

## Lean Muscular Christianity

We don't often recognize the Zeit Geist when we encounter it. I suppose that is because it **is** the Zeit Geist; the Spirit of the Age<sup>1</sup>. It's in the ethos. We breathe it in. It surrounds us almost imperceptibly. It's inescapable. Therefore, when I see things spiritual “infected” by it, I'm never surprised.

Recently, I was discussing with a pastor friend, something that he'd prepared for his men's group. It was a little piece on “Lean Muscular Christianity”. In actuality, it was a phrase he'd gotten from me! One Sunday while attending his church, I realized that there were a number of the men who had been to a men's conference on Saturday. I noticed that one of the young men was very enthused over what he'd experienced at the conference the day before, and I asked the pastor, “Who are your lean, muscular Christian men who will 'come along side' this youngster?”. He thought for a moment and said, “I'm not sure we have any.”.

In actuality, this interchange was formative for me! I have taken to thinking quite a bit about my own life, my own “muscularity”, etc. But in thinking about it, I notice some things about the church community, and the ways in which it encourages *or not*, lean, muscular Christianity. While I don't believe that there were really any “good ole days” *in* the church, or the culture, I do notice some things that have been syncretized<sup>2</sup> *out* of our contemporary church culture. Some of this is due to the Zeit Geist, and some is just our own fault. Among these things are such concepts as Sanctification and Obedience. Both of these things are often characterized by lists of don'ts (which would in and of itself explain their removal from contemporary culture and contemporary church culture!). The sanctified man or woman *has removed* this, that or the other thing, from his/her life, and therefore no longer \_\_\_\_\_s (fill in the blank). The obedient man *obeys* the 10 commandments and therefore doesn't, and doesn't, and doesn't, all those don't, don't and don'ts.

Very few in our American culture, and seemingly in our American churches, seem to like either of those, particularly. But whether we like them or not, there are some realities with which we must deal, even when the Zeit Geist is screaming that we must go the other way. Consider the following...

In the United States' Constitution, the very definition of our own government is largely stated in what the government can NOT do. Yes, there are some *enumerated* powers for

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1 Zeit Geist is a German expression for “the spirit of the age”

2 Syncretize: to attempt to amalgamate or reconcile (differing things, especially religious beliefs, cultural elements, or schools of thought).

the government, things that it should and must do, but the gist of the thing is this; if the government wants to do something, but the power to do it is *not* enumerated in the Constitution, then the the government can *not* do it. Did you know this about the American Constitution? Most don't.

Similarly, while all the Biblical writings feature combinations of dos and don'ts, when that writing first began - during the Exodus when the Children of Israel were delivered from 400 years of slavery in Egypt - the first recorded instructions from God were the things that the Children of Israel must *not* do. Now that the Children of Israel were out of their bondage in Egypt and on the way to their own land, where they would encounter numerous other cultures, religions, etc, God told them that they were to be different from the “people of the land”, by *not* doing certain things. We call these things the 10 commandments. And an interesting thing about the 10 Commandments is that they were not given to Moses to give to the people, rather they were spoken by God, to *all* the people, and were spoken to *all* the people before Moses received any other laws, instructions or commandments, be they civil, ceremonial or otherwise<sup>3</sup>. The 10 Commandments are a list of negative liberties (“guidelines to freedom”, as one expositor puts it).

Without getting all King Jamesy with *shalts* and *-eths*, let me break down simply, some ways in which the lean, muscular Christian is to be defined by these commandments, and how he/she does *not* look like the “people of the land”, and how they will have a sanctifying effect on him or her. Here we go...

*While respecting others' beliefs, I don't pretend that there are many ways to God. Jesus saves. This is my life's message.*

*The word, God, is not to be used as a colloquialism. Neither is the name of His son, my Savior. You won't hear that stuff from me.*

*I'm not a lone-wolf Christian. I'm committed to my community. You will find me worshiping with, supporting and being supported by other believers. As I “eat” Scripture, I discuss it, study it, and learn it with them.*

*I don't fill my mind with filth, and then expect Godly fruitfulness to flow from my mouth and my life.*

*I don't disrespect my mother and father. I don't disrespect my wife, my husband, my family, nor my friends. In fact, I don't disrespect anyone; period.*

*I am not caught up in the materialism, greed and selfishness that pervades our culture.*

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3 Exodus 19:9-20:21

*I do not lie.*

*I am set about the work, with God, of removing from my life, ALL the things of which He disapproves; and the list itself is troubling. Yet this is my life's goal. We in the religious/theological/church world call this process (for it happens neither quickly nor axiomatically), sanctification.*

Now to be sure, all these “negative liberties”, these *don'ts*, must be accompanied by numerous *dos*, which will support and demonstrate them in individual lives and in community. Some of these *dos* are generic, applying to all lean, muscular Christians. Some are more specific; some applying to married people and some to single; some to executives and some to servants; some to leaders and some to followers. These you will discover in community, for we lean, muscular Christians will learn Jesus from each other. That's the way God has planned it. But whether married or single, leading or following, at the head of the class or the tail, there are things that characterize us, *and differentiate us* from the “people of the land”; from the crowd, so to speak, and like it or not, they're negative.

We all find ourselves “in the ranks” of humanity. Some within our ranks are lean, muscular humans. Most, if not all, publicly or secretly, actually *desire* to be lean, muscular humans. The sad fact, at least in our culture, is that *most* do not want to do what it takes to become such. Similarly, you may find yourself “in the ranks” of Christendom. But if you want to be a lean muscular Christian, just as in all of life, more is required, and we have listed some of those things for your consideration. While you may think these things are too negative, I remind you of these two things.

First, the way in which our own nation was founded on a list of negative liberties, and more importantly the way in which God has spoken of the behavior of His people, in whatever culture they are to find themselves; separate from the people of the land - and markedly so - by a list of negative liberties.

Second, the Zeit Geist. The move in our culture is against *don'ts*, against rules, against “negative liberties”, indeed against reality itself! But I remind you that reality itself is based upon two things; upon things being what they are, and upon things not being what they are not. Our culture has forgotten this to its peril and demise. So, Beloved, will we.

Pastor