

Become One with Him

‘A drunk man who smelled like cheap wine sat down on a subway seat next to a priest. The man’s tie was stained, his face was plastered with red lipstick, and a half empty bottle of gin was sticking out of his torn coat pocket. He opened his newspaper and began reading. After a few minutes the man turned to the priest and asked, “Say, Father, what causes arthritis?” “My Son, it’s caused by loose living, being with cheap, wicked women, too much alcohol and a contempt for your fellow man”. “Well, I’ll be hornswaggled”, the drunk muttered, returning to his paper. The priest, thinking about what he had said, nudged the man and apologized. “I’m very sorry. I didn’t mean to come on so strong. How long have you had arthritis?” “I don’t have it, Father. I was just reading here that the Pope does”.’

So, apparently the Pope had been living loose, being with cheap, wicked women, drinking too much “communion wine”, and had contempt for his fellow man. (Sounds like many people today in our society with the biggest and loudest mouths!) So the Pope’s sinful behavior was the reason why he had been afflicted with arthritis. Or is this all a case of jumping to conclusions without having all the facts at hand? We see this, too, happening all around us. People are making fools of themselves all the time,

but refusing to acknowledge it, insisting that what they believe is true, regardless of the facts, in spite of the truth of the matters. The tragic, accidental killing of the young black woman in Louisville, Kentucky is only the latest example. The venom with which people who assume they know all there is to know are attacking the black Kentucky Attorney General Daniel Cameron with is unbelievable, and those making those vile attacks against him, such as Cheryl Dorsey calling him “skinfolk” and not “kinfolk”, will undoubtedly eventually have to answer to God for the manifold sins of their tongues.

While today’s most visible and audible hysteric “social justice warriors” are proudly and blatantly vile and violent beyond belief, those with similar villainous intent, in contrast, can also be among the most civil and well-mannered of folks. Just because some people are wallowing in sin doesn’t mean they can’t come across as very “nice” people, and even be your friends! Such were most of the people whom the Apostle Paul condemned numerous times during his ministry, not least of which in his letter to the Philippian church. In Philippians 3:2 he “tweets” like Trump, calling them “dogs”. These were otherwise pious-appearing, devout believers in Christ who nevertheless insisted that anyone who came to believe in Jesus the Messiah had to become Jewish first. Meaning, most importantly that the men had to be circumcised, like all Jewish men were when newborns. Paul further calls the “dogs”, “mutilators” of the flesh. For they insisted that unless every man was

circumcised they could not be saved. But Paul forcefully corrected this devilish teaching, insisting in verse three that not they, but only those who “worship by the Spirit of God are the ones who are truly circumcised”. From the moment of Christ’s self-sacrifice on the cross, circumcision was no longer a physical act performed by people but a spiritual reality imparted to believers by Christ’s Own Holy Spirit. Blessed be the Lord!

Though it should be readily apparent even to us, that undergoing circumcision can be viewed as a sign of great devotion to Christ, is it not, in reality, a badge of pride on the part of the one circumcised that they were so devoted, so pious, that they underwent such an arduous ordeal? Does that act, in the final analysis, not become simply a human attempt to gain favor with God, to make one righteous enough to “earn” one’s salvation? Absolutely. And thus, such people end up negating, neutralizing the grace of God. And once a person “neutralizes” God’s grace for themselves, they condemn themselves to eternity in hell in the company of the devil because they effectively tried to bribe God, giving Him something they had tried to steal from God in the first place. The result is equivalent to slapping Christ Jesus in the face while He still hung from the cross, saying that He never needed to come down from heaven in the first place!

This is exactly the same thing that the evil farmers in Lord Jesus’ parable were guilty of. Seeking to seize control of the luxuriant vineyard and its fruits for themselves, they murdered the

very son of the landowner. But, in the Day of Judgement, they themselves will be put to a “horrible death”. Practically as soon as the words left their mouths in answer to Lord Jesus’ question to them, the Pharisees and leading priests realized that the parable was a metaphor about themselves, and they had unwittingly condemned themselves to a horrible death in the Day of Judgement. As much as their anger burned against the Lord, yet they could not then move against Him because they were vastly outnumbered by “dimwitted, deplorable” crowds that believed the Lord was a great prophet. Which He was, but much, much more.

We recall that Paul himself had received a prestige education under the tutelage of preeminent scholar Gamaliel. Paul’s pedigree was as if he had graduated summa cum laude from Harvard, destined to become perhaps even the successor to Gamaliel himself someday. But once Paul, real name Saul, had met Christ Jesus, he realized how wrong he had been about just about everything, and he ditched his Hebrew name, Saul, and from that point on used only his Roman name “Paul”. Doing so was a clear symbolic break with his “evil” past which, by its very nature, denied the wondrous Good News about forgiveness of sin through the sacrifice of Christ’s cross. Paul, rather Saul, if in our modern day, would be a leader of ultra-orthodox Jews, who pride themselves on their meticulous observance of every jot and tittle of the Old Testament law and the Mishnah. They just knew without a shadow of a doubt that the better they observed every rule

and regulation, the more certain they were of gaining God's favor and His salvation. The more perfectly they kept the "Law", the better and more self-satisfied they felt about themselves.

Lord Jesus called this pride, when we recall His assessment of the two men who went to the Temple to pray, as recorded in Luke 18:10-14: "Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: 'I thank You, God, that I am not like other people—cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I'm certainly not like that tax collector! I fast twice a week, and I give You a tenth of my income'. But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, 'O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner'. I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted". So we see that the Pharisees' and chief priests' reaction to the Lord's parable of the vineyard farm workers was all based on pride in their own success at keeping what they themselves determined would gain them salvation. God was not consulted. Holy Spirit was totally ignored, if even His existence was even acknowledged, which in some factions was actually denied.

If our Lord Jesus went to such lengths as to actually put aside His omnipotent divinity and descend from heaven to earth, to become a man, and live with all the limitations that human be-

ings have to put up with, in a sin-corrupted world, and then go even further, to allow Himself to be unjustly accused, arrested, tortured, be tried in a kangaroo court, and then, horror of horrors, be sentenced to execution by crucifixion—if our Lord did all that, all for His love of you and me, for everybody, where in the heck do we get the idea that life should be all roses for us? If we have even the tiniest love for Him, would we not automatically want to suffer, to sacrifice, to give our everything back to Him? Should we not be jumping at every opportunity to draw close to such love, to hug Him Who is the very substance of love itself? Even greater than the greatest love between a husband and wife, should we not long to become one, as it were, with Him, our Savior, Lord, Friend, and perfect older Brother?

Recall again what Paul said, in Philippians 3:10: “I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised Him from the dead. I want to suffer with Him, sharing in His death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!” He continues in verses 20-21: “But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for Him to return as our Savior. He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like His Own, using the same power with which He will bring everything under His control”. Is that not something to use all our strength to strive for, to draw near Him? He is never far from us. He’s always right by our side. We just have to turn our eyes upon Him and see!

