 4:14)