

Seek The Old Paths

"Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths...and walk therein."

(Jeremiah 6:16)

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HARD PREACHING

James W. Boyd

Everyone probably has their definition of what "hard preaching" is. Preachers who are serious about the truth are finding the very task of preaching to be harder and harder because so many have lost real love for it.

It is not uncommon to hear somebody say about a visiting preacher, or someone of whom they have received report, "He sure does preach hard." Possibly you are acquainted with statements heard about a preacher conducting a Gospel meeting, "Do you preach that hard at home?" as if there should be a conscious effort by the preacher to preach "hard" away from home but "softer" at home.

What is this thing called "hard preaching?" It might depend upon how applicable the sermon is to the life of the one doing the measuring. If the sermon called for something the hearer has already done, that is not too hard. If it condemned something of which the hearer is not guilty, that is not too hard. But if the lesson presented God's requirements in a matter that the hearer has not obeyed, or condemned some sin of which he is guilty, then that sermon might be labeled by him a "hard sermon" and the preacher a "hard preacher."

In our day, there seems to be a lessening desire for certain sounds, sound speech, sound doctrine and clear distinction between truth and error. Some are repulsed by anything that shows the line God has drawn. They often insinuate that the preacher has drawn the line of his own authority rather than what he has

actually done; namely, brought attention to the line God has drawn. But such preaching is called "hard."

With some, only the mushy, ambiguous, "yo" type of sermons (those kind where you can take it either way, yes or no, whatever you like) is judged to be preaching "in the Christian spirit." Even among many brethren this attitude of choosing what you like and discarding what you do not wish to accept, (the same attitude that has dominated the denominational world throughout history), is very much in evidence. A growing number just would prefer nothing that is demanding or that possibly could offend anyone. As one elder once told me of a sermon(?) he heard from a preacher(?), "It was wonderful. Nobody was upset and nobody felt guilty. Nobody was aroused and all left feeling good."

I challenge anybody, if they really "preach the word," to offend nobody. What can you preach? You will not preach Jesus Christ as the Son of God because that will be too hard for the unbeliever. You cannot teach that salvation is only in the church because non-members may become offended. You certainly cannot teach the moral standard of Christ because that would offend liars, the dishonest, the adulterers in multi-married relationships, drinkers, swearers, on and on. To them, moral purity is hard preaching. Just sit down and try to figure it out and see if there is much of anything in the Bible that you can preach that somebody does not call "hard preach-

ing." You will find you have no material left.

You really cannot even preach the truth on the lovely theme of love because so many have the distorted impression that love means acceptance regardless of what you do, that it is only an emotion that prevents objecting to any doctrine whether false or not, crossing anybody despite their conduct. Few subjects have been as maligned in our time as the subject of love. That love demands obedience is "hard preaching" to many people even though Jesus said we show our love by our obedience. Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say" (Luke 6:46)? The inspired apostle John wrote, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3).

While there is no excuse or justification for deliberately abusive speech from the pulpit or anywhere else, we need to "get our heads on straight" before we cast stones at what some have called "hard preaching." It just could be that the truth is being preached just as the Word of God has revealed it and what is "hard" is the heart of the one who is hearing it, who does not really want it, and therefore will simply reject it, hoping to somehow cast some discredit against it by calling it "hard preaching."

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Editorial...

EASTER

Garland M. Robinson

The celebration of Easter is well-known in our society and is observed by the masses. Few, however, know its origin and that it holds no authority from the Bible. Many traditions exist as to the origin of the word “Easter,” but one thought appears to be present in most all ideas, Easter refers to the East and rising sun, and in many people’s minds, causing it to have a connection with the resurrection.

The observance of Easter represents a convergence of three particular events:

- 1) The Hebrew passover (celebrated during the month of Nisan which is the first of the month of the Hebrew calendar. It always fell in the Spring of the year).
- 2) The commemoration of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ (which happened to take place during the feast of the Hebrew passover).
- 3) A pagan festival of Spring which fell at the vernal equinox on March 21. This pagan festival embodied the worship of the goddess of the Saxons in whose honor sacrifices were offered annually.

The merging of these three events became associated with the unauthorized festival of the resurrection which was celebrated each year at the time of the passover.

The day on which Easter was to be observed has been much disputed. The council of Nicaea (325 A.D.) decreed it should be on Sunday but did not establish which particular Sunday. It was not until the 7th century that the rule was finally set and adopted. This same method of calculation is used today. Easter Sunday is determined to be:

- 1) The first Sunday after,
- 2) The first full moon after,
- 3) The first day of Spring (March 21).

Easter Sunday may fall anywhere between March 21 and April 25, a period of 35 days. This explains why

Easter is on a different Sunday every year instead of on the same Sunday in the same month every year.

Many other occasions are connected with the celebration of “Easter Season.”

LENT or “**Lenten**” is the name applied to the forty days of fasting preceding Easter Sunday. The word “Lent” signifies the Spring-fast for “lenten-tide.” It is observed in commemoration of Jesus’ fast in the wilderness for a period of forty days. It begins on “Ash-Wednesday” which is forty days before Easter (Sundays excluded). It is supposed to be a time of penitence where one shows sorrow for sin and their need to seek forgiveness. It is a time its observers prepare for Easter by abstaining from certain foods and activities. The Bible gives no authority as to anything concerning this event.

ASH-WEDNESDAY is the first day of Lent. It came from a custom observed by people expressing their humiliation at this time by appearing in sack-cloth and ashes. In some churches, ashes burned from the preceding years Palm Sunday is blessed by the priest and used to mark a cross on the foreheads of the members of the congregation. This reminds the people to begin their lenten penance in a humble spirit. Like the other observances in this study, there is no authority from the scriptures to observe such a day.

PALM-SUNDAY is the Sunday before Easter and marks the beginning of what many call “Holy Week” or “Passion Week.” Palm-Sunday is supposed to honor Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem where palm branches were used to align the road (cf. John 12:12-15). The first celebration of this was not known until the fourth century — 300 years after the revelation of God’s word was complete!

MAUNDAY-THURSDAY (also called **Holy Thursday**) is the Thursday before Easter and is supposed to recall to one’s mind Jesus’ last meal

with the twelve apostles in the upper room. In some places, the priest will wash the feet of twelve members of the congregation to show that Jesus washed his disciples’ feet.

GOOD FRIDAY (the Friday before Easter) is supposed to observe the death of Jesus on the cross and his suffering for our sins. However, according to the New Testament, Christians observe the Lord’s death the first day of every week, not simply on one day of the year (cf. Acts 20:7).

HOLY SATURDAY (the day before Easter) is supposed to be a day of solemn **vigil** (waiting). Some churches hold vigil services which often include the baptism of new members. Many times this leads up to a dramatic moment in which all the lights are put out leaving everyone in the dark. The priest will light a tall candle which represents the risen Christ. He then lights the members’ candles which is supposed to symbolize the light of Jesus going out into the world. Many vigils last until dawn which ends in a “sun-rise service.” Many denominations have a special “sun-rise service” on Easter morning.

WEARING NEW CLOTHES (including a bonnet, hat) on Easter Sunday is an established tradition in some places. It originated from the practice of having those who had recently been baptized to wear new white robes for Easter. The new clothes represented the new life offered through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

EASTER EGGS have long been a part of the Easter Season. Eggs were considered to be a symbol of life and creation. The giving of multi-colored eggs was a custom throughout the East. Purple was the color of kings and nobility. In ancient times, purple dye was very expensive so that only the rich could afford it. Yellow was the color of the sun with its radiance and brilliance. White was the color of purity. In uninspired church history, the egg symbolized the immature hope of the resurrection.

RABBITS (Easter bunny) are connected with the observance of Easter because they are associated with the fertility of Spring. Their ability to multiply, bringing “new life” into the world, brings hope and joy. Tradition says the Easter bunny brings a basket of multi-colored eggs the night before Easter which is hidden either

in the house or in the garden for children to find the next morning.

PRETZELS and **HOT CROSS BUNS** are supposed to be a Lenten food. The Saxons honored their goddess of Spring by eating wheat cakes. It is believed that from this ritual came the idea of hot cross buns and pretzels. The buns had a cross of icing on top and the pretzels brought to mind a person praying with their arms folded across their chest. In some places they are given to the poor to eat during Lent.

WHIT-SUNDAY is sometimes called **Whitsuntide**, **White Sunday** or **Pentecost Sunday**. It comes fifty days after Easter and marks the end of the Easter season. It is in commemoration of the Pentecost day we read of in Acts two when the Holy Spirit descended upon the twelve apostles. Newly baptized people would wear their robes of white on that day.

Easter, and its associated festivities, is considered by the masses to be the greatest event in the Christian religion. Some will “go to church” on that Sunday when they do not go any other Sunday of the year. Does the Bible claim Easter Sunday is of greater significance than any other Sunday of the year? You will search in vain to find it! It’s not there.

The facts bear testimony that Easter and its seasonal observance stand without any Bible authority whatsoever. There is **no command, example** or **implication** anywhere in scripture that would authorize the observance of this day with any religious significance. New Testament Christians observe and commemorate the death of Christ each and every Lord’s day, the first day of the week (Sunday), in the observance of the Lord’s supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-26).

Since the celebration of Easter came about after the time of the apostles and New Testament revelation, it has no place in worship guided by the Word of God. In fact, there are no special occasions, seasons, dates, or day(s) that have any religious significance for the Lord’s church and Christians. The New Testament authorizes Christians to assemble and worship on every first day of the week. Since every week has a first day, the whole church assembles for worship. Authorized worship includes: singing

(Eph. 5:19), praying (Acts 2:42), Lord’s supper (Acts 20:7), giving (1 Cor. 16:1-2) and preaching (Acts 20:7). Every Sunday is the same as the Sunday which comes before it and the Sunday which comes after it. Any “first day” is no more special than any other. It is man, not God, who makes some days or times more important and special than others; and, man does so to his own peril.

THE KING JAMES VERSION AND EASTER

Some have referred to those who use the King James Version as “Easter Bunny preachers” because it uses the word *Easter* in Acts 12:4. I suppose they seek to cast reflection and doubt on the reliable and time-tested King James Version and those who use it. For some reason they feel threatened by it and want it to go by the way-side because, in their thinking, it is old, obsolete, archaic and hence, people can’t understand it. Could it be because it refutes the numerous errors found in their favorite per-version? If the worst thing they can say about it is that it uses the word *Easter*, then it stands on pretty good ground. What can be said about the word *Easter* in the KJV?

The King James Version, in Acts 12:4, reads: *“And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.”*

The Greek word translated *Easter* in this verse is translated “passover” (referring to the annual Jewish passover) in all the other 28 places it appears in the King James New Testament. The New King James Version uses the word “passover” in Acts 12:4. Why, then, is it translated *Easter* in the KJV?

I do not know why the translators of the King James Version chose to use the word *Easter* in Acts 12:4. One plausible explanation is this: the context of the passage shows that Herod had arrested the apostle Peter and put him in prison “...intending after *Easter* to bring him forth to the people.” The translators may have chosen to use the word *Easter* so the English speaking people of the early 17th century could relate it to their own calen-

dar of events. That is, English readers would be more familiar with the time of year in which *Easter* fell than they would when the passover was observed. This way, they would more readily know the time of year that Herod intended to deliver Peter to the people — after the Jewish passover or as Christendom observed, “*Easter Sunday*.”

Regardless of why the word *Easter* appears in Acts 12:4 in the KJV, these things are certain: 1) it does not teach that *Easter* is a religious holiday, 2) that *Easter* was observed in the first century in any sense, and 3) it certainly does not teach that *Easter* is to be observed as a religious holiday at any time. It does not mention any kind of religious service connected with it at all. It simply refers to a “time” or “day” on the calendar in which Herod intended to bring Peter before the people. There is absolutely no reference to Christians celebrating or observing *Easter* in any religious way: either by command, example or implication.

To celebrate *Easter* with any religious significance is to go beyond the authority of the scriptures and therefore, stands condemned (2 John 9-11). How would one explain to the Lord on judgment day that he added religious observances to the Christian life without any regards to the Bible? Human tradition makes worship vain (Matt. 15:8-9). Paul told the Galatian brethren, “*Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain*” (Gal. 4:10-11).

The Lord’s people (true Christianity) do not have a “Christian calendar” as the world often refers to it. The New Testament knows nothing about Saint Valentine’s Day, Mardi Gras, Advent, Ash Wednesday, Lent, Palm Sunday, Holy Week, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, *Easter Sunday*, Saint Andrew’s Day, Saint Patrick’s Day, All Saint’s Day (they were running out of days so they grouped them all together), Christmas, Epiphany, Twelfth Night, on and on and on. Name them all, NOT ONE has any religious significance attached to it in the Bible. Man created them and with man they all will perish. As the Lord’s people, we must not go beyond that which is written (1 Cor. 4:6; 2 John 9-11).

Elder's COLUMN

How To Fail With Visitors

Mel Futrell

“And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple” (Acts 9:26).

I suspect all of us at one time or another, while traveling for work or on vacation, have visited the Lord’s Day or Wednesday night services of God’s people at another location. Because of the nature of some brethren’s work, or perhaps due to retirement, this occurs quite frequently for some folks. However, how we were received, greeted, treated, and what we heard while there often has a real impact on us for good or bad. If the truth be told, some of these visits many of us make become negative situations. Therefore, the next time we have the opportunity to be in that same area we are reluctant to attend worship services at the same place. And who can blame us?

None of what I have to say here is a direct indictment of any particular congregation. Yet, it is still the case that a number of congregations apparently have failed to realize the great opportunity for good afforded them when they have visitors. Are these brethren “afraid” of visitors? One might draw that conclusion by the way some brethren scatter like kicked up quail when visitors enter the building. What I propose to do in the following lines is list some things/actions that are done that result in failure toward the visitors to our assemblies — whether these visitors are Christians or not.

First, we have in mind **the failure to be on time**. Over the years it has been my unfortunate experience to attend worship services at places [usually these are vacation type areas] where we waited and waited and waited even to be let into the building. My family and I visited a congregation where we, along with about 35 others, most of whom were visitors also, had this very experience. It was literally time for services to begin, yet no one was present to even unlock the doors. And this is a

congregation that throughout much of the year enjoys numerous visitors. I began to wonder who was in charge there. It would seem to me that at bare minimum brethren at any locale should have the physical plant where they regularly assemble open at least fifteen minutes before the posted times for services. And, let me quickly add that this is not necessarily the preacher’s job. I’m inclined to believe this might be more in line with work/duties assigned to deacons. Of course the shepherds of the church couldn’t go wrong by being the first ones there to greet the flock, either.

Second, we are thinking about **the failure to speak to visitors**. There is hardly anything more irritating to me personally than to be ignored by members of the body of Christ when I and my family have at times gone out of our way to worship with a certain congregation. Solomon said in the long ago, *“A man that hath friends must show himself friendly; and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother”* (Prov. 18:24). There is absolutely no excuse for brethren to avoid greeting visitors of all sorts to our assemblies. I’m not naive. I know there will always be those who just won’t speak to anyone first, whether they be visitors or regular members. However, such conduct is shameful at best. I’ve heard brethren with my own ears say, “When I come to services, it isn’t to visit, it’s to worship God.” Give me a break! That statement and attitude is a cop-out. One need only look at Acts 2:42-47 to see that right after the establishment of the church, brethren in Jerusalem were immediately involved in both religious and social fellowship. And, the same is true for the assembly detailed in Acts 20:7-12. Evidently, a good many brethren are afraid to reach out and get to know others — and I have a pretty good idea why. If they do, they may find out there is a legitimate need that could and should be met which may cost them both time and possibly money. New Testament Christians should be the friendliest

people on earth, and that is no cliché.

Third, we want to mention **the failure to assist visitors in finding a Bible class**. This may seem petty to some, but those of us with younger children beg to differ. How many times can you recall visiting a congregation where not only were you not greeted, but you were given no aid in locating Bible classes for your family? From personal experience and the testimony of others, I have no doubt this problem occurs weekly all over the brotherhood. Really now, how much trouble would it be to have individuals or families from the local congregation posted at the entrance of the building to provide needed assistance to visitors in getting to Bible classes or the nursery and restrooms? Sometimes it is the “little” things like this that make all the difference. When Saul left Damascus and arrived in Jerusalem to “join himself to the disciples” (Acts 9:26) at that location, it took the intervention of Barnabas to see that he got squared away. The scenarios don’t have to be identical for one to see the valid principle here of service intervention. And, this service is provided by the local members.

Fourth and finally, we’re considering **the failure to be prepared to teach and preach**. Tragically many, too many, Bible class teachers and Gospel preachers are simply unprepared to fulfill the requirements of the obligation they have assumed. And, the fault lies with them and those who have assigned them this duty. My father-in-law has often spoken of those who, it seemed, had just scratched out their sermon or class material on a napkin moments before getting up to present it. They were that ill-prepared. And, like him, I and many others have seen this again and again and again. Brethren, teaching and preaching the Gospel is serious business that demands much time, study, and effort. I have a sermon titled “The Teacher’s Task” that deals with this very issue. I remind you that James said: *“Be not many of you teachers,*

my brethren, knowing that we shall receive heavier judgment” (James 3:1, ASV). James’ point of course not being to discourage teachers, but rather to awaken them to the seriousness and responsibility of teaching the word of God; and, that negative consequences follow those who abuse this.

Consider that Ezra of old “*had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments*” (Ezra 7:10). However, the order is important — he “sought” and “did” before he “taught.” The Hebrews writer spoke of those who by that time should have been teachers, and thus meat eaters, but were neither (Heb. 5:12-14). Sadly, some today who haven’t qualified themselves to teach are teaching! There is enough unpreparedness among the general membership of the local church without those who have assumed the teaching role joining hands with them in this sad state.

It is evident that failure in these areas and others is something to be avoided and that can be corrected. All of us at times are visitors. Knowing how we expect to be treated and what we expect to hear should motivate us to offer that same treatment when the positions are reversed. Oh, what responsibilities we have to both visitors and regular members alike. May we never fail.

SHEPHERDS & WOLVES

When shepherds speak well of the wolves, the sheep are in grave danger. It’s sad but true, many elderships (and churches in the absense of elders) speak well of the wolves. As a matter of fact, they would not know a wolf if they saw one. To them, all churches of Christ are just one big happy family. They fellowship them all and never check to see whether they are sound in the faith. This is not what the Lord said to do. Jesus said, “*Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves*” (Matt. 7:15). Paul wrote, “*(For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, [that they are] the enemies of the cross of Christ*” (Phil. 3:18). “*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world*” (1 John 4:1). — Editor

“DON’T ASK, DON’T TELL,” BUT GOD KNOWS

Marlin Kilpatrick

Our military’s policy of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” has been repealed by Congress and President Obama signed it into law. The DADT has been a “thorn in the flesh” for homosexuals and lesbians for quite some time. Homosexuals and lesbians have fought to have DADT overturned, and now they have succeeded. Supposedly, the repeal of DADT is a step in the right direction for equality for homosexuals and lesbians in our armed forces. It is also claimed that future enlistment of homosexuals and lesbians in our military will be encouraged by the repeal of DADT. Such conclusions may be true, but they are not the real issue. The fact remains, even though Congress has repealed DADT, Congress cannot repeal what God has said in his word, the Bible. Even though one may be silent about his/her sexual proclivities, God still knows. What is done in secret does not escape the eyes of Jehovah. Solomon said, “*The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good*” (Prov. 15:3).

Our once great country is in a morally downward spiral. What was once never heard in polite conversation is now being forced upon us by the news media and prime-time television. The television and movie industries have gradually, for decades, pushed the homosexual and lesbian agenda upon the American public. Our judicial system has also played a role in this downward, moral spiral by liberal Judges who have ruled, more and more, in favor of these aberrant life styles. But the Bible still says, “*Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people*” (Prov. 14:34).

The Bible condemns homosexuality and lesbianism in both the Old and New Testaments. Only those who reject the Bible and refuse to be guided by any norm, except their own, will dispute what God has said. The Bible tells of such conditions we are now witnessing in our own country. The Bible says, “*Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind; it is an abomination*” (Lev. 18:22). “*Neither shalt thou lie with any beast to defile thyself therewith; neither shall any woman stand before a beast to lie down thereto. ... Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations...*” (Lev. 18:23,26). Moral principles do not change. Even though the foregoing quotations are in the Old Testament, the violation of these moral principles is as much a sin today as when they were first penned. Almost half of the first chapter of Paul’s letter to the saints at Rome is devoted to a condemnation of these ungodly life styles (cf. Rom. 1:21-32).

The “thinking”(?) behind DADT is that it’s no one’s business about what is done (sexually) among consenting adults. The truth is, IT AIN’T SO! The Bible prescribes acceptable sexual behavior as that between a husband and wife; any other sexual behavior is condemned in the plainest language. God not only knows what is best for man, he also knows when men set aside his laws and engage in the most degrading, defiling, disgusting, and sinful sexual conduct.

The repeal of DADT is just another step down the slippery slope of the moral degeneracy of our once great nation. Our only hope to keep God from destroying our nation are the prayers of the righteous, for their prayers still avail much (cf. James 5:16). Think about it.

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TRUTHFUL ADMISSIONS THE DAY JESUS DIED

Roger D. Campbell

The morning and afternoon of the day Jesus was crucified, a number of people made open confessions about whom He really was. Hours before His crucifixion, Jesus stood before the Jewish Sanhedrin and enraged its members when He responded, “I am” when asked if He was “the Christ, the Son of the Blessed” (Mark 14:62). But what were mere mortals openly admitting about God’s Son that fateful day? Who were some of these?

Judas Iscariot, the betrayer. Judas had covenanted with the Jewish leaders to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver (Matt. 26:14-16). The morning Jesus was condemned to death, however, Judas returned to those leaders and “brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood” (Matt. 27:3,4). Sadly, Judas proceeded to go out and hang himself (27:5). What did he gain by confessing that Jesus was “innocent?” Did he receive monetary compensation for such? No. Was he elevated to a high position, or did he have praises heaped upon him for such an admission? No. He simply told the truth — Jesus’ blood was innocent because He was the sinless Son of God (Heb. 4:14,15).

Pilate’s wife. When Jesus was being questioned by Pilate, the governor of Judaea, Pilate’s wife sent this message to him about the Christ: “Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him” (Matt. 27:19). Just as in the case of Judas, Pilate’s wife would not be rewarded or compensated for making such an admission about Jesus. Yet, her honest analysis was to call our Lord “just.” The word “just” is often used interchangeably in the New Testament with the word “righteous.” “Just” is from the Greek word *dikaïos*, which means “in a wide sense, upright, righteous, virtuous, keeping the commands of God ... innocent, faultless, guiltless” [Thay-

er’s Greek-English Lexicon, p.148]. Our Lord was upright and innocent, and the wife of Pilate recognized it.

Pilate himself. Three times in a span of time that could not have exceeded three hours, Pilate admitted that Jesus was innocent. “Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man ... And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, Said unto them ... I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him: No, nor yet Herod ... And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him” (Luke 23:4,13-15,22). Pilate was by no means a committed follower of the Christ, yet he admitted the truth: there was no fault in Him.

An unnamed criminal. Jesus was crucified at Calvary with one criminal on His right hand and one on His left (Luke 23:33). At one point, “they that were crucified with him reviled him” (Mark 15:32). But, it is also written that after one of those malefactors railed on Jesus, the other one responded by saying to him, “...we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man [Jesus, rdc] hath done nothing amiss” (Luke 23:41). This criminal (that was nigh unto death) simply gave an unbiased appraisal of Jesus’ innocence.

A Roman soldier. After Jesus died, amazing things began to happen. The veil of the temple was torn, there was an earthquake, and graves were opened (Matt. 27:50-53). That is when the Roman soldier in charge of the crucifixion, as well as those that were with him, made a great admission: “Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God” (Matt. 27:54). These soldiers had no built-in favoritism for Jesus. They simply called it as it really was: “Truly this was the Son of God.”

Judas Iscariot, Pilate’s wife, Pilate himself, one of the thieves, plus a centurion and those with him — what did all of these have in common? On the day of our Lord’s death, each of them, in one way or another, made a truthful admission about Jesus, confessing that He was innocent, just, and the Son of God. There was no material, social, or political gain for any of them by making such an admission. They simply spoke the truth, and their truthful statements are recorded in the Bible for us.

Do we believe that Jesus really is the Son of God, that He rose from the dead, and that He still lives? Absolutely. Why? Because the word of God declares these truths for us. The message of Jesus’ life and acts that He carried out is recorded in order to convince us that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God (John 20:30,31). Those truthful admissions that we have examined — those that were made on the day of Jesus’ death — serve to reinforce the message that runs throughout the first four books of the New Testament: Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. May we ever appreciate His sinless life and His sacrifice that provides for the salvation of our souls. “Truly this was the Son of God.”

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JEHOSHAPHAT’S DEPARTURE FROM GOD

Marvin L. Weir

Many today teach that if one is ever saved he can never sin so as to be lost. But the Bible contains warning after warning against apostasy! Why warn people of the eternal danger of a sin that will not condemn one to hell?

The writer to the Hebrews warned, “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceit-

fulness of sin” (Heb. 3:12-13). To the Galatian brethren Paul said, “Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth” (Gal. 5:7)?

We can learn much from the life of Jehoshaphat. He has a great beginning, but his bright morning soon became clouded with the dark sorrows of failure. Let us see both the good and the bad in the character of Jehoshaphat.

We see him highly honored. “And the LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim” (2 Chron. 17:3). If one chooses to walk with God, his success is guaranteed. In the beginning, Jehoshaphat did not let the sins of others become a stumbling-block. He knew that God is the perfect example and he chose to follow God. God was with him as He will be with all who determine to walk with Him.

We see him greatly encouraged. “And his heart was lifted up in the ways of the LORD: moreover he took away the high places and groves out of Judah” (2 Chron. 17:6). Jehoshaphat guarded against his heart becoming consumed with pride at the beginning of his reign. He evidently realized that “pride goeth before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18). When the devil can use pride to lift up one’s heart, it is lifted from the ways of the Lord into the way that will bring defeat and death. God gives no encouragement to one who chooses to live a manner of life that is in opposition to His will. Only when we choose God’s Holy Word to be a “lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path” (Psa. 119:105) can we expect His blessings.

We see him unequally yoked. “Now Jehoshaphat had riches and honour in abundance, and joined affinity with Ahab” (2 Chron. 18:1). It was the Savior who said, “...that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:23). More often than not, Satan uses affluence as his tool to hinder man’s loyalty to God. It is true that the “love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Tim. 6:10). We must control our riches and not allow our riches to control us. Many today are selling their souls for more dollars! The Bible also reminds us to “Be not

deceived: Evil companionships corrupt good morals” (1 Cor. 15:33).

Ahab was a well-known enemy of God. Why would a righteous person desire to associate with one of Ahab’s reputation? We read: “...Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him” (1 Kings 16:33). A tremendous lesson is now taught. When one chooses to form a friendship with a worldly person, he will soon be in fellowship with his worldly ways! “And after certain years he went down to Ahab to Samaria” (2 Chron. 18:2). The ungodly “Ahab’s” are always ready to have the servants of God come down to their level. Nehemiah resisted the temptation to visit with Tobiah and Sanballat. Nehemiah’s answer should be our answer: “...I [am] doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you” (Neh. 6:3)? Why should a faithful child of God willingly depart from the highway of holiness to travel the path of ungodliness?

Christians must not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. Light does not mix with darkness. Darkness may need the light, but light can have no fellowship with darkness (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14-18).

We see Jehoshaphat completely surrendered. No, he did not surrender to God, but to the unprincipled Ahab. “And Ahab king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat king of Judah, Wilt thou go with me to Ramoth-gilead? And he answered him, I [am] as thou [art], and my people as thy people; and [we will be] with thee in the war” (2 Chron. 18:3). When will we learn that compromise is a killer? The moment Jehoshaphat promised to help Ahab, he was worthless to the cause of God! One does not fraternize with the enemy and come out unscathed.

The Lord warns, “He that is not with me is against me” (Matt. 12:30). We must always be the bondservant of Christ while refusing to be a sinful slave of men. Good beginnings are important. A good ending, however, is essential if Heaven is to be our home. May we as Paul, “...press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14).

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