

Jesus Christ'S Trial (Part Four)

Lessons For Our Time

Martin G. Collins

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Jesus Christ as the one way to the Father, fulfills the Old Testament symbols and teachings that show the exclusiveness of God's claim that Jesus Christ is indeed the only way. He has done it in such ways as the curtain barring access to God's presence from all except for the Levitical priesthood, the rejection of the human inventions as a means of approach to God, and the choice of Aaron, alone, to represent Israel before God in His sanctuary.

Jesus is the only way to God, and He alone can provide access to God. Jesus as the truth, fulfills the teaching of the Old Testament and reveals the true God. Jesus alone is the life that fulfills the Old Testament promises of life given by God. Having life in Himself, He is in this way able to confer eternal life to all those who believe in Him. The New Testament confirms and teaches this very same thing. Jesus Christ is the only source of truth, salvation, and eternal life, which are ultimately from the Father.

I want to pick up on something we touched on at the end of my last sermon. It is something that is significantly important to us today, especially in this society. It is the question of what is truth.

John 18:37-38 Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all.

There are two ways to define something, and both are necessary. One way is by telling what the object in question is, and the other way is telling what the object is not. Both are important because if you cannot say what it is not, then the object may very well be everything and consequentially nothing at all.

Now this may seem a little dizzying, but some people's definitions of God are like that. He is everything and therefore nothing at all. On the other hand, it is also necessary to say what the object is because the negatives, at best, merely narrow down the possibilities.

The basic principal is important in the matter of the examination of Jesus by Pilate because the crucial issue was the claim of Christ to be a king and consequently to possess a Kingdom. Was this Kingship and Kingdom to be thought of as in opposition to that of Caesar's whose interest Pilate was obliged to represent? Was it an earthly kingdom or was it something else—something that did not threaten Caesar's legitimate interests, and therefore neither he nor Pilate should fear?

These were valid questions; so in His conversation with Pilate, Jesus was careful to define the nature of His Kingdom accurately. He defined it negatively by affirming that it is not of this world. Then he defines it positively, showing that it is of the truth and that it was for the very purpose of bearing witness to the truth that He came into the world. In developing this, He said in verse 37:

John 18:37 For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth.

Now the interesting thing about this definition of Jesus' Kingdom is that Pilate's response was not one that showed he wanted to pursue the matter further. And even a recognition of the importance of what Jesus said, he did not have. Rather it was a cynical response based on what seemed, to Pilate, to be the impossibility of ever knowing what truth is. He said, "What is truth ?" and then walked out.

Whatever these words were, they were not facetious. Pilate had just looked into the eyes of the Son of God and had heard Him exclaim, "For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth."

This incident was far from a laughing matter. The situation was grave and the question that welled up from Pilate's deep cynicism was the disillusioned and despairing cry of his era; and it is this that makes Pilate the preeminently modern man.

We readily admit that there are elements of this trial that are difficult to identify, and obviously Pilate's concern for Caesar's rights is formed and even more so are the petty rivalries among the Jewish leaders and Pilate. But our inability to identify does not hold true at this point, that is concerning truth and the Kingdom of God.

On the contrary, here, we detect that disillusioned voice of this modern culture today and recognize the current widespread view, not only that truth, in the ultimate sense, may be unknowable, but that it may in fact not even exist as an object of our inquires. It

is of no concern to our society today, speaking from the world's point of view.

They see it as nothing to even bother with. That is why the politicians today can lie over and over again; it just seems like society does not care; they do not want to know the truth.

In Pilate's day, disillusionment with truth was disillusionment with great philosophy. Pilate may not have been a philosopher, but he was aware, as were all Romans, that the Greeks have excelled in precisely this field, and yet had failed to solve the ultimate philosophical questions.

Now listen carefully because what I am about to describe explains how the world thinks today. The man who tried hardest to solve this was Plato. Plato understood that the basic problem in inquiring knowledge of what is true is that there must be knowledge of more than particulars, if there is to be any meaning.

Now in the language of philosophy, the word "particulars" just means "things." Those things that we see in the world, that we are surrounded by; and we know by experience and projection that there are many thousands, millions, and even trillions more.

In a sense we know these particulars are things because we observe them. But real knowledge is something that goes beyond these individual things to that general concept or form that gives them meaning.

For example, when we talk about chairs, a simple physical object, we can easily list many styles and types of chairs. Some of them quite different than others. There are rocking chairs, split-back chairs, desk chairs, stuffed chairs, the list seems endless. But when we speak of a chair, we obviously have some general idea of a chair into which these "particulars" or "things" fit.

Plato said that, "what is so obviously true on this level [the level of a physical thing, like a chair], must be true in every other area as well." But where did these ideas come from? This is what Plato mulled over for his entire life.

On the level of the chairs, we may argue that they come from the human mind, and in this way we may localize the ultimate meaning of the universe as coming from the human mind. But if we do that we immediately want to ask, "Where does the idea of the mind or man himself come from?"

Where do we find absolutes in those areas about which men apparently disagree, like

morals, the proper structure of human society, religion and so on? So, popular Greek thought answered with this: "from the gods!" But then where does the idea of the gods come from?

Plato recognized that in pursuing this necessary kind of argument, one must move backward and upward to one great universal thing from which every meaning comes, and here is the problem: they could not do that.

Although Plato and the other Greeks understood the necessity of finding such a grand overriding universal thing, they nevertheless never found the place from which the universal thing could come or a way in which it could be known for sure. They did not have God's revelation.

It was out of the despair of his search that Plato reported to have said wishfully, "It may be that someday there will come forth from God, a Word, who will reveal all mysteries and make everything plain." After Plato, there were other attempts to solve the same great problem, but these were no more successful than he had been.

Consequently Greek philosophy gradually descended into a growing cynicism expressed in the "grin and bear it" philosophy of the Stoics, the "if it feels good, do it" philosophy of the Epicureans or the "leap of faith" philosophy of the various mystery religions. We have all three of those reasoning today, and we hear these terms used in our society publicly.

Pilate knew all this, so he asked, quite correctly from a perspective of the philosophical thought before him, "What is truth?" Meaning that speculations in this area had proved both impractical and meaningless to the average human society.

Now one proposed solution to the problem of truth, though it is actually a denial of the solution, is relativism that has grown out of the philosophy of Wilhelm Fredrick Hegel. He lived from about 1770 to 1831. Hegel was a German professor who, in a series of intense books, advanced the proposition that truth is not an absolute, but rather it is something that is always evolving through the flow of world history. That is how Bill Clinton could say, "define 'is'?"

Now in Hegel's view, it is the result of a synthesis which comes about in the following way: every fact, theory, or truth may be called a thesis, which by its very existence produces an antithesis. At first, these appear as opposites, but in time they came together to form a synthesis. This synthesis, in turn, becomes a new thesis producing its own antithesis and so on. It is circular reasoning; it gets nowhere.

According to this system, truth is relative, and it depends upon whom you are asking and of what period you are asking about. What is true now may not have been true 10-20 years ago and it may not be true 10-20 years from now, or again it may be true for me, but not for you. This is Hegel's legacy and heritage to the modern world.

Most people today speak of what is true or false purely on a subjective basis. That is, a humanly determined whether a thing is true or not, on the basis of how it makes them feel. Joe Baity mentioned the very same thing in his sermonette.

Today there is a denial of security, but a wish for secure feelings. We all want to feel secure, especially in this world. Look at what happened after 9/11; they were ready to let the government do just about anything. There is a denial of religious values, but a desire for religious feelings. They want to cast out the doctrines and to feel good about their religion. In fact to modern society, feelings are all there are; it is all that matters. So we have them defining love from the same reasoning, from feelings.

Now today, as never before, on thousands of campus and millions of homes, the question of truth is not even asked, and it is supposed to be the very institutions that do the questioning. Instead people are asking, "Does it work? Is it practical? How does it make you feel? Do you feel good about it?" Obviously our own lack of meaning is linked to the failure of this quest and the declining moral tone of this culture.

It is expressed in various things like political scandals, Wall Street payoffs, legalized immorality, shoplifting, and many other things flow from it.

Here, we turn to the answer to the modern dilemma. Because if Pilate's question is preeminently the modern question, then the statement of Christ, which provoked it, is preeminently a word to our own disillusioned culture and to us as well.

Now this is not the first time that Jesus had spoken about the truth and its nature. Earlier, He had spoken of Himself as The Truth, and you see that here in John 14:6

John 14:6 Jesus said to him [speaking to Thomas], "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

That is an emphatic statement of the truth. God is truth, Jesus is truth, and the Spirit of God is truth. Truth is also used in various other senses in scripture. Jesus, in the revelation in which the spirit of truth given through His apostles, are the final ultimate revelation and definition of truth about God, man, redemption, history and the world.

Now Jesus referred to the Bible as truth in John 17:17 as we heard in the sermonette.

John 17:17 Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.

Jesus even spoke of the need to worship in truth.

John 4:23-24 But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

So the very thing that the world ignores and tries to cast off is the very thing that is necessary to have a relationship with God. Now Jesus also spoke of the need to do the truth. Let us go back one chapter to John 3:21

John 3:21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”

Now all these references are totally understandable in view of the biblical conception of what truth is and how it functions. If we look at the definition of the world and the Greek philosophers, it makes your head spin. You look at the truth in God's word—the Truth—and it is as clear as can be for those who have God's Holy Spirit.

Before Pilate, in the very last references to truth in the entire gospel, Jesus refers to it in a way which even a gentile like Pilate could fathom. To paraphrase, Jesus said, “For this I came into the world to testify to the truth; everyone on the side of the truth listens to Me.”

Now this has several important things that Pilate and our own culture need to know:

1) It says that there is such a thing as truth and that truth is an entity. Truth is singular; it is not in fragments that would require us to speak of truth(s) in a sense of unrelated facts or items.

An example of that is when the World Wide Church of God started changing the doctrines; they would change one, and it would have a domino effect because every

doctrine in God's church is tied together intricately and cannot be separated. But the World Wide Church of God attempted first in the 70's with the STP—slowly turning protestant or systematic theology project—to do that very thing: to separate the doctrines out. But one doctrine builds upon another; they are interwoven and cannot be dissected in that way. You change one, you change the rest.

Truth holds together, therefore there is no phase in truth that is not related to every other phase of truth. The creation of God is related to the structure of the atom; the inspiration and errancy of the Bible are related to the mathematical equations which are used to organize and sustain the galaxies. All things that are true are part of the truth and stand in a proper and inescapable relationship to God, who is Himself the Truth.

2) Christ indicates by His statement that truth is not only an entity, it is objective—meaning it is there to be observed and discussed, and we can observe and discuss it without prejudice. This is involved in Christ's statement that He has come to bear witness to the truth as one might to any fact submitted in a court of law.

This has implications in two areas. On the one hand, it says something about the way the Christian should approach scientific truth. It may approach it dispassionately and analytically. On the other hand, this also says something about the nature of religious truth. Because if truth is an entity and truth is objective, then religious truth is not something beyond the range of analysis and verification; it is not something to be reached by a great leap of faith.

Now in order to understand God's truth, we do have to have faith. I am talking about the world's faith, here, more like blindness or ignorance is bliss. Rather, truth is something that may be studied and will therefore inevitably throw light upon our natures and the nature of the universe. God's invisible attributes are clearly seen in His creation.

Now just as biologist might look through a microscope to study the nature of the microscopic world, so we look through the microscope of the word to see our true condition, our secret faults. In the Bible, we find that God has done what needs to be done by sending His Son as our Savior. Jesus died for us, He rose, He reigns for us. That is objective truth, and therefore may be studied and applied to our lives as any other truth can.

3) The words of Jesus to Pilate indicate that truth must come from above. When Jesus says that He has come to bear witness to the truth, He implies that, in the ultimate sense, truth is not of this world, but rather must come to this world by revelation. This is true of all truth, because apart from the revelation we have in God's word, no one would

even guess what is disclosed there, let alone really know it.

We cannot even begin to fathom what God is truly like or what He has done in Jesus Christ for our

salvation. That is also the case with scientific truth. For although it is true that God has given us primarily a book of spiritual truth, not scientific truth, He has nevertheless given us the minds capable of perceiving the revelation of Himself in nature and actually leads the mind to discover what is to be found there.

Many times scientists are unaware of this, and other times they know it. It is said that Samuel Morse, the inventor of the telegraph, was once seen bowed over his desk where he was working. He was asked what he was doing, and he replied, "I am asking God for help. Every time I go into my laboratory I say, 'O God I am nothing, give me wisdom, give me clarity of mind.'" Morris knew that truth comes from God. Consequently we are not surprised to learn that the first message sent over his new invention was the thankful and wondering question, "What hath God wrought?"

4) The words of Christ teach that in the ultimate sense, the truth that comes from God has become embodied in one person. To the world truth is abstract and may be supposed to always be abstract. We think of truth in terms of equations, figures, and propositions, but God says that truth is personal. More than that, it is a person and this person is Jesus Christ. He Himself said unequivocally in John, "I am the way, the truth and the light."

Now this is the answer to Plato's quest. Plato had said, "If maybe that someday there will come forth from God a Word who will reveal all mysteries and make everything plain. That Word has now come—Jesus Christ is that Word. This is a very foundational scripture that you probably already have memorized:

John 1:1-4 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light [truth] of men.

He is the one who has come to reveal all mysteries and to make everything plain to all those who will come to him. Now you do not have to turn there, but in John 18:38 says once again:

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John 18:38 Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all.

In the instructions for the observance of the Passover occurring in Exodus 12 and in other parts of the Old Testament, there is a detail that has bearing on the outcome of the trial of Jesus before Pilate. These passages tell us that the lamb to be killed, in observance of Passover, was to be without blemish. You do not have to turn here either, but in Exodus 12:5 says:

Exodus 12:5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats.

In order to make sure that it was without blemish, in a very personal sacrifice, it was to be kept in the home for three days prior to the sacrifice during which time it was to be examined carefully. Only when it was known to be flawless was it to be used in the Passover ritual.

Now this has bearing upon the trial of Jesus before Pilate because in the plan of God, He was the true Passover Lamb who died that the angel of spiritual death might Passover all who trust in His sacrifice. He was examined to this end and found to be without blemish, without sin and without guilt. At the beginning of His public ministry, Jesus Christ had been identified as the Lamb of God by John the Baptist, His divinely appointed forerunner. John had pointed Him out in saying,

John 1:29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

Now from that point on, Christ moved in and out among the people of Israel to be examined by them, by friends and enemies alike, and none could find fault with Him. Now, in what is virtually the last official word pronounced on earth concerning Jesus, the Roman procurator, Pilate, comes forth in opposition to the determined will of the Jews and even the careless nature of his own conscious to declare Jesus innocent, and he does it three times.

The first declaration of innocence was at the conclusion of the official Roman trial. In this trial, Jesus had been accused of making Himself to be Christ, a King, thus an enemy of Caesar. Pilate found the charge unwarranted. After careful examination of

Jesus, as to the nature of His supposed Kingdom, he appeared to the crowd and declared, "I find no fault in him at all."

The second declaration of Jesus' innocence was after Pilate had sent Jesus to Herod and had received him back uncondemned, and that is what we find here in Luke 23:13-16

Luke 23:13-16 Then Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people, said to them, "You have brought this Man to me, as one who misleads the people. And indeed, having examined Him in your presence, I have found no fault in this Man concerning those things of which you accuse Him; no, neither did Herod, for I sent you back to him; and indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by Him. I will therefore chastise Him and release Him"

Now the third and last occasion of Jesus' innocence was after Pilate had caused Jesus to be flogged, hoping by this act to satisfy the outrage of the vicious mob. Now down a few verses:

Luke 23:20-25 Pilate, therefore, wishing to release Jesus, again called out to them. But they shouted, saying, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" Then he said to them the third time, "Why, what evil has He done? I have found no reason for death in Him. I will therefore chastise Him and let Him go." But they were insistent, demanding with loud voices that He be crucified. And the voices of these men and of the chief priests prevailed. So Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they requested. And he released to them the one they requested, [Barabbas] who for rebellion and murder had been thrown into prison; but he delivered Jesus to their will.

So at last, Pilate, being unwilling to risk a riot and thus the loss of his own position, gave Christ over to death even though he has found Him innocent. However, this is the point I am making: it is as one uncondemned and in fact declared to be blameless that Christ is sacrificed. It is as God's blameless lamb that Jesus dies for the sins of the world.

It is not only by Pilate that this important verdict, "I find no fault in Him at all" was given. It has been given by all who have ever examined or even been associated with Jesus Christ. Think of those who have pronounced a verdict of innocence upon Him; there is God, the Father, first of all.

At the beginning of Christ's public ministry, John the Baptist had identified Jesus as "God's Lamb" and although John was a prophet and therefore was believed and trusted, we might want to ask if John was entirely sure of His identification. After all, Israel had waited for hundreds of years for her Messiah, and the waiting of the world for the one who was to crush the head of Satan was even longer.

Is He really the one we might ask? Is this really the blameless lamb who was to die for the sins of the world? The issue is not allowed to stand in doubt because as soon as John baptized Jesus, the Holy Spirit in a bodily form like a dove is seen to come upon Him.

Luke 3:22 And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased."

Which was another way of saying that He was entirely innocent. On the mount of transfiguration, after Jesus had appeared in His glory, the Father's voice was heard again.

Matthew 17:5-6 While he [Peter] was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them [the disciples]; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid.

Now a second verdict of innocence was pronounced upon Jesus by those who knew Him best: His disciples. There was much about Him that they did not know or understand. They did not know of the full purpose of His ministry, nor did they understand the necessity of His death at that time. But one thing they knew was that they had never met anyone who could match the moral excellence of His character or teaching.

In I John 2:1, John called Christ, "the Righteous" and Peter, in those early sermons recorded in the book of Acts in Acts 2:27, called Him "the Holy One." He calls Him "the Righteous One" in Acts 3:17.

In I Peter 1:19, Peter says that Jesus was without blemish or defect. In Mathew 1:23, Matthew confessed Him as Immanuel, meaning God with us. In John 20:28, Thomas

confessed Christ's perfection by declaring Him, "My Lord and my God."

All of these had rubbed shoulders with Jesus with the closest possible contact. They had done this for the better part of three years. They had seen Him in good times and bad, facing the acclaim of the multitudes as well as enduring the insults and the outrages of those who were opposed to His teaching.

If anyone would have known of a weakness in Christ, these men would have known it; yet they would have unhesitatingly and enthusiastically confessed with Pilate, "I find no fault in Him at all."

Again there is the testimony of the Jewish leaders. These men were enemies for the most part; they had no desire to think favorably of Jesus. In fact the opposite was the case; they hated Him and wished to trap Him with some foolishness for which He could then be openly accused or in some violation of the law for which He could be officially condemned, yet they could not succeed.

When they had at last condemned Him, it was only because He had openly declared Himself to be the unique Son of God which they would judge to be blasphemy without any evidence at all. But perhaps we are not looking in the right place.

We have spoken of the disciples of Christ, who had full opportunity to observe Jesus, but who might be thought to be partial. We have spoken of the leaders who were certainly not favorable to Him, but who might be said to have lacked adequate opportunity to observe Him closely over a period of time.

Was there no one who was both in a position to observe Christ closely and at the same time not predispose to judge Him favorably because of friendship or some similar cause? We have no right to expect such a person, but God in His wisdom has provided such a one in Judas.

Judas was one of the twelve, and he was with Christ throughout His ministry thereby having full opportunity to observe Him. Yet after the betrayal, Judas attempted to return the 30 pieces of silver to the Chief Priests and elders saying as Matthew records in Matthew 27:3-5,

Matthew 27:3-5 Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." And they said, "What is that to us? You see to it!" Then he threw

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down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself.

“I had sinned by betraying innocent blood,” was the equivalent of saying, “I find no fault in Him at all.” Is that not the verdict of all who have ever associated with Jesus Christ—those who lived with Him during His lifetime and knew Him then? But what of those who have associated with Him since, both friends and enemies? Is their verdict not identical?

Notice Christ's friends first of all; they have trusted Him as Savior and have been saved from their sin, but their way has not always been smooth.

In the providence of God, some have suffered great personal disappointment, some have lost jobs, families, or their health. Some, like the Old Testament patriarch Job lost everything.

Job 3:3 “May the day perish on which I was born, And the night in which it was said, ‘A male child is conceived.’

Job 3:11-13 “Why did I not die at birth? Why did I not perish when I came from the womb? Why did the knees receive me? Or why the breasts, that I should nurse? For now I would have lain still and been quiet, I would have been asleep; Then I would have been at rest.

The faithful have not cursed Christ. Job did not, even when his wife was trying to get him to; they have confessed, rather, that there is no fault in Him at all. This is even true in a certain sense of Christ's enemies, at least if they had taken the trouble to examine His character and His teachings.

They may be opposed to Christianity; they may have no desire at all to follow Jesus, but still there are a few critics who have not been impressed with Christ's character and teachings. And there are fewer still who would rail against Him.

We even find that the Muslims accept Jesus Christ as a prophet, but of course lower than Mohammad. They claim that Mohammad supersedes Jesus, but they recognize that He was special.

You might say that there are some, but the last word is not in yet because one day they

will be confronted with Christ and His Glory and will be forced to confess, in spite of themselves, that He is who He claimed to be, that He is without fault in His conduct.

The apostle Paul wrote about that day to the Philippians. He said that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the Glory of God the Father. Everyone will have that opportunity. Jesus Christ passed through every examination that could possibly be made of Him and was declared to be blameless. He was weighed in every scale, measured in every standard by friends and foes alike, and in each case he was found to be innocent.

Now after Pilate asked, "What is truth," he went out again to the Jews and said, "I find no fault in Him at all." The verdict of Pontius Pilate that Jesus Christ was innocent of the charges brought against Him should have been followed by an immediate release of the prisoner. Or, if Pilate had reason to believe that the Jew would harm Jesus in spite of his judgment, he should have put Jesus in protective custody as the Romans did later with the apostle Paul.

But when Pilate announced his verdict publicly, the decision met with such opposition from the rulers and the crowds that Pilate immediately backed away from the only proper and noble course and instead attempted to bring about the release of Jesus indirectly.

He made three attempts to do this as I mentioned before:

1. To have Jesus beaten thereby hoping to provoke pity from the blood-thirsty mob.
2. To honor the custom of releasing one prisoner at the feast, which he suggested might be followed by releasing Jesus.
3. This was actually chronologically first, but Pilate sent Jesus to Herod Antipas.

Pilate's attempt to pass the buck was unsuccessful as such attempts usually were. He was attempting to pass the responsibility for dealing with Christ to Herod, but the matter simply came back to him, and he could not escape it.

In the same way, people today cannot escape when confronted with Christ and asked to make a stand for Him. How many even associated with the true churches of God have not made a stand when pressured about Christ from their family, the world, or at their jobs?

Herod Antipas was a son of Herod the great, who had commanded the babes of Bethlehem to be killed in hopes of destroying the so-called "King of the Jews" about whom he had been informed by the wise men.

Old Herod was a dissolute and dangerous creature. He had 10 wives and he had murdered a number of them as well as several of his children. This led the emperor Augustus to say of him: that it was better to be Herod's pig than one of his sons. But however abased the father was, this was truer of the Son.

Antipas was a libertine of the worst sort. Although he governed adequately for a time, he lacked that ruthless tenacity of purpose that has served his father well and so was eventually removed by the Romans.

Herod Antipas did not rule all that Herod the Great had ruled. One of the father's wills had designated Antipas' sole successor, but there had been various wills, and the matter was finally disposed by Augustus in the following way:

One son, Archelaus, was given the area of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea (that is the southernmost region). He is termed an ethnarch. A second son, Philip, was given the area of Decapolis (the region to the west). Herod received the title of tetrarch and was given the provinces of Galilee and Perea (the northernmost sector of the father's kingdom).

We know a few more things about Herod; for one thing he was the ruler that arrested and then later killed John the Baptist. John had criticized Herod for having taken his brother's divorced wife, Herodias, while his brother was still living. Herod had arrested John for it.

Matthew 14:1-12 At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the report about Jesus and said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him." For Herod had laid hold of John and bound him, and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. Because John had said to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her." And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet. But when Herod's birthday was celebrated, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod. Therefore he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. So she, having been prompted by her mother, said, "Give me John the Baptist's head here on a platter." And the king was sorry; nevertheless, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him,

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he commanded it to be given to her. So he sent and had John beheaded in prison. And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother. Then his disciples came and took away the body and buried it, and went and told Jesus.

At this stage, Herod seemed to have some sensibility towards religious things, because he respected John and even listened to him. But after he had killed John, this rapidly degenerated to a mere superstition. So, here, in Luke 9:7-9, we read:

Luke 9:7-9 Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was done by Him [Jesus Christ]; and he was perplexed, because it was said by some that John had risen from the dead, and by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the old prophets had risen again. Herod said, "John I have beheaded, but who is this of whom I hear such things?" So he sought to see Him.

He was little concerned, if not a lot concerned, because he was a very superstitious person. Thus when John told of Jesus' preaching and works, Herod imagined that He was John the Baptist raised from the dead; and later, whether correct or incorrect, the rumor had reached Jesus that Herod was seeking to kill him also. Now let us go over to Luke 13:31-33.

Luke 13:31-33 On that very day some Pharisees came, saying to Him, "Get out and depart from here, for Herod wants to kill You." And He said to them, "Go, tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.' Nevertheless I must journey today, tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem.

"Fox" was an apt designation for Antipas because he was certainly crafty and a cunning man held under the debilitating influences of a licentious wife. Now Luke alone, of all the gospel writers, tells of this incident.

Luke 23:6-12 When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked if the Man were a Galilean. And as soon as he knew that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time. Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had desired for a long

time to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him. Then he questioned Him with many words, but He answered him nothing. And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him. Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked Him, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate. That very day Pilate and Herod became friends with each other, for previously they had been at enmity with each other.

Now this brief account tells us much about Herod. For one, it tells us that Herod was aware of much that was going on in his province. He knew this because we are told that, from what he had heard of Jesus, he hoped to see him perform some miracle. Second, it tells us that he had a certain curiosity about Jesus because he was greatly pleased to see him. Third, more seriously, it discloses more of Herod's spiritual decline because on this occasion the reproving voice of conscience seems to be entirely absent.

We find him looking upon this solemn confrontation as simply an occasion for entertainment. When this turned out disappointingly, the curiosity with which he began soon curdled into stark contempt and cruelty.

Herod's experience should be a warning to many similarly minded persons who frequent places of Christian worship out of curiosity and are only hardened by the experience. Christ did not reveal Himself to Herod.

God will not reveal the precious things of His words to anyone's idle curiosity. There is a term I use occasionally for people that write in that have little interest in truth. I call them religious hobbyists, because that is what they are. They are just interested in idle curiosity.

The true measure of the tragedy which was Herod is seen in what, under other circumstances, might be thought good. First, there is the matter of Herod's curiosity. God will not reveal the precious things of His word to idle curiosity, but this does not mean that curiosity itself is all bad or that God will not on occasion use it to draw a person to Him.

You remember, for example, that Jesus played upon the curiosity of both Nicodemus and the woman of Samaria attempting to lead them to the truth about His mission. To Nicodemus, he spoke cryptically of the new birth prompting the aging leader of Israel to ask, "How can a man be born when he is old. Surely he cannot enter a second time into

his mother's womb to be born!" And to the woman of Samaria, he spoke of living water causing her to reply:

John 4:11-12 The woman said to Him, "Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?"

So curiosity itself is not bad. This much at least can be said concerning Herod: his curiosity had been stirred regarding Jesus. How had it been stirred? Obviously by hearing a lot about Him; what Jesus was doing had been the common talk of the kingdom for the space of three years. And much of this had undoubtedly come to the self-serving Herod's attention.

You could hardly have failed to hear of Jesus' feeding of the four and five thousand because these feedings had taken place in or near Galilee and had been accompanied by significant popular movements by those who wished to make Jesus their King.

Jesus had walked on the water in Galilee, and He had stilled the storm. He had healed the son of a Galilean nobleman, and there were other miracles that you are familiar with. Then, in addition to these miracles, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead in Bethany just a week before, and the news of this great miracle had apparently spread through Jerusalem like wild fire.

Herod may not have heard of all these miracle, but the main ones had undoubtedly been brought to his attention. It was undoubtedly because of this that he wanted to see Jesus do some wonder. Also it was not just through idle rumor that Herod had heard of Jesus, he had also heard of Him through John the Baptist.

We have no record of what John actually said to Herod, but we can hardly imagine that John, having received an opportunity to speak to Herod, would have failed to point to Jesus and preach about Him. Herod may even have heard John's great text and testimony in John 1:29.

John 1:29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

In addition, there was, in Herod's household, one who undoubtedly knew about Jesus. If

indeed he was not a full believer, he is none other than the husband of Johanna, one of the women who traveled about with Jesus and ministered to Him out of her substance.

The husband's name was Chuzas and is identified as Herod's steward. If Herod was interested in Jesus, as he undoubtedly was, he would have inquired about Him and would have received information about Him from his steward.

Yet Herod's curiosity remained only an idol curiosity. He made no effort to see Jesus or learn from Him, even when his remorse over his treatment of John the Baptist was at its zenith.

Now there are two more things that might be said in Herod's favor were they not so deeply corrupted. The first is that as a consequence of his curiosity, Herod is said to have rejoiced at seeing Jesus. In fact, we are told that he was greatly pleased. And again we are told that Herod was glad because he hoped to see him perform a miracle. I think any of us would be excited and glad to see Jesus perform a miracle.

When the Gospel is preached, we hope to see those who were dead in trespasses and sins brought to spiritual life. And when the teachings of Jesus are put forth, we hope to see lives turned about, sin repented of, and many urged onto a straight way which Christ sets before them.

Now this Godly joy and spiritual expectation were not the joy and expectation of Herod. He was exceedingly glad, but it was a frivolous gladness, just as his curiosity was an idle curiosity. It was expected, but it was a base expectation.

He hoped only to see some wonder with which he might later entertain his guests at some banquet or orgy. Each would have his stories, but Herod's story of a miracle done by the Galilean labor would top them all.

That brings us to these points of conclusion. It is not that curiosity, joy, and expectation are bad, in and of themselves; they are good. We may even argue that they have been given to us by God that they would, like all of God's good gifts, lead us to Him. However if a person has been perverted to the hardening effect of sin, this curiosity will be nothing more than intellectual exercise for the purpose of being entertained.

This society today is certainly one that seeks entertainment first and foremost. I fear that even some in the greater churches of God have expressed their lack of interest or desire for some minister's sermons; all they are interested in is if they have been entertained or not. It is a sad situation, and their hearts will be hardened if that is their

attitude, so it is a very dangerous situation to be in. We must all be very careful of such things.

There is no true approach to God without a painful awareness of one's own sin. This is because God is

Holy, and we cannot approach Him in His Holiness without corresponding exposure of our own corruption, which helps us put God in His true perspective in relation to us.

Yes, we are forgiven for our sins, and then if we commit a sin and ask for forgiveness genuinely, we are, again, forgiven for them. But sins are ongoing and our hearts are hardened by them. So we have to be careful that it is not a way of life because we can only be forgiven for our sins, if they are individual sins that we occasionally commit, but not if it is an ongoing sin that we commit as a way of life.

When God approached Adam and Eve in the garden after their initial sin, they hid from Him because they knew they were naked and exposed. Isaiah 6:5 mentions Isaiah's vision where Isaiah saw God high and lifted up and heard the seraphim singing of His holiness. Then Isaiah felt naked and exposed, and he fell back crying saying:

Isaiah 6:5 So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of hosts."

When Peter caught a glimpse of who Jesus really is, on the occasion of the miracle of Him providing a great catch of fish in Galilee, Peter responded, "Go away from me, Lord, I am a sinful man."

Obviously, Herod had undergone a similar, if not much lower experience, on a superficial human level, though without benefit, because the preaching of John the Baptist concerning the immorality of His life had troubled him.

When God opens our minds, the conviction of sin should lead first to repentance, then to the faith in Jesus Christ, where the penalty and guilt of sin are dealt with.

But where this does not take place, where conviction of sin does not lead both to repentance and faith, unconfessed sin hardens. And eventually, the one who was once genuinely convicted can regard religious matters only with an idle curiosity and even antagonism.

We saw this on a massive scale when the World Wide Church began to break up after Hebert Armstrong's death. Some have come back since then, but many have not. We only hope that they were never converted to begin with, so that they will have their opportunity for a life in God's Kingdom.

It is important that we take note of the steps in Herod's decline because they are, in a sense, a warning to us.

1. There was a genuine conviction to sin, but Herod did not welcome this conviction. He was unwilling to part from his sin. He wanted to have his cake and eat it too; he wanted to be religious and keep his sin too.

2. He attempted to still the voice of conscience, which in this case meant stilling the voice of John the Baptist. At first he tried prison, but once launched in this direction, he soon came to the position of murdering John both to satisfy Salome and also to rescue his own imagined honor.

3. Having silenced the voice of conscience, which always insists on the indispensable place of morality in true religion, Herod's religious instincts turned to superstition, and he thought that Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead.

4. Superstition turned to raw unbelief because when Herod finally did have Jesus before him, he looked at Him only as one might be prevailed upon to do a trick for the amusement and entertainment of himself and his court.

5. When Jesus declined to perform for this decadent unbeliever, Herod's interests turned to contempt, and he and his men of war viciously scoffed at Jesus. Having silenced Him, it was no surprise that Herod now failed to hear or appreciate the word of God—the truth. He refused to hear the truth from the man in whom there was no guilt. Sadly this same thing happens to people who leave God's church.

You cannot treat God lightly. You cannot mock God. Whenever a converted person in the Bible had contact with the God of the Old Testament and Christ of the New Testament, it was handled in a very serious way, more serious than anything we have ever encountered before. To those it has happened to, there has been a profound change in that person.

God the Father is the Great, Holy, omnipotent God of the universe and His Son, Jesus Christ, is our Lord and Savior who takes the work of being God seriously. "I am the Lord your God," He says, "you shall have no gods before Me." He does not leave any wiggle

room; no gray areas.

For a final scripture, please turn to Galatians 6. No zeal, however passionate, no prayers, however fervent or long, no witnessing, however loud, can influence God to act when a person's heart is with the world and he is spending his time and money on everything else but living God's way of life. This mocks God.

Galatians 6:6-10 Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches. Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

The Greek used for “mocked” in verse 7 means to draw up the nostrils in contempt. It is not a word to be used lightly. God does not suffer Himself to be imposed on by empty words. He will judge according to works which are seeds sown for either an eternity of joy or a death in misery.

As believers, our expectation and experience in this life will also be persecution and affliction, but this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard nor has entered into the heart of men, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”