

Sermon-Proof Christians

To be sermon-proof is to hear God's Word, claim to love it, claim to obey it, but not act on it! It is to become so hardened, the heart is no longer moved and is totally unaffected by what is preached. Some call it "gospel-hardened." Think of all the old Bible stories and Bible characters. Who do you think was the most sermon-proof? Who sat under the clearest, strongest Word and was totally unaffected by it?

Was it Saul? He heard a clear, strong word: *"Go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass."* (1.SAM 15:3). Saul disobeyed this message. Instead, *"Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good..."* (1.SAM 15:9). Then Samuel appeared and Saul became a liar! *"Saul said unto him... I have performed the commandment of the LORD."* (1.SAM 15:13). Samuel was horrified because he could hear the sheep that were spared bellowing. *"Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD, but... didst evil in the sight of the LORD?"* (1.SAM 15:19). Was Saul hardened? Was he sermon-proof? Why else would he tell such bold-faced lies to a prophet of God who had the goods on him? Listen to him lie again with the evidence of his lying all about him: *"Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me..."* (1.SAM 15:20). Caught red-handed, he blamed others and contrived incredible excuses for his sin: *"But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen... to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God..."* (1.SAM 15:21).

Samuel got to the heart of the problem. He knew that Saul was sermon-proof because his heart had already been given over to witchcraft. *"For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee..."* (1.SAM 15:23). Sermon-proof Saul ended up getting guidance from a witch and died an early, cruel death, abandoned by God. But was Saul the most sermon-proof of all?

Who was more sermon-proof than Judah and Israel? God said unto them, *"I sent unto you all my servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, saying, Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear to turn from their wickedness... Wherefore my fury and mine anger was poured forth..."* (JER 44:4-6). They had one illustrated sermon after another from Jeremiah. His sermons were so strong, so hard, and full of warnings that the people of God tired of hearing them and began to mock his message. Ezekiel said of them: *"...thy people still are talking against thee... saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the LORD. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness (their own plans and desires)." (EZEK 33:30-31).*

They loved going to hear this man of God preach truth. They knew it

came forth from the Lord. Look at them, sitting there saying "Amen," drinking it all in, with loving praises pouring out of her mouth. But, *"Lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice (like a popular singer), and can play well on an instrument (as a talent speaker): for they hear thy words, but they do them not."* (EZEK 33:32). They had become sermon-proof, loving to hear (it was a show to them) - but leaving unaffected and unchanged. Were they the most sermon-proof of all?

What about Judas? Wouldn't he have to be considered as one of the most sermon-proof of all times? He was an apostle - chosen, called, anointed. He cast out devils and healed the sick. Most important of all was that he sat for three years under the ministry of God's own Son. He was there every time Jesus took the twelve aside to explain clearly what His message meant. While the others grew under this Word, Judas only grew hard. He ended up opening himself to total demonic control and became a betrayer of Christ.

You may be thinking that Judas was certainly the most sermon-proof of all. It is true that all the men I have mentioned were sermon-proof. They all heard, yet disobeyed. They all pretended they loved God's Word, yet never yielded to it. But there is another one who started out so spiritual, so close to God, so blessed, so anointed. It seems incredible to even think he could become sermon-proof, hard, and disobedient.

This man is Solomon and his story is one of the most shocking in all of God's Word! Solomon started out as a spirit-led, tenderhearted, broken-in-spirit servant of God. But he ended up an old sermon-proof idolater, wallowing in sexual lust and perversion.

I want to warn you. Up to now, most readers of this message have been able to sit back and say, "Thank God, I'm not sermon-proof! I'm not like Saul. I'm not like those two-faced children of Israel. I'm not a Judas!" But we are going to see that the most incredible examples of being sermon-proof are not street people, not backsliders, not really the Saul or Judas types at all. Rather, they are the ones, like Solomon, who started out right, but are getting hard and idolatrous and don't recognize it. Let me show you how once-holy Christians - the most discerning, wise, and blessed - can become sermon-proof and very hard.

Before we look at the life and downfall of King Solomon, let me show some of the commandments of the Lord concerning Israel and her king. There were three clear, distinct commandments known by all Israel - so clear a child could understand them. *"But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt... Ye shall henceforth return no more that way."* (DEUT 17:16). *"Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away (no harem, no strange wives)..."* (DEUT 17:17). *"...neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold."* (DEUT 17:17). Moses had warned: *"For the LORD... is a jealous God: Lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they go a whoring after their gods... And thou take of their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a whoring after their gods, and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods."* (EX 34:14-16).

Solomon Loved the Lord, But He Practiced Things Contrary to the Word of God.

Solomon had pockets of disobedience in his life. *"And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father: only (with this exception) he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places."* (1.KIN 3:3). Solomon truly loved the Lord. He had a great respect for God's house and he was morally clean -

but - with exceptions! We will see these exceptions all through Solomon's life. It is possible to really love the Lord, have a heart for God, spend time and money in His work, put God first, and be dedicated to Him - and still hold on to areas of disobedience to the clear Word of God.

With all his heart Solomon wanted divine wisdom and discernment to know between right and wrong. God appeared to him in a dream and said, *"Ask what I shall give thee."* (1.KIN 3:5). Solomon was given *"...an understanding heart to... discern between good and bad..."* (1.KIN 3:9). But God added this warning: *"...if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days."* (1.KIN 3:14). Solomon heard a powerful sermon from God Himself! He had the sermons of his father David ringing in his ears. **He had the example of his father's sin and consequent judgment. He had the Law and the judges, including Deborah, Samuel, and the prophet Nathan.** David warned, *"And keep the charge of the LORD thy God... to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses..."* (1.KIN 2:3).

Solomon knew the Word. As a result of all God revealed to him, he wrote 1,005 songs and 3,000 Proverbs! In his Proverbs, he warned against the evil power of strange women: *"Her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell."* (PROV 5:4-5). Oh, how he knew the Word! How good he was at preaching it to others. World leaders came to consult with him. But as wise, discerning, and blessed as he was by God, he still clung to areas of disobedience in his life.

Let's look at these pockets of disobedience to God's Holy Word, the areas he totally ignored regarding the Lord's commandments. Do you remember the three specific commandments to all kings of Israel? Solomon broke all three! Remember David's warning to heed Moses? "No horses out of Egypt"? But, *"Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt..."* (1.KIN 10:28). Solomon opened up the door of free trade with Egypt, contrary to the Lord's

explicit commandment. Again, the commandment was: *"He shall not... cause people to return to Egypt, ye shall henceforth return no more that way..."* Egypt is the world and all it stands for! When God calls for separation from all your past, he means it! There are no exceptions.

"Do not accumulate or hoard gold and silver"? But, *"All king Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold... For the king had at sea a navy... bringing gold, and silver..."* (1.KIN 10:21-22). God gave him wealth to test him: Would he use it to drown himself in luxury or would he use it to God's glory and for the people? Here is the clue to what Solomon did and to where his riches went: *"He was SEVEN YEARS in building it (the Lord's temple). But Solomon was building his own house THIRTEEN YEARS..."* (1.KIN 6:38-7:1). How much are we spending on ourselves, compared to what God gets?

"Neither shall he multiply wives to himself..."? "But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh... And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart." (1.KIN 11:1-3). He tried to outdo all the kings of the earth, in having the biggest harem. *"...Solomon clave unto these in love."* (1.KIN 11:2). He cherished them in lust! He was loving God, but clinging to his harem.

All of Solomon's Compromise Can Be Traced to One Fatal Flaw: He Refused to Close the Door on Egypt!

"Solomon made affinity (alliance) with Pharaoh king of Egypt..." (1.KIN 3:1). God's sermon to Solomon was: "You can become everything I want you to be and enjoy my blessings and fulfil your call in life without a single compromise with the world, the flesh, or the devil." God had promised He would establish Solomon's kingdom alone! And so it happened! *"And king Solomon shall be blessed... And the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon."* (1.KIN 2:45-46). Up to this point Solomon had not compromised. God was in total control and the king was being blessed and established by simply loving and trusting the Lord. As yet

there were still no horses from Egypt, no harem, no wallowing in luxury! But Solomon did not know that a serpent was lurking in his heart! With his mouth he was saying to God: "All I want is You Lord - I don't want riches, fame, or acceptance. Glory and reputation mean nothing to me. I just want to know what is right and wrong and how best to serve You and those around me."

But God knew what was in Solomon's heart - because when he appeared to him the second time, He gave him his solemn warning: *"If ye shall at all turn from following me, ye or your children, and will not keep my commandments and my statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods, and worship them: Then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them; and this house... will I cast out of my sight..."* (1.KIN 9:2-7). An old, wise preacher once wrote: "Men are rotting inwardly today, and the pillars of their character crumbling to decay, from the very same influences that brought down Solomon."

Solomon took a single step of disobedience which eventually would turn him into a hardened, sermon-proof, lust-driven man. He considered it a small indiscretion in that he took to wife the daughter of Pharaoh. To him it was just a marriage of convenience. He *"took Pharaoh's daughter and brought her into the city of David..."* (1.KIN 3:1). I am amused by the theologians who try to justify this marriage. One said, "Only the Canaanite women were forbidden." Another even said, "She represents the gentiles being brought into the covenant. She is a picture of God's grace to the heathen." Nonsense! She was an idol-loving heathen from Egypt. If Solomon was forbidden to bring a horse out of Egypt, how could he bring a heathen wife? She was the strange woman Solomon warned against in his Proverbs, the woman whose gate led to hell! The daughter of Pharaoh represents the single cord that still holds us to something of his world, a single, besetting sin that is not surrendered - that single compromise that always seems justified!

Picture this heathen queen arriving in Zion: This is Israel's holy ground - and here comes her huge retinue of heathen hairdressers, maids,

housekeepers, even her own priests! In her baggage she carries her gods, her images, her rituals, her enchantments. By Egyptian standards Jerusalem was a frontier town, and Israel just an emerging nation. I can see her looking around, thinking, "This ought to be easy - I know right where I want my temple built!" Were any of the Lord's priests feeling convicted? Were they saying to one another, "Moses forbade this very thing! We've been commanded not to touch anything out of Egypt. And now, of all things, marriage to Pharaoh's daughter! We will be forever in league with Egypt!" Did Solomon have even a tinge of conviction as he received this Egyptian queen into the Holy City? Didn't he know that what Pharaoh's army couldn't do, this seductress would do? Moses had commanded all ties to Egypt be forever severed!

I'm sure Solomon could give many excuses why he had to go through with this idolatrous marriage. They would sound like this: "Yes, I know what God's Word says. Yes, I've heard all Moses' sermons about mixture with the world. But in no way will this affect my love for God. There are certain things that go with my job. This won't hinder my work and dedication to the house of God. I'm on my guard - I'm in control! It's strictly business!" These are the same old excuses used today for every compromise and for every tie to this world. It is used by those who love God and flirt with the world. They say, "Yes, I know what the Bible says about separation and not touching the unclean thing. Yes I've heard all your sermons about TV, theater, separation. But - it goes with my job! I don't see it your way. God hasn't shown that to me! I don't see any conflict: I love the Lord - I'm called by God - besides, I've got it all under control. The Lord knows I mean to do well, that I really love Him!" They hear but they won't obey. When the Word comes against their policy, their way of thinking - they disobey and go on as if God winks at it all!

Solomon's first and single compromise opened the door to a flood of compromises: horses from Egypt, a harem, gold and luxury! A man of God wrote: "It is fatal delusion that there is a mysterious gift of God called grace, which allows a man to sleep on the lap of some

Delilah, without being robbed of his strength - a magic power that keeps a man in the right even against his own deliberate choice."

Solomon Became a "Half-And-Half" Believer!

Solomon compartmentalized his life: half for God - half for his pleasures. The Word of God halfway convicted him. He experienced halfway sorrow, halfway repentance - with halfway changes! I don't know what happened, but Solomon got halfway convicted about this heathen woman living in the holy place near the ark. So he decided to move her out - halfway across town! *"Solomon brought up the daughter of Pharaoh out of the city of David unto the house that he had build for her: for he said, My wife shall not dwell in the house of David... because the places are holy, whereunto the ark of the LORD hath come..."* (2.CHR 8:11). A true repentance would have cost too much! The justification for actions contrary to God's commandments are always: "I can't do that! I gave my word. I can't make a total break. That would be too humiliating - I'm too far into it."

The truth was that Solomon didn't want to give her up! He knew in his heart it was all wrong. It was nagging him on the inside. I can hear him saying, "Yes I've got to do something about this. I'm going to show the Lord I want to do the right thing." Does he ship her back to Egypt? Does he cry out to God, "I've sinned and made excuses. I hear Your Word and will obey! Your Word is clear, no matter what the cost, no matter the humiliation, no matter the consequences - I will obey. Let the whole world call me a fool, I'll obey God."? No! He builds her a house on the wall, yet still in the Holy City. Solomon went to God's house to offer sacrifices, then crossed town to be with the Queen of Egypt! Two neat compartments: a holy one and an evil one. No doubt he thought this was separation.

Our churches today are filled with half-and-half Christians - halfway convicted by the Word - halfway repentant - making halfway changes in their lives. There is so little of "trembling at the Word." I hear so many who are still living in blatant sin, still doing the same old thing. They say: "God knows I

mean to do well. He sees my heart. I really love the Lord. I've made some changes and I'm doing better." It's not enough to mean well. We must do it! So few want to cut off the past, to cut off all ties from the world. They want to slowly withdraw and so take half-measures. Jesus said if your eye offends you, cut it out! You don't put a patch on it. My former business manager was thirty-three years old when he developed cancer of the eye. He was treated with laser surgery and told it was all gone. But the whole eye should have been removed. The cancer spread and he died three months later. The doctor was shocked, saying, "I thought I got it all out!"

Solomon had built the temple and had finished all his building projects. But he was still living in disobedience in these areas, seeing no danger in it. Yet God is so merciful that He continued answering his prayers. Solomon was still going up three times a year to offer sacrifices and was joyful and glad in the presence of the Lord. I believe this is the most dangerous position a Christian can be in: A strange love has his heart, yet he loves his Lord. His prayers are still getting through and there is joy and gladness. There remain, however, areas of disobedience where the Word is not the absolute authority - while the believer is blind to the deterioration taking place. Under all the blessings is a worm of lust at work, weakening the character and will.

God again appears to Solomon with a strong sermon, a powerful Word: "Walk in integrity. Obey My Word. If not, I'll cut you off." All the while, Solomon was slipping away from God, growing hard and insensitive to the Word, blinded by the blessings and mercies of God. How many Christians get blessed, feel God's Spirit, get happy in Him, and say, "Everything's all right because God is blessing me"?

Disobedience to God's Word Will Eventually End Up in a Total Breakdown of Morals and Christian Character

Begin with a single act of blatant disobedience to a clear word from God - add to that a half-hearted conviction for sin, a half-hearted repentance - and you will end up like Solomon: an absolute degen-

erate! *"For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God... For Solomon went after Ashtoreth... and the abomination of the Ammonites. And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD... And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel..."* (1.KIN 11:4-9). These words send chills up my spine!

Solomon was now gospel-hardened - sermon-proof! The Word of God had no impact on him whatsoever. He was so pathetic! Look at him: Where once he built a house for one strange woman, there now stood a huge harem. The daughter of Pharaoh has become but one of 1,000 lovers! Solomon himself is now old and haggard, while God is silent and angry with him. He no longer prays to God and has no joy left. His heart is sick as he writes pitiful prose about the vanity and uselessness of life. Jerusalem has become polluted with heathen temples, built with high taxes. The king drinks heavily, as he is bored by all his gorgeous houses and gardens. He's now bitter with his heart full of idolatry. The days of touching God are but faint memories. All he can say now is: "All is vanity - it's all for nothing!"

Is this the same man who once prayed so eloquently at the temple dedication: *"What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man... which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house: Then hear thou in heaven... and forgive... to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest... That they may fear thee all the days that they live in the land which thou gavest unto our fathers."* (1.KIN 8:38-40).

So go ahead - cling to your idols! Justify your areas of disobedience and excuse your little sins! One day it will break out into a raging, uncontrollable fire of immorality and apostasy. It was brought to my attention recently that an old pastor acquaintance (who pastored one of the largest Pentecostal churches in America) - now an old, retired man - had been caught making obscene phone calls! He had been reduced to a corrupt, sad, dirty-minded old man!

By Contrast, Moses Truly Left Egypt Behind

There is another side to all of this, however. There was another man who gave up everything to follow his Lord. Whereas Solomon married Pharaoh's daughter, Moses fled from her! *"By faith Moses... refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt... By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible."* (HEB 11:24-27).

Moses could have had all the gold and silver, the horses, the harem, all the luxuries and pleasures of materialistic Egypt! He was a prince in Egypt, from the royal court of Pharaoh. But, he *"refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter."* And that decision cost him everything. But he did not run out of fear, *"not fearing the wrath of the king."* He considered the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures in Egypt, preferring to suffer with God's people. Moses had his eyes on Jesus his Lord and not on the things of this world.

Does it pay to obey? Does it pay to heed God's message? Compare these two men of the Bible: Solomon, looking over his life, said, *"Whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them. I withheld not my heart from any joy... Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought... and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun."* (ECC 2:10-11). He goes on to say: *"Therefore I hated life... (my) heart taketh not rest in the night... I praised the dead... more than the living... riches kept to (my own) hurt... I dug a pit and fell in it... My wisdom was grief to me... (my) appetite is not filled... I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her: but the sinner shall be taken by her..."* (See ECCL 2-7).

But look at Moses: At 120 years of age, his eyes were ablaze - all his physical forces were at full strength when God called him home. God personally took the body of Moses.

Here is God's testimonial left to mankind concerning Moses: "*And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, in all the*

signs and the wonders, which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh..." (DEUT 34:10-11).

It pays to obey!

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