

The Old Paths

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"I Can Spell Kuwait"

Jarrod Jacobs

The above statement was made by my oldest son last week. Upon telling his mother how he could "spell Kuwait," she asked him how to spell it. His reply: "I-r-a-q." This seemed funny at first, but it also made an indelible impression on me that my son, though still "fuzzy" about the details, is quite aware of what is going on around him. Perhaps he is more aware than I give him credit for being. As a father, I need to realize that if I am watching the news, or a TV show, then he is watching it, too. He is no longer in the "baby" stage where he is seldom aware of the things around him. His perception of things is expanding. It has already been observed by me that if I get a Bible out to read it, he will get one, too. If I get tools out to work on something, he gets his tools out as well! He tries to do what I do.

Unfortunately, no parent is safe from falling into a "rut" in life, and doing things by habit rather than by careful thought. When children are involved, we need to be careful, though, lest our "rut" become their "stumbling block." May all parents appreciate the fact that their example is felt by their children each day. Parents have a great and grave responsibility to bring their children up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." (Eph. 6:4)

Parents, are we active in the God-given responsibilities of teaching, training, and instructing our children? Have we gone into "auto-pilot" since the days of potty-training and learning to walk? I hope not! In Old Testament days, God spoke of parenting as a "full-time" job! Through Moses, God said,

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates" (Deut. 6:6-9). Abraham was considered to be a good father by God. God knew, "He will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment..." (Gen. 18:19). Could God say that about me? (Rom. 15:4)

I remember a few years ago talking with a father about little children's shows, He talked about how at one time he didn't like "Barney," but added, "I've made my peace with Barney." I did not appreciate that statement until 3-4 months ago. Now, I have made my "peace" with Barney! I'd rather have my boys watching shows like that or "Sesame Street," etc., than for them to know how to "spell Kuwait." Why should they be needlessly exposed to cruelty, foul language, evil behavior, etc., before they absolutely have to? (For that matter, why should I? - Phil. 4:8; I Tim. 5:22!) Perhaps I am dreaming, but isn't it possible that with a little more vigilance and concern on my part, I can spare their innocence for a little while longer? Could it be that if I will not go into "auto-pilot" so often, then perhaps I can still leave some good impressions, and teach my boys valuable

lessons while they are still young? Yes, it is necessary to know "current events," the weather, what is happening in our world, etc. But, I know it is vital that I mold and shape two very special lives; and I pray God will open my eyes and not allow me to switch over so soon to "auto-pilot" when two young souls hang in the balance. Will you pray for me, too? Parents, let's examine ourselves (II Cor. 13:5), help, and pray for each other.

"Abusing Sardis"

Mike Thomas, Owensboro, KY

I have heard brethren use the church at Sardis as scriptural justification to attend churches that practice error. When a Christian leaves a faithful congregation to attend an institutional church, or even a denomination, some Christians justify such a decision by saying, "Well, there were a few at Sardis who were not condemned, so who can say God will not receive them for going there?" Brethren, if this is our thinking, we need to carefully reconsider how we are using (and abusing) Sardis.

The context of Jesus' reference to the church at Sardis discusses His displeasure with them for dying spiritually (Rev. 3:1). They may have won the brotherhood's affection as a vibrant and living church (v. 1), especially in comparison to smaller congregations, but God knew their real condition of being spiritually inactive and dead. Therefore, to remain in fellowship with God they had to repent (v. 3). In the midst of making these condemning statements, Jesus acknowledged, "Nevertheless, you have a few names who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy" (v. 4). Their brethren may have been departing from God's service, but these few were still in fellowship with Him for not defiling their garments.

Before we use this passage to justify at-

tending institutional churches or denominations, there are a few facts we must observe from the text.

Inactivity is not the same as blatant error. A congregation may not be meeting its God-given potential, which is sinful to say the least, but it is not the same as a church that has never been right with God. Sardis had fellowship with God but was losing it to their laziness and worldly pursuits. Churches today that begin in error, whether institutional or denominational, must first be proven to be of God before they can be compared to Sardis (Matt. 7:21-23).

Secondly, what was God about to do to the church at Sardis if it did not repent of its inactivity? Read carefully verse 3. He was about to judge them! This was not an environment that God was condoning, much less encouraging His people to remain in. He was about to judge the church if it did not repent of its condition. Since this is so, why would we use this verse as justification to attend a church practicing error? If it is acknowledged that an institutional church is violating God's will, and we use Sardis to justify going there, what are we forgetting in comparing that church to Sardis? It was condemned! Sardis was not a God-given example of situations that God tolerates. It is an example of a church about to be judged! So why turn to a condemned church as authority to attend an erring church? In comparing modern churches to Sardis, to excuse their error, and to justify our support of them, we mistakenly seal our fate with a group of condemned people. It is like turning to Judas' example to justify our denying Christ. Yes, we may be like an example in the Bible, but it's not the kind that saves us. The worst thing you could say about a church you are attending is that it is like Sardis because Sardis was not of God, but of the world, and soon to be judged.

Next, if Sardis is equivalent to

attending erring churches today, who in those churches are saved and who are lost? In Sardis, there were two groups of people: those received of God and those condemned; the few and the majority. In erring churches today, who among them is of God and who is not? Is it the ones endorsing the departures from God's will – the false plans of salvation, instrumental music, church-sponsored colleges, kitchens, gymnasiums, orphanages and so on? Or is it the ones who oppose such practices? Jesus said the few at Sardis who were saved were the ones "who have not defiled their garments" (Rev. 3:4). They were in the minority because they remained active, alive and busy in God's work. This is a far cry from those who leave faithful churches to support, participate in and condone the sin of erring churches. Even the majority at Sardis did not go this far from God's will! Yet, even if we could compare Sardis to erring churches today, who among those churches are going to be saved and who will be lost? Those engaged in sin or those who oppose it?

When God says, "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them" (Eph. 5:11), and we say, "Have fellowship with error because the few at Sardis did," we are perverting God's word. How can we condone sin when we're neck deep in it as members of an erring church? How can we expose sin when we lend support to it? Furthermore, Paul said, "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you

cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons." Does that sound like God permits His people to attend any church, regardless of its practices? Does it even hint at such a notion? God forbid. If anything, God is warning against our fellowship with those who violate His will, especially in worship. "He who greets him shares in his evil deeds" says John.

Friends, the real Sardis today is not found in churches entrenched in error and apostasy. Even the condemned majority of Sardis had not gone this far. The comparable scenarios to that of Sardis are when Christians in churches that God has once fellowshiped, are losing that association with Him because of worldliness and inactivity. They have obeyed His gospel and have been following His will regarding Christianity (Acts 2:42), but are slowly letting "the cares, riches and pleasures of life" choke out God's word. This is a sin that is likely affecting scores of churches of our Lord today, and must be repented of immediately, but it is not even close to saying God gives us authority to attend churches that practice error. Sardis was condemned for its sin of apathy, not endorsed for its doctrinal perversion. It is a pattern of God's judgment against worldliness, not a scriptural alternative to attending churches built on apostasy. Come out and be separate says the Lord. Not, join in and help out. "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity." To say anything else about Sardis is to abuse the scriptures.

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