

# LEST YE FAINT

by

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## CHAPTER NINE

### CURBING THE TIDE OF UNBELIEF

**“Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip” (Hebrews 2:1).**

ALL THE WHILE THE ALLIES were loath to shell the Benedictine courts during World War II. The enemy within the walls was exacting the lifeblood of our beloved sons. Forbearance in some cases is utter folly. It requires a turning of the guns upon the infested areas to detect the howling of the wolves where the bleating of the sheep should be heard.

The archenemy of both God and man has a formidable array of suicidal generals. They have spearheaded into the laboratories of science, citadels of learning, seminaries of training and pulpits of churches. Their chief aim is to exile Truth.

Prominent among their stratagems are the fog of ignorance, the barbwire of skepticism, the camouflage of words and the smoke screen of wisdom. These deceptive schemes, pressed singly or promoted in varied combinations, whip otherwise still waters into turbulent, raging streams of distrust, carrying small barques, not too well anchored, into strange waters, either to capsizes in a shipwreck of faith or to drift aimlessly with no particular port in sight.

#### **The Prevalence of the Fog of Ignorance**

Visibility for many Christians has been reduced to a sad minimum. The lack of Scriptural knowledge has beclouded vital issues, weakened convictions and lessened productive activity. There is a definite deflection through disinclination. Hazy about the will of God and laziness in the work of God result from an indifference toward the Word of God. No one is so blind as the one who does not want to see.

The greatest peril to be faced is internal deterioration. Paul made frequent appeals for inward strength, both as regards the individual and the Church. He spoke about practicing godly self-control lest, while he urged upon others the principles of holy conduct, he himself might be disqualified. He never feared the external foe.

Someone has remarked that when his enemies threw him into prison, he came out the other end with a convert under one arm and the jail gate under the other. But, his great concern was ever about himself. He knew well that the enemy is busily engaged in the strategy of breaking down internal resistance.

Israel furnishes a graphic example.

Concerning the national situation of God's ancient people, the diagnosis was sad indeed: **"The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores"** (Isaiah 1:5, 6).

How attractive to malignancy would such a physical condition be. Even so, the spiritual situation, of which this is descriptive, bespoke a vulnerability which made the favoured people of God a ready prey to treacherous enemies which were then plotting their destruction.

Elijah had seen the portents of disaster looming ominously on the horizon. He prayed his heart out in solemn supplication and intercession: **"Hear me, O God,"** he pleaded, **"hear me that this people may know that thou art the Lord God"** (I Kings 18:37).

**"THAT THIS PEOPLE MAY KNOW . . ."** Do you get it? They did not know, not that they could not have known, but because they became willing victims of the fog of inexcusable ignorance.

As the tree bends, so it falls. Paul viewed with uncomfortable alarm the tendency toward unbelief in his day. With frequent and evident forcefulness, he stated, **"I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren"** (II Corinthians 1:8).

- He did not want them to be unaware of spiritual gifts, especially of the enabling of the Holy Spirit so necessary to the acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord (I Corinthians 12:1).
- He did not want them to be bent under sorrow because of the decease of loved ones in Christ (I Thessalonians 4:14).
- He did not want them to be at a loss to understand Israel's blindness when she was the repository for the oracles of God (Romans 11:25).

Peter also showed a similar concern. He did not want the believer to be ignorant of God's unchangeable faithfulness because the fulfillment of His promises was apparently delayed. He explained that the time element did not, in any wise, enter into the matter (II Peter 3:8).

What is the picture now, some nineteen centuries later?

The enemy of Truth has worked relentlessly down through the stream of time. Today, there is a nebulous cast to the spiritual atmosphere. The wheat is making a life-or-death struggle for subsistence among the tares. The dynamic of the Church of Christ is but faintly evident; the offensive launched against the citadel of Satan by a valiant vanguard has all but lost its impact; and the army of Christian soldiers has literally bogged down.

Many a post is poorly manned because essentials are lacking. In a circular for the Northfield conference, Mr. Moody once referred to the fact that the Church limps and lags because “teachers are without knowledge, witnesses are without testimonies, workers are without power, and disciples follow afar off.”

### **The Pricking of the Barbed-Wire of Skepticism**

Loyalty does not seek an easy course. It does not shrink morbidly from hardship nor worry uselessly about danger. Loyalty is intent upon following, without deviation or vacillation, the path of devotion. Should that path lead through hardship of deprivation, through ordeals of persecution, or into the cold, cruel embrace of death, loyalty asks no greater honour than that of being true to Christ and His cause. Nor does it lack encouragement. **“Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life”** (Revelation 2:10).

What heart reaction do we experience toward those patient and persistent sufferers who reddened the soil with their blood and made possible the heritage which we enjoy? Loyalty does not always take the same course, but it leads to the same end.

Whether in the first or the twentieth century, it has the same texture, shows the same dauntlessness, and is willing both to suffer and die, if called upon, in order to uphold the banner of the cross. But loyalty must face a variety of tests. Satan’s desire is not so much to crush a life as it is to curb the Light. If this can be accomplished through deception more effectively than through destruction, he is quick to shift his emphasis.

Blatant unbelief is not always passive. It becomes bitterly assertive, hurling stinging, stirring taunts at those who would be true. But **“thou son of man, be not afraid of them,”** counsels the tender, loving Lord; **“neither be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions”** (Ezekiel 2:6).

- John the Baptist was a **“winebibber”**;
- Paul, the apostle, was **“beside himself—mad”**;
- Jesus was a **“perverter of the nation”**.

Such were the invectives which issued from corrupt hearts.

*A skeptic is that type of unbeliever who aggressively opposes the Scriptures. He is not contented in his darkness, but constantly seeks to extinguish the light of Truth for others. His cynical attitude leads him to become vitriolic. He is not concerned about the faith and feelings of others.*

Those who placed the crown of thorns on the brow of our Lord administered pain without compunction, and their kind today is no more tender in piercing and pricking His followers with daring and delight.

Caustic and cutting are their vehement outbursts as they seek to batter the bulwarks of our faith. The encouragement they receive in their ignoble efforts is surprisingly great.

This was evidenced by the taunts in the military forces when a true soldier of Christ stood firm under satanic fire. It is often demonstrated in the classroom when a godless professor seeks to embarrass a student who dares to voice his implicit faith in the Bible. There is delight in trying to confound him as argumentative students join the instructor in a common display of contempt for the counsels of the Most High.

But the worst kind of skepticism, by far, can be termed “**spiritual wickedness in high places**”.

Before the writer at the moment is a report of a sermon recently delivered in a church of our city to a congregation including some three hundred specially invited university students. The caption reads, PASTOR SEES BIBLE AS NOT INFALLIBLE. Some of the barbed-wire entanglements which he subtly threw about his unsuspecting hearers were as follows:

“On the one side, we have Genesis with its flat earth surrounded by the sea; on the other we have a round earth, rotating about the sun, and surrounded by numerous other planets. On the one side, we are confronted with the most amazing miracles; on the other side, we learn that science can explain no end of these miracles. Six days in the week we live in an ordered world. On the seventh we open the Church door on a land of topsy-turvy, where dry sticks are changed to serpents, cities let down out of the sky, angels stir water in wells, and bedeviled swine run violently into the sea. The men who wrote the Bible were not human robots— machines who took down what the great dictator had to say. Their conception was somewhat primitive. Passages in the Old Testament indicate God to be little better than a cruel Oriental despot.”

One of the most subtle and most destructive stratagems militating against all that we count sacred is the increasing practice of inculcating doubts regarding divine authority, of questioning the integrity of the Holy Scriptures. We are rich in privilege, happy in pursuit and hopeful in prospect. All this, and more, is our fortunate estate while many other peoples are currently disintegrating, downtrodden by foes, disturbed by internal strife and destitute of the bare necessities of life.

A people that forgets God goes backward, and questioning the authenticity and the absolute infallibility of the Bible constitutes a most serious threat to our national economy and a grievous offence to the personal faith of our people.

Yes, skeptical antipathy has cut a swath through the human race, felling in windrows weak and unprotected victims, there to leave them unassisted in the restlessness of their empty lives and comfortless in their outlook of hopelessness.

### **The Perplexity of the Camouflage of Words**

Several Roman Catholic lads, while playing on the street one day, were conjuring up mischief when they noticed a minister, with clerical garb, passing by, “S-s-s-h! Here comes Father,” one of the lads warned. Another of the group, recognizing the man, retorted with disdain, “He’s not a father; he’s got children.” The minister, overhearing the comment, laughingly asked himself, “When is a father a father, and when is a father not a father?”

Oftentimes, in these days of delusion, we are wont to enquire, “When are words words, and when are words not words?” That is to say, when are words the vehicles of the true thoughts and intents of the heart? When are they only ambiguity in orthodox apparel or false doctrine in scriptural garb?

Many ministers in our day, who are known to be unorthodox in their doctrines, maintain their prestige among weak, but truly born again people, because of their employment of scriptural terms, which, if they were asked to define, would prove their views to be utter distortions of divine truth.

The late Dr. I. M. Haldeman \* cited an illustration of a well-known religious leader who was commended for his reference to the vicarious work of Christ on the cross. Later, this same leader placed the vicarious suffering of Christ in the same category with the hardships of David Livingstone, Father Damiens and Florence Nightingale.

\* *The King’s Penknife*

Perhaps nowhere may one find words so much on dress parade as in a message at a funeral service. How meaningless are so many statements as broken and bleeding hearts receive them, hoping thereby to be comforted in their bereavement. “His labours are now over and he is at rest,” the minister will comment, even though the deceased was known to have utterly rejected Christ as Saviour. The Lord says, “**The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest**” (Isaiah 57:20).

“Your loved one is at peace,” perhaps the minister will say. This could only be true of one who has received the Prince of Peace by faith. “**There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked**” (Isaiah 57:21).

“**He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die**” (John 11:25, 26), are also words that have been solemnly intoned countless times by those who disbelieve and discountenance the second coming of Christ. The general resurrection theory is widely promulgated because it is read from rituals without investigation or examination. By the term “**new birth**” is often meant nothing more than a new vision or revival of some kind of devotion.

But what about the many careless, unthoughtful testimonies which are given in prayer meetings or young people’s gatherings? What about the solemn and significant words of hymns which fall from people’s lips whose hearts do not support the statements uttered? Words misplaced or deceptively used are decidedly harmful in their confusing effect. One must admit it, if ever so hesitantly, that we are living in a day when the true meaning of Divine Revelation is hid behind the clever camouflage of words.

### **The Perniciousness of the Smoke-Screen of Wisdom**

Liberalism actually advertises the fact that its approach to the Scriptures is academic.

The inference is clear. A man who requested a transfer from one church to another which was more orthodox in its message received an accompanying letter from the pastor which stated in part, "Join that church if that is what you want, but remember, God doesn't put a premium on ignorance. When he wanted competent leadership, he chose a wise, educated man like Paul. Our approach to the Bible is one of education, training and wisdom." The writer has this letter in his file.

But what is wisdom?

- Is it that degree of human development which makes it possible for man to belittle God? No, that is a superficial inflation of the ego.
- Is it that extent of human progress through investigation and acquirement that gives man a foundation for his contention that the Bible is antiquated and insufficient? No, that is deception of the first water.

Wisdom is a weighty word. It falls into a lofty bracket. It has many meanings in Scripture; i.e., prudence, discretion, quickness of invention, dexterity of execution, craft, cunning, true piety, fear of God, personification of Christ, natural instinct and sagacity. Divine wisdom and human wisdom are distinguished one from the other. Divine wisdom is from above (James 3:17). To make the contrast more pronounced, Paul declared that "**the foolishness of God is wiser than men**" (I Corinthians 1:25).

**"Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore, get wisdom; and, with all thy getting, get understanding"** (Proverbs 4:7).

Thus, the attainment of wisdom requires the acquisition of understanding in order to utilize and enjoy it. Wisdom without understanding is like a fortune without a knowledge of it. "**Get understanding.**" This is supreme encouragement in sublime endeavors.

The main reason why there is not a greater display of heavenly wisdom is due to the subtle instruction of man.

Fear toward God is based upon the faulty opinion of men (Isaiah 29:11). Nowhere else in the spiritual curriculum does substitution become more subversive. It fosters insincerity, produces incapability, and leaves prevailing instability amid the ranks of professing Christians. "**Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of me**" (Isaiah 30:1).

**"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"** (Psalm 111:10).

This statement deserves more than casual reading or careless recitation. We would do well to inquire into the meaning and derivation of the "**fear of the Lord**". It is commonly stated to be reverential trust with a hatred for evil, but this is not a thorough definition. It merely puts the phrase into its proper category. The fear of the Lord is said to be clean, enduring, inspiring, life-giving, satisfying, informative, enriching. If wisdom, true wisdom, is the embodiment of such ennobling principles, then surely it is "**the principal thing.**"

And nothing so swells the tide of unbelief as the multiplication of those who are wise, not in Christ, but in their own conceits (Romans 12:16).

### **Divine Counsel for Curbing the Tide**

**“Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip”** (Hebrews 2:1).

But what have we heard? What has God been saying insofar as the immediate context is concerned? God has spoken OF His Son; He has spoken TO His Son; and He has spoken IN His Son.

#### *THE THINGS WHICH GOD HAS SPOKEN OF HIS SON*

Verses two and three of Hebrews one present some faith-begetting characteristics of our Lord.

- He is the heir of all things and the creator of all things.
- He is the reflection of God’s glory and the true expression of His being.
- He sustains the universe by His almighty Word; and, having effected our cleansing from sin, is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high.
  
- Here is the Captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10).
- Here is the One in us Who is greater than the one in the world (I John 4:4).

If we were to give more earnest heed to these unique qualifications of Christ, we would be inspired with a holier zeal, and motivated by a stronger determination to stand firm amid the changing ways of man.

#### *THE THINGS WHICH GOD HAS SPOKEN TO HIS SON*

We should tread very softly as we come to the portals of truth as found in Hebrews one, verses five through thirteen. The Father is speaking to His beloved Son. We listen with quickened heartbeat and with subdued minds as the direct address develops:

**“Thou art my Son . . . I have begotten thee . . . Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever . . . God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows . . . Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thine hands . . . They shall perish, but thou remainest . . . Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.”**

No regenerated person can listen to these words without a stirring of the emotions. It is all about the incomparableness of Christ. None with Him can compare, and He is my Saviour. Will I desert Him for the passing fancies of this age? Not if I give more earnest heed to these things which I have heard. There may be strong academic persuasiveness and attractive cultural acquirements in the sphere of infidelity, but, with Peter, my heart cries out when the decision must be made:

**“To whom (else) shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life”** (John 6:68).

*THE THINGS WHICH GOD HAS SPOKEN IN HIS SON*

**“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son”** (Hebrews 1: 1, 2).

This is the voice of authority, the voice of challenge, the voice of eternity. What could be more sobering to a careless Christian?

What could be more startling to a drifting disciple?

- It is the voice that will speak forth the reward of the saints.
- It is the voice that will sound the doom of the sinners.

Surely that voice is not being heard by the rank and file of church people today. If it were, there would be a more even cadence in the walk, a quickening of the pace and a decided definiteness about the direction of the going. His is the voice of victory.

**~ end of chapter 9 ~**

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