

Woodroof Wept

By Eric Hall

One cannot help feeling sorry for James Woodroof. The distressing experience he describes on pages 48-49 of his book, *The Church in Transition*, was almost more than he could endure. Apparently he had the misfortune of watching a "well-intentioned but ill-equipped" member of the Lord's church read several passages from the King James version of the Bible on the Phil Donahue show. Needless to say, Phil and James were quite embarrassed. Indeed, as Woodroof describes in his book, he actually wept as God's Word was read because such quotations from an "out-of-date" translation may have left the impression with Phil's audience that the church of Christ is unprepared for the times in which we are living. How sad! Perhaps if this "ill-equipped" Christian had left his Bible at home, Woodroof's throes of despair would have been avoided. One can only imagine the fit of weeping that would have ensued had Woodroof witnessed Jesus' encounter with Satan in the wilderness. There, too, Scripture was quoted to counter the powers of darkness.

Instead of weeping as God's Word was read on national television, Woodroof might have recalled or read Isaiah 55:10-11:

For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

God's Word is powerful. His people do not weep when it is read; they rejoice. If Jesus quoted Scripture to repel Satan, then it is certainly permissible to quote God's Word in response to a question on the Phil Donahue show. Instead of rejoicing, however, Woodroof wept. He was not alone. Undoubtedly Satan also wept since both he and Donahue had just been skewered by the sword of Truth.

Woodroof's weeping and ranting, however, are not entirely worthless. Indeed, his tirade reminds us how easy it is to sit safely on the sideline and hurl abuse at

those actively engaged on the field of battle. In the 20th chapter of Deuteronomy, God told his people how to prepare for war. The laws he gave for physical battle may be applied to our spiritual battle as well. Consider, for example, the eighth verse:

"What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart."

In short, cowardice is contagious. We don't need cowards on the battlefield. The spiritual coward has always been the curse of the church. So many of us today talk a good fight but are unwilling to engage the enemy. If Jesus had fought the way we often do, then we would remain dead in our sins and without hope. Instead, Jesus fought our battle and continued to fight even after we deserted him and fled. He faced the angry crowd alone. He suffered the death that we deserve. Unlike our worldly leaders, he does not send his people to fight a war that he avoids. He is there with us and faces every danger by our side. His soldiers are anything but ill-equipped! They are equipped with the sword of the Spirit. Indeed, they are equipped with the whole armor of God.

What then does it say about us if we are unwilling to stand up for him in even the simplest matters? What does it say about us if we remain silent while the world takes his name in vain and ridicules his loving sacrifice? What does it say about us if we remain idle while false teachers lead vast numbers of his once-loyal forces away into darkness? What does it say about us if for the sake of our own comfort and convenience, we quietly continue to support congregations whose leaders are corrupt and whose teachers are false? Our Lord and Savior deserves better than that. Our Lord and Savior demands better than that. He commands us to "Come out from among them, and be ye separate." He has no need for double agents. His soldiers must be loyal and true.

Those who will not fight the good fight of faith should leave the battlefield lest their cowardice spread and infect others. Jesus has no desire for lukewarm

followers. One who is unwilling to take up his own cross is not worthy to bear the name of the one who died on that cross. If we fight on every front except those unpopular or those not “politically correct,” we are no better than traitors. Martin Luther observed:

If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battle front besides, is merely flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.

But here we have come full circle back to the weeping Woodroof. It is we who should weep. We weep for congregations led by men who do not know, or worse, do not care to know the Word of God. We weep for all who have placed their faith and trust in the wisdom of men. We weep for all who seek the praise of men instead of the praise of God. We weep for all who have betrayed and denied our Lord through cowardly inaction and silence. We weep for all enemies of the cross of Christ whose god is their belly, who glory in their shame, and who set their minds on earthly things.

And yet we also rejoice. We rejoice that amid all of the confusion and division, the one true church of Jesus Christ continues to worship and serve him as it has from its beginning. We rejoice that we have been given the living and active Word of God with which to fight the rulers of the darkness of this world. We rejoice when men speak evil of us for his sake. For in the midst of a vast multitude of “Christians,” there are some for whom the way is narrow, some who are hated by all, some who have been put out of the “synagogues,” and some whose murder would be regarded as a service to God. That is, among those who are called Christians there are a few who actually follow Christ and experience the persecution he told his followers to expect. For these we rejoice.

There are no cowardly Christians. Courage is a requirement for the job. As Bonhoeffer reminds us, when Christ calls a man, he bids him to come and die. Unless we take up our cross and follow him to death, we cannot one day lay aside that cross and follow him to life.

(Editor's note: Bravo! — Dobbs.)

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