

LAGGING BEHIND THE LEADER

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Lieutenant General Nathan Bedford Forrest was perhaps the most feared commander produced by the Confederacy. Much can be said about him, and not all of it good. But no one denies he was remarkable. The only soldier—North or South—to enlist as a private and rise to the rank of Lt. General, Forrest personally killed 30 Union soldiers and had 29 horses shot out from under him. Lacking a West Point education, he nevertheless struck terror into its graduates and his own brilliant tactics came to be taught there. Union General William T. Sherman said that Forrest should “be hunted down and killed if it costs 10,000 lives and bankrupts the treasury.”

Forrest was nothing if not a born—and fearless—leader. As cavalry officer, his favorite tactic was the charge, which he employed to devastating effect. Forrest did not watch a charge. He *led* it. In fact, at the battle of Shiloh, Forrest led a charge against Sherman’s men. In his zeal, Forrest galloped so far ahead of the rest of his cavalry troops that he found himself—all by himself—in the middle of Union soldiers, who opened fire on the lone Rebel. Forrest took a slug in the left side, which lodged near the spine, leaving his right leg hanging useless in his stirrup. Incredibly, he managed to turn his mount around and clear a path with his pistol, allowing him to gallop out of the maelstrom. Because they let Forrest get so far ahead of them, the Confederate cavalry almost got their highly respected leader killed. The point is this: *Bad things happen when you lag behind the leader.*

So it is in the Lord’s kingdom. Listen to how the inspired apostle John describes our leader: “And I saw the heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and he that sat thereon called Faithful and True; and in righteousness he doth judge and make war...And the armies which are in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and pure” (Rev. 19:11, 14).

Of course, we realize that heaven’s cavalry will eventually be victorious. In the meantime, though, the outcome of a lot of skirmishes rests on our shoulders. God has entrusted “earthen vessels” (2 Cor. 4:7) to engage the Devil in battle on earth. That means you and me. We need not worry that the Savior will forsake or fail us in any way. But if we lag behind, then he suffers, as does his church. So how do we lag behind?

First, we lag behind when we fail to muster enthusiasm for the Lord’s cause. Jesus is full of zeal for the truth (John 2:17). His zeal does not waver up and down according to the current mood of the troops. If we are content to allow the few, or even none, to stand for the truth, then we may as well realize we have already defected to the enemy. The word “traitor” comes to mind. Remember, Jesus said “He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth” (Matt. 12:30).

Second, we lag behind when we fail to comprehend New Testament doctrine. The church needs advocates of objective truth, not espousers of theological theory. That truth is the word of God (John 17:17). When we deviate therefrom, the kingdom suffers. In his day, Jesus dealt with men who thought themselves right, but who all the while were mistaken, “not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God” (Matt. 22:29). Those people are still here—even in the church. And, to one degree or another, they drag down the gospel. Some of us have let the Lord on his white horse get so far out in front that we are of no help to him in the war. Worse, we may even be shooting him in the back.

None of us wants to get to judgment only to learn we hurt the very church we ostensibly loved. Let each of us determine to have zeal tempered by knowledge (Rom. 10:2), and never be guilty of lagging behind the Leader.