

September 19, 2014

As part of the process of painting a word portrait of Jesus from the Gospels through the eyes and words of others, I assembled all the Scriptures related to words spoken by the religious establishment of priests, teachers, and Pharisees.

The weight of negativity, the judgemental, critical, sneering, fury overwhelmed me as I pondered their words. Their scheming plots, traps, constant snapping at every word He spoke culminated in anger finally expressed in their manipulating Pilate (who declared Him innocent) to murder Him left me exhausted.

How could He endure such constant attacks? I then thought of my own life experience and how quickly I complained and whined to God when others contradicted, challenged or criticised either me, my words or actions and I repented of my complaining. I then considered the times I had been the Pharisee who found fault with others teaching or actions and I repented of my criticism and judgementalism. As a friend of mine often states, "O Lord, let this not be in me."

I had attacked my attackers with hostile words, actions and thoughts, and I repented of fighting fire with fire rather than doing as Jesus did in forgiving them even when in agony on the cross.

I was reminded of the Scripture in Hebrews 12:3; "For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest you be wearied and faint in your minds" (KJV). The NIV replaces "contradiction" with "opposition" and the OMB uses the word "hostility."

When we are under continual scrutiny and criticism we grow weary. We want to quit, in fact 80 to 85% of all Bible School graduates do just that within five years. The church can become like a Piranha feeding ground showing no mercy. I read an article entitled *Confessions of a former Pastor* and as important as it is to recognise our shortcomings and weaknesses, he had "graduated" from pastoral ministry to teaching in a Bible School. Now he does not have to face the opposition and contradictions of the flock.

Jesus did not avoid the "contradictions," and for "the joy set before him" He endured the suffering so that He can now encourage us all.

So, rather than judging and criticising, let us encourage one another in the faith; and as Paul reminds us, "Be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love." There are numerous, encouraging Scriptures that exhort us to bless each other as well as admonish us to be generous with our forgiveness when we are faced with opposition, contradiction or hostility... PEACE

Shalom

*Ron Harris*

