

Northeast Church of Christ

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From the Pen of Paul: *Improper Attempts at Covering Sins (3)*

PREVIOUSLY WE HAVE SEEN HOW the Bible teaches that sins are to be “covered.” And we have looked at some ways that men attempt to “cover” their sins in a different way. We continue to look at some of these attempts which actually do not cover sins.

Getting rid of the preacher does not cover sin. In Acts 7, Stephen convicted his audience of sin saying, “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been the betrayers and murders: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it” (Acts 7:51-53). Those were serious charges and they were all true! However, instead of repenting and seeking to have their sins covered in the proper way, we read, “When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth” (v. 54). And then “they cast him out of the city, and stoned him” (vv. 58-60).

Do you believe killing the preacher covered their sins? Instead of having their sins forgiven, they sinned more! I doubt that many today actually go this far; however, preachers sometimes lose their jobs by preaching the truth about sin! And, preachers are often “slain” by the tongues of those who have been “cut to the heart” as Stephen's audience was. James wrote about the destructive nature of the tongue when used in an improper manner in James

chapter 3. Everything he said about the tongue's misuse can be summed up in his statement in James 3:10b: “My brethren, these things ought not so to be.” But, as in the case of Stephen, this type of reaction only adds to sin instead of covering it.

Having a good conscience does not cover sin. All desire to have a conscience void of offense; however those who have been taught wrong and have a faulty understanding may have a good conscience even when they are not pleasing to God. Of course, Saul of Tarsus is a prime example. When we are first introduced to Saul, he is “consenting unto his (Stephen's) death” (Acts 8:1). Later, in this same chapter, we are told, “As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison” (v. 3). In our next encounter with him, we are told, “Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem” (Acts 9:1-2). When Jesus confronted Saul on the road to Damascus, He pointed out that Saul, by his actions, was actually persecuting Christ. “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou *Me*” (Acts 9:4)? Listen to Paul speaking before Agrippa, as he described his own actions: “I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison,

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“Why can't every man be right religiously regardless as to what his religion might be?”

EVERY MAN COULD BE RELIGIOUSLY right if God had said just be religious. The question arises, do we have a religious standard from God? If we do, then we must follow it. If we do not have a standard from God in religion, then each man is free to do as he wishes religiously and still be saved in the end.

I will not be arguing in this article about the reliability of the Bible. I shall assume that we all believe the Bible to be the Word of God for the sake of answering this question with more clarity and brevity.

Does the Bible claim to have all the answers to direct us in a life that will please God? It certainly does. The Bible says that it perfectly, thoroughly furnishes the man of God unto all good works (II Tim. 3:16-17). God has given us everything that pertains to life and godliness (II Pet. 1:3). There can be no question about the Bible affirming that it has the answer for a man to live in such a way as to please God.

Does the Bible condemn human creeds and manmade guides in religion? The answer to this is that it does. Whoever does not live by the Bible does not have God (II John 9-11). If we add to or take from the Bible, we will be lost in hell (Rev. 22:18-19). Jesus said men worshipped God in vain because they worshipped according to tradition and not according to God's law (Matt. 15:8-9).

How does one know he is adding to or taking from the Bible? We may know this by studying the Bible prayerfully and carefully. We may also know that we are adding to or taking from the Bible when we seem to have the Bible conflicting with itself. The Bible does not cross itself. It does not say one thing in one place and then another thing contrary to what has been said in another. So if we seem to have the Bible

crossing itself, we had better check for we have misunderstood something some place—we have not properly interpreted the Bible.

Is a man a bigot because he says two plus two equals four? Or is a man narrow minded when he has the ability to work math above those who are around him? Some men can work problems in math or calculus that I could not begin to work. Should I become angry with them because they have this ability? Of course I should not! I should be very happy that we have men with such ability.

Why then do men get mad when a person can give a correct Bible answer and another cannot? I know for a fact that some men are wrong and that all men are not right in religion. We cannot all be right in religion and hold to completely different views of Bible doctrine. The Bible either teaches a thing or it does not.

What would you think of me if I said you must be baptized in water to be saved one day and the next day I said right the opposite? Suppose I said one day you must work out your salvation by works of merit and the next day I said you are saved by faith only? Suppose I did this type of thing on three hundred different things in religion? Could you have any confidence in me? Of course not! If it is wrong for one man to teach three hundred conflicting things in religion, would it not also be wrong for three hundred men to teach three hundred different doctrines in religion? If your answer is yes, then you have what is taking place in this country and throughout the world.

Who is right in religion? The man who properly divides the Bible and lives by and teaches it. We will all see the Bible alike when we all rightly divide the Bible (II Tim. 2:15).

—Malcolm L. Hill

having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them” (Acts 26:9-10).

No one in their right mind would suggest that Saul was not sinning against both Christ and those he persecuted. However, listen to what Paul said about how his conscience handled all of his actions during this time. “Men and brethren, I have lived in *all good conscience* before God until this day” (Acts 23:1). Paul certainly had a good conscience during his life as a persecutor. Later, he would write of those who would “depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits,

and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy” (I Tim. 4:1-2). These, Paul said, would be able to do these things “having their conscience seared with a hot iron” (v. 2b). When flesh is seared, it becomes numb or loses feeling. Thus, it is possible to have the conscience become void of feelings when it comes to right and wrong. To say the least, the conscience can never be relied upon to be the *only* source of whether our actions are correct or not. Having a good conscience definitely does not cover sin.

(Continued next week).

—Paul M. Wilmoth