

What Then? Are We Better Than They?

by Ward Fenley

I listened to interviews with a well-known Christian leader after and before he was exposed for having gay sex and having taken crystal meth, and it is sad how the fear of people, particularly Christians, caused him to not be able to confide in them regarding his problem. He was so scared that he blatantly lied to news crews about what happened. Reading the lyrics of Steve Taylor's song "Guilty by Association" somehow reminded me of this leader's plight. The song seems to pinpoint the uselessness and vanity of trying to "Christianize" everything. I am not so sure the Father cherishes 'Christianese', which so many leaders use to promote their personal godliness. We live in a world of not only magnificent natural creation but magnificent man-made creations as well, clearly testifying to the unique minds God has given us. Our problem lies in the fact that we, like those who built the ladder to heaven, trust in such things. Then Christians, in order to repudiate those things begin to mock them and speak of them as evil. Spiritually, it is very dangerous to view inanimate things as having moral or immoral value. There are extremes on both sides of the political spectrum. Flaming liberals despise gun ownership and flaming conservatives despise alcohol, neither of which is sinful. And hearing this leader speak of how he had never used marijuana and how he had never drunk a drop of alcohol all his life in order to convince us that he had not taken meth or had gay sex was one of the saddest things I had ever seen, and reminded me of how many times in the whole of my Christian life I have had to do the same. I just wonder what the Christian world would have done had he come out and told everyone. Had they the ability, I think they would have stoned him.

As Paul and Barnabas were, he is a man "with like passions as you"...and me, and all of us. I have been afraid to darken the door of a "church" for some time because of the numerous problems I have, not simply because of the errors of dispensationalism and humanism being taught. This leader confessed that he had a sexual problem (i.e. a homosexual problem). There exists a "fight club" mentality from Christians toward the world and toward fallen Christians. This "fight club" group of Christians views their existence as one of war against those who break a system of law they feel should be imposed upon all society. I am almost afraid to write articles because I worry that the "fight club" Christians will all the more seek to harm me and expose all of my struggles. And if they saw my struggles as clearly as my forgiving wife sees me and as some in my closest circle of friends see me, I fear they would bite and devour me as the Christian community has done not only with the afore-mentioned leader, but also the non-Christian community.

If we establish ourselves as so blatantly anti-homosexual, and thereby view ourselves as morally superior, and then we fall, whom do we have left? The psalmist asked, "Whom have I in heaven but thee?" I realize he ultimately said that there "is none upon earth that I desire." But if he were to catapult himself into the 21st century new covenant, wouldn't he realize that there is now the whole of heaven populated and ever increasing with those cleansed by Christ? Maybe now with the blood of Christ we can answer the question, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee?" with, "You and all your people." I and others in my circle are struggling to find

Christians who will hear our vices, our struggles, our intellectual and moral deficiencies, and yet crave one to remind us that our "iniquity is pardoned" and our "warfare is accomplished."

From what I read, the greatest need within the kingdom of God is for God's people to obey not a system of morals but to obey this: "Cry unto My people that her iniquity is pardoned and that her warfare is accomplished." He knows His people will fail. But in our generation of hyper-moral fundamentalists, we are held to a standard of outward moral perfection. If for some reason we are placed in the public eye, we know that all are watching with sometimes implicit trust that we are who we claim to be: free from homosexual vice, drug abuse, adultery, stealing, lust, envy, greed, addiction and the rest of those things which outwardly manifest the sin of the heart for which Christ agonized, bled, and died.

It is in fact possible to live outwardly perfect. Paul said concerning the law he was blameless. Jesus said, "except your righteousness exceed that of the Scribes and the Pharisees, you shall by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." It seems it is possible to live in outward perfection. But Jesus and Paul focused on the inward problem, as Paul said, "except the law had said, 'Thou shalt not covet' I had not known lust." Paul had an inward problem—an inward problem which corrupted his very being. God does not look on the outward. Certainly consequences happen for immoral behavior, such as the example of the Christian leader partaking of gay sex and crystal meth. One could possibly contract AIDS or hepatitis, or experience terrible mental delusions and "tweaking." However, those outward circumstances are not why Christ came to shed His blood. Christ came to shed His blood for the inner disease of sin. The consequence for this inner "heart disease" is separation from God. Outward manifestation yields physical consequence. But unfortunately outward manifestation is what produces guilt. Why is that unfortunate? Because the vast majority of the time, those who are religious and trusting in self-righteousness experience guilt because of outward manifestation rather than experiencing guilt for the origin of their outward manifestation, and that is their inner motive and transgression. I can proclaim with authority and truth that the Bible teaches "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it?" There is a frightening reality to this passage in the seventeenth chapter of Jeremiah. The frightening reality is that any claim to blame our thoughts on something outside of us is misguided and even more testimony that the heart is deceitful above all things. It deceives us. And we cannot even know it. Sometimes it takes a significant outward fall to realize that we may be inwardly guilty of the very things we so staunchly condemn. Are you one of these people? Am I one of these people? Yes and yes. We all are these people. This is why Paul was so quick to tell the heathen he had the same lusts they had. After all, isn't lust the main issue? But what is so scary is that the lust we have all been accustomed to hating is the most common interpretation of lust: men lusting after women; women lusting after men; men lusting after men; women lusting after women; mankind lusting after animals; mankind lusting after children; etc. etc. etc. But is it possible the "lust of the flesh and the pride of life" is the more deceptive sin (and manifestation of separation from God) of lusting after our own self-righteousness?

This is the height of the pride of life. We all too often view the pride of life as exulting in ourselves as a result of fame, power, promotion etc. But tragically it is far

more deceptive. The pride of life in 1 John and throughout the scriptures is primarily referring to the wickedness and vanity of trusting that our own will and efforts can gain us eternal life. "Search the scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life." What could be more horrifying than thinking we have eternal life as a result of viewing ourselves as having abstained from the outward manifestation of sin, and completely overlooking the inward devious and sinful nature of the heart through self-righteousness? Thousands may think themselves holy because they perform well in front of others. But "all things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." You may see my outward performance. But do you see me at night? Can you peer into the crevasses of my heart and tell what I am thinking? I may be pondering the twisted things I can do to destroy you, to maim you, to steal from you, to demean you, and to expose you. But outwardly I can say, "all glory to God," and "let God be true but every man (and woman) a liar." With my religious jargon I can fool you into thinking that I am profoundly Christian, yet inwardly am a ravaging wolf. I may very well be a "white-washed tomb filled with dead men's bones."

What is humility? What is the escape from the pride of self-righteousness? Does our jargon keep others thinking we are above reproach and our lives the result of the true kingdom experience? "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart, Oh God, you will not despise." (Psalm 51:17) Contriteness and a willingness to receive others in failure is the sign of brokenness. Binding up the wounds of our brethren overtaken in a fault is the sign of the truly 'good' Samaritan. The giving of a glass of water to one brother or sister overtaken in what they never thought could happen to them is to cry to them that their warfare is accomplished and their iniquity is pardoned. James said "confess your faults to one another," yet we stand trembling at the thought of revealing even outward failures, let alone our hearts from which such failures are manifested. Are you gay? Are you in an affair? Do you masturbate to pornography? Do you steal? Do you fantasize about little children? Have you taken illicit drugs? Have you murdered? Have you raped? Even worse: have you looked at any of the above and said you are incapable of ever doing such a thing? With the exception of the last one, you can rest assured that you fall within the parameters of struggling Christians. But if you answered yes to the last question, you remain in blasphemy against God and are held prisoner in the bonds of self-righteousness. I was there until I was made aware of my capability to fall at least inwardly in all the areas mentioned above and more. God opened the window to clearly view my deception. He continues to make clean the window through inner and outer failure, and yet cries to me that my sins are forgiven. God does not make distinctions between what happens as a result of evil thinking or motives and evil outworking. Instead, God places all significance on our thoughts, and holds us spiritually accountable for those while we are in a state of unbelief. What is so miraculous about having been given eternal life is that those same evil thoughts are present, and yet God views us in Christ as blameless and unrepentable. We may even outwardly manifest those evil thoughts as believers, yet we are regarded as eternally pure in God's eyes.

The big question is: have we had a failure which has brought us to the staggering realization that we are just like the rest of humanity, desperately in need of the life of Christ and His grace and mercy? If so, then we have been brought into His perfection and holiness, not our own. No matter what vice we fall to after that

moment, no matter what outward failure, we are assured of His eternal presence, comfort and forgiveness. We have, however, no reason to be assured of this when we attack His people for falling and view ourselves as incapable of reaching the depths of what we view as the pit of debauchery. In fact, I might even be bold enough to say that if we have never fallen, we have never known mercy. If we have never done the unthinkable, we have never experienced the miraculous. If we remain shocked and amazed at the horrors and evil of humanity, then we have never been shocked and amazed at the wonders of God's mercy and grace and the glory of the cross. Christ died because He saw that we were indeed like everyone else, helplessly devoted to *all* the evils humanity has to offer, and yes, even the most deceptive of all horrors: that we believed we were *never* helplessly devoted to *all* the evils humanity has to offer; that is, we believed we were incapable of committing those evils. But if He has revealed even that to us, then we have known those things "into which angels desire to look":

For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:3-7).