

LETTER FROM CARTER CONLON

Dear Friend,

It is difficult to be a genuine follower of biblical truth. It could be said that those who have sought heaven outside the Word of God have cheated themselves out of their own salvation. No amount of homemade religion will ever suffice for simple obedience to what Jesus has spoken.

Scripture speaks of the peril to those who walk the foolish path of self-deception. As genuine followers of Jesus, we may endure the scorn of an increasingly godless society. However, I believe that those of us who live a sincere Christian life in this generation will know and experience an ever-increasing measure of the peace and keeping power of God.

I hope the accompanying message is a source of encouragement and strength. Remember that Jesus loves you and this truth comes to you today for your good.

Yours, in Christ,



Carter Conlon
Senior Pastor

WE CAN'T ESCAPE THE HARD TRUTHS

by Carter Conlon

In John 6:53, Jesus said to His disciples, "Unless you eat of my flesh and drink of my blood you have no life in you"(paraphrase). Although they had experienced His power and miracles, many of them were offended and said, "This is a hard saying, who can hear this?" The Scripture says that they turned back and walked with Him no more.

The disciples who resisted the truth ran from it, but ultimately they could not escape it. Every one of them would die and eventually appear before God, only to find that Jesus meant what He said. It did not matter how often they went to the synagogue or how much they prayed. Without the life of Christ in them, they had no real life.

■ WHAT ABOUT MERCY?

The early church was in its infancy, moving together as one body with one purpose in the earth. The Scripture says that as they were together praying, the place was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost (see Acts 2). They were speaking the Word of God with boldness. People were selling their possessions and bringing the money for the apostles to distribute so that no one would be lacking. Those were exciting times!

Then we come to Acts 5:1-11 and the story of Ananias and Sapphira: "But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of

the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.

It is very dangerous to pretend to be fully obeying the Word of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.

Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet

of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.”

As a young Christian, I used to be somewhat perplexed by the severity of the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira. After all, hadn't Peter done worse? They lied about the price of the land, but Peter had lied about knowing Jesus, which seems to be a much more severe offense. Peter had received forgiveness, and doesn't the Scripture say that those who have received mercy should be merciful?

Yet here is Peter pronouncing their sentence of death, which in the natural doesn't make sense. We know that God is just and His judgments are right, so there must be something dangerous here for the individual believer and the church as a whole, a great truth which you and I need to understand today.

When we begin to make excuses for what we know is wrong, we eventually get to the place where we think we can deceive God.

■ PRETENDING TO BE WITH THE PROGRAM

I believe the key to understanding Acts 5 is this: Ananias and Sapphira were pretending to be with the program when, in fact, they were not. It is very dangerous to pretend to be fully

obeying the Word of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit. I believe Peter received mercy for his actions because he was young in the Lord, and he acted out of fear. It was a momentary thing; he did not understand and was not yet formed in the power, strength and truth of God. Peter was not moving with the church as a body as Ananias and Sapphira were.

In contrast, Ananias and Sapphira were not afraid—their was calculated deception. They deliberately deceived others, and they thought they could deceive God. When we begin to make excuses for what we know is wrong, we eventually get to the place where we think we can deceive God. We mistakenly believe that our deception does not matter to God, since we are part of the New Covenant. We believe that an incredible blanket of grace and mercy covers everything—and that is true—but it doesn't apply to the willful sinner. God was saying at that time, “Before this church really gets going, I have to set the record straight—there is still a judgment of death on willful deception.”

The irony is that Ananias and Sapphira could have chosen not to sell their land and still been part of the church. Or they could have said, “Here is half,” and it would have been fine. The real issue was that they pretended to be something they were not.

■ WEAKNESS IN THE CAMP

Pretending to be righteous brings into the church the same weakness that Achan brought into the camp of Israel, a hard truth recounted in Joshua, chapter 7. As Joshua was leading the Israelites in to possess the Promised Land, he gave them specific instructions. “*And ye, in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it*” (Joshua 6:18). In other words, do not embrace the fallen value system of the wicked; do not think it is going

to offer you any security. We would be wise to heed these words today. This system offered no security to those outside the kingdom of God.

Today many “Achans” are standing in pulpits, giving a wrong value system to the people of God while building up each man’s individual image.

After a phenomenal victory over Jericho, Joshua led the Israelites forward to a small town called Ai. The scouting party sent by Joshua reported back that the men of Ai were few, so Joshua sent in only a few thousand men to attack the town. The Israelites suffered a resounding defeat at the hands of the small, defenseless city.

The defeat was so severe that Joshua fell on his face and cried to the Lord, “We would have been content to dwell on the other side of Jordan!” These were words that Joshua probably never imagined he would say, for they were the very sort that caused the people to live for forty years in the wilderness. But God said, “Joshua, get up off the ground, there is an accursed thing in the camp and it has brought this weakness that you see” (Joshua 7:10, 13 paraphrase).

In order to find out what the “accursed thing in the camp” was, they drew lots. This system in the Old Testament was divinely inspired by God, and the lot fell to a man named Achan. Joshua said to Achan, “*Now Joshua said to Achan, ‘My son, I beg you, give*

glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me.'

And Achan answered Joshua and said, 'Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and this is what I have done: When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it'' (Joshua 7:19–21, NKJV).

■ THE WRONG FOCUS

You have to wonder what was in Achan's heart. As in Acts, chapter 5, the Scripture in Joshua, chapter 7 talks about a time of power and supernatural provision. Achan had to have known that the God who gave them victory over Jericho would provide for them. Yet we can picture Achan as he clambered with the rest of the army into the ruins of a society that had lived apart from God and trusted in gold and silver. Suddenly his eye falls on a garment from Babylon, the likes of which were highly sought after in the commercial trade of that day. These garments often had golden threads interwoven in them, signifying the perishing society's view of success and prosperity. The threads formed images of men and cattle, with the cattle representing prosperity. When Achan saw the garment, he coveted it, and said, "I want this for my life. I am not content to be just a little part of a larger body moving into the Promised Land. I want to be successful—I want to be noticed!"

Jesus said, "*The light of the body is the eye...if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness*" (Matthew 6:22–23). The moment we look on something that God forbids, a flood of darkness comes along with it. Once Achan saw that garment, he also saw a wedge of gold only half a step away. Can you imagine trading the power

of God for a pound of gold? Once we have a wrong view of success, we also will apply a wrong measure of how to achieve it. We are living in a world where everyone wants to stand out; everyone wants to be the big player. But in order to get there, we think we need a little more than everyone else.

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Along with the wedge of gold, Achan saw about five pounds of silver coins. Note that he buried the silver deeper than the gold and the garment. In the silver coins, Achan saw something that he thought would bring him success and happiness, but he did not understand that the silver was a betrayal of God Himself. Interestingly, Judas sold out the Son of God for a handful of silver very close to the same measure as Achan found.

Achan failed to see that he was selling out the glory of God and in so doing, bringing weakness into the camp of Jesus Christ. Likewise, we are in a position of theological and practical weakness in our generation. Today many "Achans" are standing in pulpits, giving a wrong value system to the people of God while building up each man's individual image. Once this is done, there is an immediate movement to gold—money must be involved.

Achan's focus was on himself, his own security, and his own plans. He

forgot he was only a small part of something much bigger than himself. This wrong focus led Achan and his whole house to ruin—sadly, he did not go alone. His sons, his daughters, his wife, and even his cattle all went into darkness with him. Likewise, when you as a Christian begin to focus on yourself, you are opening the door to destruction in your own home. Look away from your own needs and seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; God says that He will add them to you.

■ A DOOR OF HOPE

The writer of Hebrews says, "*But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*" (Hebrews 3:13).

In the Lord there is always hope. The Lord says, "*...I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her*" (Hosea 2:14). He is talking about a bride who had given herself to other lovers. She was adorned with things that were not the righteousness of Christ—garments and jewelry that were given to her through these other pursuits. And in the Valley of Achor, which is where Achan and his family were put to death, the Lord said that He would speak comfortably to her.

Similarly, we are all going into the wilderness. Everything that this society has known and trusted in is about to perish; it is all going to crumble. But those who have an honest relationship with Christ will stand! He is going to open "*...a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt*" (Hosea 2:15).

God is saying, "I will not let you go, because you are My church, My beloved Bride. I am going to bring you into a place of trouble where I will strip you of all garments, adornments, gold, and silver—the

entire value system of a perishing society. In that place of trouble I will open a door, and bring you through it with a song in your heart and My name on your lips. You will no longer call Me Master, which implies restrictions on behavior and things given. You will call Me Ishi, which means husband. You will love Me with all your heart, and walk with Me in the coming days.”

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■ DON'T WAIT TOO LONG

Beloved, this is not the time to be running from the hard truths; instead, it is time to stand in the truth of God. The hour is late, the rains are coming. I feel almost like Noah just before the rain started. If you are in the wrong place, get out of there! If you are doing wrong things, trust God for the power to stop. Don't be found where you shouldn't be; don't be doing what you shouldn't be doing. Don't let your value system be intermingled with the system of this world. Put it all away, for it's time to get right with God.

Achan was too late. Joshua said, *“...My son, I beg you, give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession to Him, and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me”* (Joshua 7:19, NKJV).

Perhaps if he had come forward in the beginning, he would have escaped the judgment. But, instead, he had to be singled out from among three million people before he finally came clean.

Imagine standing before the throne of God one day and hearing Him say to you personally, “Tell me, son, what did you do to have your name taken from My lips? I gave you every opportunity for freedom, every chance to walk in truth. Everything was there—the power, the covering, the cleansing, the anointing. Tell me, what did you do?” What fearsome words on that day! As for Achan, I think at that point he knew that mercy was past. He had waited too long.

Beloved, don't wait too long. We live in one of the most perilous times in history. If ever there was a time to fully embrace the heart and will of God, it is now! If you are in a place where you should not be, do not play games with God. Get right with Him. The covenant is for honest and sincere people. God reveals hard truths and brings us into an awareness that we are in trouble because He dearly loves us. He is saying to us, “Once you and I are in agreement about these things, I will open the door before you, and you will walk through that door with a song. You are going to love Me and know how much I love you. All you need to do is choose to walk through that door of hope, no matter how fearful it may seem. Trust that I will give you the strength, and you will never have to look to your own resources again. It will be My power that sustains you.” Praise God!

Carter Conlon
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CARTER CONLON

Carter Conlon is senior pastor of Times Square Church, where he has been on the pastoral staff since 1994.

TIMES SQUARE CHURCH

Times Square Church was founded in 1987 by Pastor David Wilkerson, author of “The Cross and the Switchblade.” It is an interdenominational church located in the heart of New York City.

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WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Sunday	10:00AM	3:00PM	6:00PM
Tuesday	7:00PM	Church Service	
Thursday	7:00PM	Prayer Meeting	
Friday	7:00PM	Church Service	

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