

# **Throwing the Baby Out with the Bathwater:**

## **A Christian Response to Cancel Culture**

*Revised and updated text of a sermon preached*

*by Jonathan Peters at Reformation Bible Church on August 2, 2020*

### **Introduction**

The Apostle Paul says in Philippians 3:17: “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.” The word “ensample” is a translation of the Greek word “τύπος” (typos), meaning “a mark left by a strike or blow.” More simply, it is a form, figure, mold, pattern, or type. When this Greek word refers to a human being, as in this case, it can be translated “example,” whether good or bad. The context of this verse indicates a good example: that is, a person whose life is a pattern for how we ought to live. The verse is split into two clauses, each including a command about what is to be done with good examples. In reverse order, these commands are: 1) mark them which are good examples and 2) be followers of them.

### **Marks of Good Examples**

This word “mark” means “to fix one’s eyes upon or direct one’s attention to.” We are thus commanded then to observe good examples. But who are they? American society today would tell us they are athletes, actors, rock stars, medical workers, and social justice warriors. In time past, soldiers, statesmen, or police officers might have been cited as good examples. But are these all truly good role models? How can we tell? What should be our criteria for assessing such people?

In this passage, as well as others, the author tells us that we should direct our attention to him, and those who walk like him. Hebrews 6:12 gives us two specific characteristics of this walk. It says: “Be . . . followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” The first characteristic then is *faith in promises*, specifically *God’s promises*. In earlier times, God revealed these promises through visions and spoken prophecies. In these latter times, He revealed His promises exclusively through recorded Scripture (all 66 books of the Old and New

Testaments). Paul, and those like him, trusted this revelation because they knew it was inspired (God-breathed), inerrant (without error), authoritative (having a right to demand obedience), and sufficient.

Due to their trust in the Bible, *good examples embraced what it said about God as Creator, Lawgiver, Redeemer, and Judge*. They recognized the fact that God is the self-existent one, with no beginning or end. He is all-knowing, all-powerful, all-present, and all-perfect. He is also the maker and preserver of all things. In the beginning, He created Adam and Eve in His image, and commanded them to be holy. Paul and those of like-precious faith affirmed these very things, as well as Adam's fall into sin. In direct disobedience to God's command, Adam ate of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, plunging himself and the entire human race into depravity and judgment. All men were born henceforth with their "understanding[s] darkened, being alienated from the life of God" (Eph. 4:18). They cannot earn favor back with God; and without His intervention, they will be doomed to the fires of Hell for all of eternity.

But, men like Paul also believed that God the Father sent His only-begotten Son into the world to be born of the virgin, Mary. This Son, Jesus of Nazareth, came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). He came to earn a righteousness which no one else could achieve, and to die a substitutionary death for all who would place their faith and trust in Him. Left to himself, Paul rejected this Good News. But God met him on the road to Damascus, and gave him spiritual life to look unto Jesus as his one and only sin-bearer. Christ's righteousness, in turn, was credited to his account. Before this conversion, Paul had been a slave to sin. But now that Christ had set him free from its punishment and power, he could put off his old ways and pursue holiness. In Philippians 3:13-14, Paul put it this way: "this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

If the first mark of a good example is a profession of faith, the second mark is *endurance*. Again, Hebrews 6:12 says: "Be . . . followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." The word "patience" could also be translated: endurance, steadfastness, or perseverance. This, in essence, describes the quality of the faith. It is a never-dying faith. It is the opposite of the bad soils described in the parable of the sower. In Matthew 13, these places initially receive the seed of the Gospel, sometimes with joy. But they are so defective that when the sun of tribulation comes, or the thorns of riches, the seed fails to produce any fruit. Godly

examples, rather, are like the good soil which receives the seed of the Gospel and bears forth lasting fruit: some thirty, some sixty, some a hundredfold. They may at times stumble into sin (even egregiously) and deny their Lord (like the Apostle Peter), but they never utterly fall away, because they are rooted and grounded in Christ. Some branches from these plants will need to be pruned by the Lord of the harvest, but it will be to their advantage, not their final destruction. Hebrews 10:38 aptly states: “The just shall *live by faith*: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him” (emphasis added).

*Society at large will tell you that these doctrines do not really matter for assessing good examples. Being nice or helpful is all that is necessary.* To our modern society, a good example is merely someone who is competent at a job, skillful at winning a game; or maybe someone who donates money to some charity, discovers a cure for a disease, rescues someone from physical danger, or fights against some perceived injustice. To an extent, we can acknowledge when someone acts according to “common grace.” Due to the “glimmerings of natural light, whereby [a man] retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the difference between good and evil, [he can at times] . . . discover . . . some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for maintaining an orderly external deportment.”<sup>1</sup> Some may even manifest more common grace than others.

But, we must recognize that *common grace is not saving grace*. I’m afraid many confuse the two, though. In the final book of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, C. S. Lewis has a character named Emesh, who zealously serves the false god, Tash. Emesh passes away into eternity, and Aslan, the great lion (supposedly representing the God of the Bible), approaches him. Aslan says to him: “Son, thou art welcome.” Emesh replies: “Alas, Lord, I am no son of thine but the servant of Tash.” Aslan answers: “Child, all the service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service done to me . . . No service which is vile can be done for me, and none which is not vile can be done for [Tash]. Therefore, if a man swear by Tash and keep his oath for the oath’s sake, it is by me that he has truly sworn, though he knew it not, and it is I who reward him. And if any man do a cruelty in my name, then, though he says the name of Aslan, it is Tash whom he serves and by Tash his deed is accepted. Dost thou understand, Child?” Emesh then says: “Lord, thou knowest how much I understand . . . Yet I have been seeking Tash all my days.” Aslan replies:

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<sup>1</sup> Canons of Dort, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Heads of Doctrine, Article 4 and Rejection 5. See also Romans 2:14-16.

“Beloved, unless thy desire had been for me thou wouldst not have sought so long and so truly. For all find what they truly seek.”<sup>2</sup>

Evangelist Billy Graham said the same kind of thing in an interview in the late 1990s with Robert Schuler. Graham claimed that there were many saved Muslims and Buddhists, who never saw a Bible or heard the name of Jesus, but tried to live a life that was different from their surrounding community. *This inclusivism that Graham and Lewis promoted is utter nonsense, and completely antithetical to Scripture.* Acts 4:12 says “there is none other name under heaven [but Jesus] given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Romans 10:13-14 confirms: “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe on him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” Those who never hear the gospel, never know the Scriptures or Jesus Christ, these people are “not righteous, no not one. . . . They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable” (Rom. 3:10, 12). *They may do seemingly good things, but all ultimately for bad ends. Why? Because they are still at war with God.* Their worldview, their priorities, their heart, their religion is anti-God (Rom. 8:7). Even if they do not act as wicked as they could (Ez. 16:51-52), they still reject Christ as their Lord and Savior, and are therefore an abomination in His sight. Andrew Fuller aptly illustrated it this way:

[Suppose] a ship’s company rise against their officers, put them in chains, and take the command of the ship upon themselves. They agree to set the officers ashore on some uninhabited island, to sail to some distant port, dispose of the cargo, and divide the amount. After parting with their officers, they find it necessary, for the sake of self-preservation, to establish some kind of laws and order. To these they adhere with punctuality, act upon honour with respect to each other, and propose to be very impartial in the distribution of their plunder. But, while they are on their voyage, one of the company relents, and becomes very unhappy. They inquire the reason. He answers, ‘We are engaged in a wicked cause!’ They plead their justice, honour, and generosity to each other. He denies that there is any virtue in it: ‘Nay, all our equity, while it is exercised in pursuit of a scheme which violates the great law of justice, is itself a species of iniquity!’

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<sup>2</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (1956; repr., New York, NY: Collier Books, 1970), 161-165.

— ‘You talk extravagantly; surely we might be worse than we are if we were to destroy each other as well as our officers.’ — ‘Yes, wickedness admits of degrees; but there is no virtue or goodness in all our doings; all has arisen from selfish motives. The same principles which led us to discard our officers would lead us, if it were not for our own sake, to destroy each other.’ — ‘But you speak so very *discouraging*; you destroy all *motives* to good order in the ship: what would you have us do?’ — ‘REPENT, RETURN TO OUR INJURED OFFICERS AND OWNERS, AND SUBMIT TO MERCY!’ ‘O, but this we *cannot* do: advise us to any thing which concerns the good order of the ship, and we will harken to you!’<sup>3</sup>

Brethren, since unbelievers will not submit to Christ’s rule, we must not fix our eyes on them as if they were the good examples which Paul is speaking of in Philippians 3:17. The captain of the ship will one day return and punish the impenitent sailors for all of eternity. Therefore, *we must get our gaze off of these traitors, and refocus it on godly examples who have thrown themselves upon the mercy of the Captain of their salvation.*

### **Location of Good Examples**

Where then should we look for these examples? Again, our world today would tell us that the best places to look for good examples are the music, movie, and television award ceremonies, a professional sports hall of fame, an ecumenical religious gathering, or maybe some Marxist protest. But how, we must ask, does one achieve notoriety at these events? Answer: generally by singing sensual rock songs, acting in gory or licentious films, playing frivolous games on the Lord’s Day, promoting a false religious unity, or advocating anarchy, vandalism, or some other kind of socialistic activity.

O yes, there may be a few virtue-signalers who reference God’s name in a song, thank God or quote Scripture in their speeches, or who point to heaven after scoring a touchdown. But Jesus says in Matthew 7: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, . . . have we not done many wonderful works in thy name? And then

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<sup>3</sup> “Letter III: On the Total Depravity of Human Nature,” Gaius to Crispus, February 9, 1795, in *The Complete Works of Rev. Andrew Fuller* (New Haven, CT: S. Converse, 1924), 4:65-66. Italics and all caps in original.

I will profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” Jesus also said in Luke 6:26: “Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!” *Those today who receive the applause of the majority of Americans are not people we should even bother to look at, nor should we try to find heroes from these venues at Vanity Fair.*<sup>4</sup>

We should look elsewhere. *We should look first and foremost in Scripture.* For starters, we can look at the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11. There, we can examine the lives of men and women like Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Moses, Rahab, and Gideon. We can look elsewhere in Scripture to observe the lives of David, Elijah, Jonah, Jeremiah, Peter, Stephen, and many more.

We can also look in church history to find godly examples, especially during times of adversity and revival. We can look to the *Protestant Reformation* to examine the lives of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Knox. We can look to the era of the *Puritans* shortly thereafter to see the lives of men like John Bunyan, Matthew Henry, and John Owen. As Americans, it would be wise for us also to look at the *First Great Awakening* to ponder the ministries of Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield. The *modern missions movement* is also a good place to find heroes of the faith like William Carey, Adoniram Judson, and Amy Carmichael. Great preachers and teachers such as Charles Spurgeon, A. W. Pink, J. Gresham Machen, and D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones are also worthy of our consideration.

We should also be looking to find godly examples in *our church* and on *foreign fields*. As Paul says in I Timothy 5:17: “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour.” We should be observing those pastors and missionaries who faithfully labor in the Word. We should also observe the lives of *mature believers* within our congregation, and churches of like-precious faith. A few months ago, it was reported that there was a church in the Old Northwest that wanted to do a relaunch. In order to attract more young people, they told the older people to stay away for some time. This is a terrible idea! Titus 2 talks about the aged men and women teaching the younger people how to be godly. Removing mature believers removes wisdom from any congregation. Leviticus 19:32 says: “Thou shalt rise up before the hoary [gray] head, and honour the face of the old man.” We must seek to honor them, learn from them, and pursue fellowship with them. Lastly, we can look to godly members of *our own families*, if the Lord has blessed us with such. Those who have sought to train us up in the

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<sup>4</sup> See John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Part 1.

“nurture and admonition of the Lord” are worthy of our honor and respect (Eph. 6:1-4, cf. Prov. 22:6).

May I conclude this section by saying that God does not limit us on the number of good examples we should find. Neither does He place quotas on how many people we should find from different time periods, locations, ethnicities, lawful occupations, or orthodox denominations. Practically speaking, we cannot be exhaustive or omniscient *in our list of heroes*, but we should *always adhere to the guidelines God has placed before us*. And, may I also say, the more these good examples conform to Christ’s image, the more we should admire their godly virtues.

### **Following Good Examples**

It is not enough for us just to mark and observe good examples. We can assemble a great list of heroes, but that is meaningless unless we actually follow their good example. But what does it mean to follow them? The word “follower” in Philippians 3:17 (and Hebrews 6:12) is the Greek word “μιμητής” (mimētēs), from which we get our word “mimic.” We should note that the Apostle Paul did not use the word “ὑποκριτής” (hupokritēs) here, which means an “actor” or “pretender.” In the ancient world, stage actors would use masks, which they held in their hands, to represent someone who they clearly were not in real life. This is not what any of us should be. We should not *pretend to be like our heroes in public, while at the same time living a life of conscious sin in private*. This is being a *hypocrite*. No, we must be actual mimickers, imitators of our heroes in all of life. Internally, as well as externally.

### **Ditches to Avoid:**

#### *Idolization*

We must avoid two ditches when seeking to follow good examples. The first ditch is idolization. We must *be careful not to deify any man, or give him a god-like status*. This is what the crowd at Lystra tried to do with Paul and Barnabas after a cripple was healed, calling them Jupiter and Mercury. Deifying men has several devastating effects. For one, it violates the first commandment, which says that we should have no other gods beside the Lord (Ex. 20:3). Paul and Barnabas reproved the men of Lystra by saying: “We . . . are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God” (Acts 14:15).

The angel in Revelation 19:10 similarly admonished the Apostle John not to worship him, for “I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus.”

The second problem with *idolization* is that it *blinds us to the sins of the godly*, causing us to imitate them in ways that we shouldn’t. A third problem with idolization is that it does not grant living examples the opportunity to be rebuked and to repent of any known sin. In accordance with Matthew 18 and Galatians 6:1, if “a brother shall trespass against” us or “be overtaken in a fault, ye that are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”

Another problem with idolizing someone is that we may be confronted eventually with their feet of clay, and be tempted to throw out the baby with the bathwater. We can then start to think, “If this man, who was my idol, did this specific sin(s), he must have been wrong about everything.” Then we may become like the thankless Israelites in the book of Judges, who “remembered not the LORD their God . . . neither showed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had showed unto [them]” (Judges 8:34-35, cf. 2:8-10 and Ex. 1:8).

A fifth problem with idolization is that we can become unnecessarily divisive. If we deify one specific person, we are like the Corinthians who said, “I am of Paul; and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas” (I Cor. 1:12). A healthy diversity of heroes can remedy this problem. Lastly, Paul said in I Corinthians 3:21, 23: “Let no man glory in men. For all things are yours . . . And ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s.” God did not give us these godly men so that we may be their spiritual slaves, but rather that they may all minister unto us, who like them, are servants of Christ.

### *Cynicism*

We should be careful, moreover, not to fall in the opposite ditch of cynicism, which is so prevalent today in cancel culture. *Cynicism is that deadly disease which scorns the godly (particularly the deceased), and belabors their infirmities.*<sup>5</sup> We already mentioned this to a degree with the ungrateful Israelites in the book of Judges. There are several other problems

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<sup>5</sup> See also Samuel Sey, “Cancel Culture And Christian Culture,” Slow To Write Blog (July 3, 2020): <https://slowtowrite.com/cancel-culture-and-christian-culture/> and Joel Beeke, “Propaganda: Giving the Puritans a Bad Rap,” Joel Beeke Doctrine for Life Blog (October 25, 2012): <http://www.joelbeeke.org/2012/10/propaganda-giving-the-puritans-a-bad-rap/>.



with cynicism. First, it can cause us to become resentful and malicious. It can make us like the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18. This servant owed his master 10,000 talents, which he could not pay. The master had compassion on him, and forgave the entire debt. Shortly thereafter, this very servant demanded a mere 100 pence from a fellow servant, who pleaded for more time. The first servant refused, and cast his fellow into prison until he should pay off the little debt. The master became angry when he heard of this, and delivered the merciless servant to the tormentors. Jesus warns us: “So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses” (Matt. 18:35). Those of us who profess Christ should meditate on Ephesians 4:31-32: “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”

Second, *cynicism tends to deaden our ability to perceive our own sin*. While we scornfully point out the flaws in a godly man’s eye, we lose sight of the beams in our own eyes (Luke 6:41-42). We become so consumed with tearing down other men that we neglect our own sin, which is likely far worse, and possibly of the same kind. Many of the social justice rioters and protestors today, who say they stand against racism (better termed, “ethnic prejudice”),<sup>6</sup> are in fact the very ones who perpetuate another form of the same sin by adhering to *Intersectionality/Critical Race Theory/Cultural Marxism/Woke Theology*.<sup>7</sup> Proponents of this ideology judge all white people “by the color of their skin [rather than] the content of their character.”<sup>8</sup> Rather than providing objective evidence against individuals, they *slander all white people as active participants in or complicit with an alleged “systemic racism”* (see Lev. 19:15-16, Deut. 24:16). *Such an unsubstantiated accusation is, by its very nature, racist and unjust*. We ought all to heed the words of Matthew 7:2: “with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” Likewise James

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<sup>6</sup> See R. Scott Clark, “Machen’s Letter to His Mother or What to Do with Dead Sinners?” The Heidelbergblog (September 4, 2018): <https://heidelbergblog.net/2018/09/machens-letter-to-his-mother-or-what-to-do-with-dead-sinners/>.

<sup>7</sup> See also “The [Dallas] Statement on Social Justice & the Gospel” (September 2018): <https://statementonsocialjustice.com/>, Neil Shenvi – Apologetics: <https://shenviapologetics.com/>, Scott Allen, *Why Social Justice Is Not Biblical Justice: An Urgent Appeal to Fellow Christians in a Time of Social Crisis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Credo House, 2020), and Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity – and Why This Harms Everybody* (Durham, NC: Pitchstone, 2020). Readers should be cautioned about Pluckrose’s humanism and Lindsay’s atheism.

<sup>8</sup> On August 28, 1963 at the Lincoln Memorial, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (civil rights activist and liberal Baptist pastor) denounced this very kind of thing when he said: “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”

2:13 says: “he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy.” If we’re not careful, any one of us can end up like the self-righteous Pharisee who proudly thanked God that he was not like other men (like that “sinner” over there). Sadly, we will return to our homes dead in our sins, while the penitent sinners will be graciously pardoned (Luke 18:9-14).

Thirdly, *cynicism causes us to replace godly heroes with ungodly ones*. We may even start to think that unbelief isn’t so bad, as long as it doesn’t have any accompanying vices now deemed “unpardonable.” Imagine for a moment that a servant of Abraham saw his master twice deceive pagan rulers that Sarah was merely his sister. Maybe he even saw his son, Isaac, do the same thing later with his wife. Rather than humbly learning from his master’s mistake, this servant forsakes Abraham to follow after Pharaoh and Abimelech, all because these unbelieving pagans stood against the sin of deceit, and his master didn’t. What a fool this servant would be!

Let us also witness the Israelites during the reign of King David, who were dismayed that “there [was] no man deputed of the king to hear” their “good and right” claims. Their unsettled hearts were soon won over to David’s treacherous son, Absalom, who said unto them: “Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice!” (II Sam. 15:3-6). These people joined Absalom’s conspiracy, and unjustly tried to set him up as king in his father’s stead. The Lord avenged David in due course, and destroyed their uprising. Absalom and 20,000 of the people were slain. If any of us here remain in rebellion against God and His Spirit-anointed servants, we will likewise face judgment one day.<sup>9</sup> Godly saints may also weep for you as David did, crying: “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!” (II Sam 18:33).

Fourthly, *cynicism*, in essence, *defies God’s verdict of the godly*. God says that His children are people “of whom the world is not worthy” (Hebrews 11:38). Cynics, rather, treat the godly as if they are “the filth of the world, . . . the offscouring of all things” (I Cor. 4:13). During David’s flight from Absalom, he and his mighty men passed through the town of Bahurim. There, Shimei, a relative of Saul, cast dust and stones at the men, and cursed David by saying: “Come out, come out, thou bloody man, . . . thou man of Belial,” (II Sam. 16:7). Belial

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<sup>9</sup> God also chose Samson to be the leader of Israel for twenty years during the time of the Judges. Although deeply flawed, Samson deserved honor as a hero of faith (Heb. 11:32). The Philistines, rather, plucked out his eyes, bound him in chains, and made sport of him in their temple. Samson prayed to God that he “may be at once avenged of the Philistines” for their cruelty (Judg. 16:28), and the Lord gave him strength to bring down the temple on his ridiculers.

means “worthlessness.” David, the Lord’s anointed, the man after God’s own heart, the sweet Psalmist of Israel, now called “worthless”!?! Although impetuous, David’s bodyguard was right when they said that Shimei was no better than a “dead dog” (II Sam. 16:9). Proverbs 19:5 says: “A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape.” Solomon, David’s son, eventually executed Shimei for his slanderous actions against his father (I Kings 2:42-46, cf. II Kings 2:23-24). Listen then to the very words of Solomon this day: “How long, ye scorers, will ye love scorning? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you” (Prov. 1:22-23, slightly rephrased).

Fifthly, *cynicism tends to forget the very basis of salvation*. Many scoffers say: “This celebrated hero from antiquity had an ‘obvious’ sin in his life after his profession of faith. How can he be truly saved?” What’s implied behind that statement is this idea: that men are saved on the grounds of an exhaustive repentance. Men are assumed to merit salvation by confessing *all* of their sin, specifically and thoroughly. This doctrine, however, is foreign to the Scriptures. While everyone should “endeavour to repent of his particular sins, particularly,”<sup>10</sup> no one will ever be able to find out all of his secret faults during his lifetime. No one ever has. Every godly example, lamentably, goes to his grave with some indwelling sin. But even *that* sin is pardoned. For, you see, *salvation rests entirely on Christ’s blood and righteousness*.

You may think of the Israelites in the wilderness who were bitten by fiery serpents. These Israelites may have been bitten multiple times, all over their bodies. They may not have been able to identify all of the places where they had been bitten, but they could sense the poison causing them to grow faint. They knew if they beheld Moses’ brazen serpent, they would be healed. So they looked and lived. And that is exactly what godly examples do. They may not know every location where sin has struck, but they know that their sin is destroying them. They, therefore, look on the Son of Man as their sin-bearer, and He cleanses them from all unrighteousness (John 3:14-15). What a comfort it is for believers then to face death knowing that Jesus paid the debt for their sin, once and for all! *Christians do not need to rack their brains on their deathbeds to search out all of their unconscious sins, or call in some priest to grant final absolution*.

Lastly, cynicism often causes us to perpetually overlook the fact that even the godliest man on earth is not yet glorified. Paul, nevertheless, acknowledges in Philippians 3:12 that he

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<sup>10</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter XV: “Of Repentance unto Life,” Section 5.

has not yet attained perfection in thought, word, or deed. He is like gold that has been extracted from the earth, which still has impurities to be refined. Thankfully, God will glorify His children in the New Creation, and remove all the former things of this sin-cursed world (Rev. 21:1-4).

### **Conclusion**

We must be wiser than both the idolater and the cynic. *We must humbly recognize and avoid the sins of the godly*, whether it be Noah's drunkenness, Abraham's deceit, Gideon's idolatry, David's maladministration of justice, Elijah's despair, Jonah's ethnic prejudice, or Peter's cursing. *BUT, we must see past their warts, and observe their godly virtues. We should rejoice that they were saved by grace from all of their sin*, whether known or unknown to them (Ps. 19:12). Unlike the vast majority of mankind, these wise men built their house upon the rock of Jesus Christ (Matt. 7:24-25). Although they stumbled and fell at times, and did not clearly see all of their sin, they *brought forth the fruit of righteousness, and persevered in their faith*. Jesus will one day say to them: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21).

If Jesus will say this to them, then we ought not only to observe their virtues, but also to *follow them, as they follow Christ* (I Cor. 11:1). Paul put it this way in Philippians 4:7: "Those [godly] things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do." My question to all of us is: Do we, like all godly heroes living and dead, believe that God, the maker of heaven and earth, is holy, and we, His creatures made in His image, have sinned against Him, meriting death and judgment? Do we look to Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, as our Lord and Savior? If you do not, I urge you this day, repent and believe the Gospel, and He will abundantly pardon your sin, just as He did the saints of old. Do we, like all godly examples, embrace the Scriptures as the inspired, inerrant, and sufficient Word of God? Is it a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path? Do we hide it in our hearts? Do we meditate on it day and night? Do we, professing Christians, seek to follow it, making it our rule of life?

Lastly, I must ask, do we have enduring faith, like the heroes of old? The Apostle Paul encourages us all to "continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and has been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them" (II Tim. 3:14). As we've seen, we live in "perilous times . . . [where] men [are] lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, [revilers], disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, [irreconcilable], [slanderers], [without self-control], fierce, [and] despisers of those that are good" (II Tim. 3:1-3).

Fading are the days when even the hypocrites “build [up] the tombs of the prophets, and [decorate the memorials] of the righteous.” We live among “the children of them which killed the prophets,” who are now “fill[ing] . . . up the measure of [their] fathers” (Matt. 23:29-31).

Will you then, like all Israel, desert the godly legacy of King David, and follow Absalom’s revolt? Or, *will you “stand fast in the faith” as mighty men of valor, loyal to the Lord and the Lord’s anointed* (I Cor. 16:13, cf. Jude 3)?<sup>11</sup> We must acknowledge that those who do will likely suffer persecution (II Tim. 3:12). They will face the fury of Satan and his followers (John 8:39-41). But you know you’re in good company when the ungodly “revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for Christ’s sake, . . . for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. . . . Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven” (Matt. 5:11-12, cf. Rev. 2:7, 21:7).

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<sup>11</sup> See also the *Westminster Larger Catechism*, Questions 127-128.