

Obstinacy

by Wayne Goff

“Obstinacy: Stubbornly refusing to change one’s opinion or chosen course of action, despite attempts to persuade one to do so” [*Oxford American Dictionaries*].

While studying the prophetic book of Isaiah, I came across God telling Israel that one of the reasons why He prophesied and fulfilled His prophecies was because He knew they would be stubborn and obstinate in their hearts. Therefore, God proved Himself and His Word to be right while their idols were wrong, false and fraudulent.

*“I have declared the former things from the beginning; they went forth from My mouth, and I caused them to hear it. Suddenly I did them, and they came to pass. Because I knew that you were **obstinate**, and your neck was an **iron sinew**, and your **brow bronze**, even from the beginning I have declared it to you; before it came to pass I proclaimed it to you, lest you should say, ‘My idol has done them, and my carved image and my molded image have commanded them.’”*

God removed every excuse from the idolater’s mind by proving beyond the shadow of a doubt that God and His Word are right and everything contrary to them is wrong. However, this did not resolve the issue. The issue was their **stubborn heart**. But God cannot take away the stubborn heart, just the excuses one might possess for having one!

Gospel preachers today understand this point all too well. You can prepare a lesson on a particular subject, do your research, prove your points repeatedly and then draw a solid conclusion that is inescapable. Then you preach that lesson to the congregation, your audience. Will everyone listen to the sermon? Will everyone make a personal application to the truth? Will everyone thank you for your efforts and thank God in prayer for the lesson learned? Unfortunately, not at all.

In fact, we all know well the saying that if someone doesn’t like the message, then they should shoot the messenger. How many preachers have been *blamed* for preaching the truth? For example, someone gets mad at the preacher’s lesson, and so they say that the preacher is overly zealous, or out of touch, or a little too strict -- rather than confess that God is behind the teaching, and that the truth has been preached, and therefore they need to change.

Let’s remember that Jesus Christ was crucified for what he taught. *“...But you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you”* (Jn. 8:37).

Don’t forget that Stephen became the first Christian martyr for the sermon he preached in Acts 7. Stephen rightly accused the Jewish people for having persecuted and/or killed every prophet God sent to them! *“Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it”* (vv. 52-53). Then right on cue this angry mob took Stephen and stoned him to death! Well, didn’t that prove the preacher to be right? Stephen had already said to them: *“You **stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears!** You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you”* (v. 51). And there lies the rub.

I remember one time preaching to a group of people sitting on the back pews of the auditorium. I warned them that the word *“backsliders”* describes those who have fallen away. Rather than consider what I said, and maybe move a pew or two toward the front, the folks got angry and left! Well, didn’t that prove my point? Do you ever read in the Bible of *“front-sliders”*? But it’s easier to blame the messenger than to **change**, I suppose.

THE LESSON FOR US?

So what is the lesson to be learned here? God knows our hearts and understands our weaknesses. He appeals to us by the most powerful force among us: persuasive preaching. If that will not change your mind, soften your heart, and change your life, then nothing will.

Are you willing to listen, to learn, and to change if necessary?