

JOHN HUS: THE PRE-REFORMER (3)

During his exile in Bohemia, Hus wrote the following:

"What fear shall part us from God, or what death? What shall we lose if for His sake we forfeit wealth, friends, the world's honors and our poor life? It is better to die well than to live badly. We dare not sin to avoid the punishment of death. To end in grace the present life is to be banished from misery. Truth is the last conqueror. He wins who is slain, for no adversity 'hurts him if no iniquity has dominion over him'"

It is no wonder that historians refer to Wyclif and Hus as "pre-reformers." Luther was not directly influenced by Hus, and was unaware of his work when he began his own reform movement. But, as he learned of Hus he grew to admire him. Luther condemned the burning of Hus and wrote of him, *"If such a man is to be regarded as a heretic, then no person under the sun can be looked upon as a true Christian."* In the Prague library, there is a *hymn* to Hus' memory, dating from 1572, with three medallions pictured. On the first medallion is a picture of Wyclif striking sparks against a stone. The second shows Hus kindling fire from the sparks. And the third depicts Luther holding aloft a flaming torch.

Lessons Learned: -- Hus' example of moral integrity contrasted sharply with the immoral and corrupt clergy of his day. There is no less need for such integrity among God's people today! We live in a morally deteriorating culture. May the Lord give us the strength to withstand the temptations and seductions that so easily beset us!

John Wyclif was a maverick that rejected traditional doctrines — the kind of preacher many elders and preachers warn their assemblies not to hear. Yet, Hus ignored Wyclif's poor reputation with the 'church,' exhibited a mind open to honest inquiry, and demonstrated the courage to repeat the truths he learned regardless of the consequences. O, that such courage and strength of faith would be instilled in our hearts today!

It requires a genuine faith and a courageous will to maintain the independent spirit of a Jan Hus — to be so devoted to the Word of God that we stand with it, knowing that this may result in being ostracized from many of one's own brethren and friends. The fear of being shouted at from pulpits, written up in journals, and put on "trial" as a victim of populist politicking and paranoid combat is real.

Hus also exhibited the humility to subject his will to the Will of God, even if his most cherished beliefs were proven wrong. So often pride dominates us and keeps us from changing our minds once we've defended a position. Such pride will never result in the discovery of truth!

There are lessons to be learned from the reaction of the Catholic Church. In part, the unstable political and religious climate of the day was instrumental in bringing about the persecution and murder of Hus. Instability creates fear. When men, especially religious men, feel they are in danger of losing a hold over others — fear dominates. Attacks

against any who are deemed a threat are inevitable. Honest, humble, patient investigation is discarded.

When a group of preachers or brethren claim a "lock" on the truth, they become *reactionary* toward anything that differs from a long held practice. Such was the case with the Pharisees toward the Lord (Matt. 15; Mk. 7). The reliance on their own past interpretations hindered the search for and ability to see the truth of the Lord's instruction. This mentality is the seed of the Catholic error.

The Catholic error rests not only in particular erroneous practices, but also in the mentality toward their understanding of truth (*That we own the truth -- and should place our trust in one group's collective, general understanding of what is true*). Surely we must guard against this mentality today! There is always a danger that in our fear of change we will quash what is actually true! We may not look like the Catholic Church of Hus' day, but do we regard our beliefs as they regarded theirs? Might we be guilty of persecuting, with pen and pulpit, honorable brethren seeking the truth — who may, in the end, actually be right?

The Scriptures are the Word of God. They are *Godbreathed*. They are, and must always remain in our hearts, the final authority in life. One man's or one group's , understanding of the Scriptures is *not* the final authority. The Scriptures are infallible -- we are not. We are finite beings susceptible to error. I am convinced that Jan Hus would not seek others to follow his beliefs per se, but would encourage men to seek the Lord and His Word above all. It is not my place to judge Hus -- one way or another. He is in the hands of the Lord and He knows his heart. Yet, the spiritual distance he traveled in the environment of his day is impressive. Would we have had that courage? Do we have that courage? Can we say we have moved that much closer to the Lord in our spiritual walk? In Jan Hus' life of moral integrity and determined commitment to Scripture, unwavering in the face of death, we have before us an affecting example.

— Jeff Young in *Biblical Insights*,
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