

The Resurrection and Post-Resurrection Narratives

Chapter 6: The Jewish Authorities' Great Lie

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Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day (Mt. 28:11-15).

Of all the gospels only Matthew records the bribery of the Roman guards and the fabrication by the Sanhedrin of the story of the stolen body. This is to be expected because Matthew had set the foundation for this story in 27:62-66 where he described the Pharisees' request for a watch at the tomb. This request was based on their supposition that the disciples of Jesus were untrustworthy and may attempt to manipulate a resurrection scene. Therefore, in this pericope Matthew turns the tables: "and those who predicted deceit on the part of Jesus' disciples (27:63-64) finish up perpetrating deceit themselves in their futile attempt to thwart his triumph."¹

The story begins while the women disciples, who had encountered the angels in the empty tomb, were on their way to tell the apostles what they had seen. Matthew notes the irony of the timing that, while the faithful women were on their way to report the resurrection to the disciples in Jerusalem, some of the Roman guards were on their way to tell the Sanhedrin virtually the same news. This event is so astonishing that Matthew introduces it with a "lo" or "behold." It is as though he says, "*Look*, the very persons who had been given the assignment of making sure nothing of interest could take place are now the eyewitnesses who are on their way to the chief priests and elders who had employed them." What a marvelous sight indeed! As we study this record we need to examine: (1) the story of the soldiers; (2) the deceit of the Sanhedrin; and (3) the consequences of the evil cover-up.

The Soldiers' Report

Matthew notes that "some," not all the Roman guards came into the city to speak to the chief priests. The events of early Sunday morning had scattered the guards and some of these guards decided to tell the Jewish authorities what had happened. The other guards who did not go to the chief priests may have fled the area (i.e. they went A.W.O.L.). Or they were in collusion with the soldiers who went to the Sanhedrinists, but simply waited behind to await the outcome of the report.

In any case, this incident raises a question: Why did the Roman guards go to the chief priests and not to Pilate? The answer to this question lies in the fact that the resurrection of Jesus was a very serious problem for both these guards and the Jewish authorities. If the guards went to their superiors with the story of the angel, the earthquake and the resurrection, they probably

¹ R. T. France, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 409.

would not have been believed. They could even have been accused of sleeping on the job, or even more likely, accepting a bribe so the body could be removed. These guards according to Roman law could have received capital punishment for such a blatant dereliction of duty.

The guards, however, knew that the empty tomb was even more of a problem for the Sanhedrin who had condemned Jesus to death. If the truth of what really happened at the tomb was spread abroad by the soldiers, Christ would have been vindicated; the Jewish leadership revealed as thoroughly corrupt; and, the movement the Savior started greatly furthered. The chief priests did not want to lose their grip on the people or be known as the ones who murdered the Messiah. The soldiers took advantage of the chief priests' plight as a way of saving their own necks; if they could make some money in the process through a bribe, so much the better.

Regarding the soldiers' report, Matthew says they "reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened" (28:11). This means they relayed everything that they had seen or witnessed. Therefore, this report would have included the great earthquake; the angel who descended from heaven whose countenance was like lightning; and the angel rolling away the door and sitting upon it. The guards may have told the chief priests that they became so frightened at this event that they fainted. If they had investigated the tomb after they came to, they would have seen the grave clothes neatly lying where Jesus' body had been.

It is interesting that in God's providence the very men who had been sent to prevent the resurrection, or at least any event that would lead people to believe the resurrection took place, are the same men who report the resurrection to the chief priests. The chief priests who were the official leaders of the Sanhedrin and the great power brokers in Jerusalem were the first men to hear the news of the resurrection and they heard it from the most independent and unimpeachable witnesses possible. God's outworking of these events is astonishing and marvelous.

The Deceit of the Sanhedrin

When the chief priests heard the report from the soldiers, the effect it had on them was astounding. These men knew that Jesus had promised to rise from the dead on the third day. They had now been presented with unbiased, credible and multiple eyewitness accounts that a resurrection had indeed taken place. Yet, this earth-shattering news, which proves that Christ is the Son of God—the Messiah, is not embraced. Their response indicates that either: a) The Jewish leadership believed the report to be true but did not care; or, b) chose to interpret the soldiers' account as a delusion, exaggeration or hallucination. From the account one thing is clear. The Jewish authorities did not offer any complaints regarding the soldiers' performance. This clearly indicates that the Sanhedrinists did not believe that the body was stolen or that the guards were hallucinating. They accepted the guards' testimony at face value and therefore we can only conclude that they believed something miraculous occurred, but deliberately chose to cover it up. "The high priests have no excuse; they cannot say that they were misinformed or not fully informed.... Although their report contains the most astounding facts, the high priests do not for a moment attempt to question those facts. They think of only one thing: to nullify them."² "It might justly have been expected that they should now have believed in Christ, and repented their putting him to death; but they were obstinate in their infidelity, and therefore sealed up

² R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, 1162.

under it.”³ The guards’ report “brought fresh terror to the priests, and led to further sin on their part.”⁴

In response to the soldiers’ testimony the chief priests assembled or “took counsel together” (*sumboulion lambontes*) with the elders. “These two groups are frequently mentioned together in Matthew as representative of the Jewish authorities, especially in the passion narrative (cf. 16:21; 21:23; 26:3; 27:1, 3, 12, 20).”⁵ Matthew’s notation is important for it demonstrates that the cover-up of the resurrection of Christ was a deliberate, premeditated, carefully considered act of the Sanhedrin. “*Sumboulion lambanein* means more than ‘to take counsel;’ it includes the discussion and the final passing of a resolution. The expression is a Latinism, *consilium apere*, and is repeatedly used by Matthew (12:14; 22:15; 27:1, 7)... Thus by a formal resolution the ruling body of the Jewish nation determines on the rankest lie and the most flagrant bribery.”⁶ “Christ’s malicious enemies are of the devil’s nature; they will never cease to oppose him, though they know him to be the Son of God, as appears in these chief priests and elders.”⁷ The Jewish leadership’s corporate wickedness continued even after the greatest sign was set in plain sight before them.

These prominent Sanhedrinists decided to do three things to counteract the soldiers’ report of the resurrection. First, they decided to bribe the soldiers with a large sum of money in order to change their story. The expression “large money” (KJV) comes from Tyndale’s translation. The Greek expression “*arguria hikana*” means literally “money enough.” “The use of the plural for pieces of silver (*arguria*) is common. The papyri have many instances of *hikana* for considerable (from *hikano*, to reach to, attain to).”⁸ The chief priests and elders gave the soldiers a large sum of money or what was enough to strike a deal regarding the cover-up. The Sanhedrinists had brought out silver to cause Judas to betray Jesus and now they used silver to suppress the truth of the resurrection. The tithe money that was given by the people of God to be used for the service of Jehovah was used in the advancement of a great and bold lie.

By way of application there are three things noteworthy regarding this bribe.

(1) The actions of the Jewish leadership demonstrate that a refusal to repent of gross, scandalous sin will lead a person deeper into other sins as a consequence. Everyone knows that adulterers, thieves and damnable heretics must continually manufacture lies to cover their sins. The person who refuses to repent of sin becomes entangled in a web of iniquity and deceit. The lies and hypocrisy can never really come to an end until genuine repentance and restitution (where applicable) is made. When the Sanhedrin chose to cover up the evidence for the resurrection and replace it with a lie, they were choosing a life-long path of evil and treachery. “The more men be engaged in a sin they are the more forward to go on in it, and will spare no cost to gain their point, for these priests and elders gave but thirty pieces of silver to have Christ crucified, but here they *gave large money* to keep down the report of his resurrection.”⁹ “Thus it is evident that the reprobate, after having once given themselves up to a course of sinning, are continually entangled in new crimes; and this arises out of their desire to conceal their shame before men, while they give themselves no concern about the offense committed against God.”¹⁰

³ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 5:443.

⁴ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1987), 414.

⁵ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1995), 876.

⁶ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 1163.

⁷ David Dickson, *Matthew* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1647] 1981), 411.

⁸ Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1930] n. d.), 1:243.

⁹ David Dickson, *Matthew*, 411.

¹⁰ John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, 3:351.

(2) Let us be aware that money is often used as a motivation to commit evil. As Paul says, “Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Tim. 6:10).

For those who are evil and seek power and control over others money is the lubricant of the machinery of iniquity. The reason for this is simple, “There is no kind of evil to which the love of money may not lead men, when it once fairly takes hold of them.”¹¹ Money was one of the motivating factors in the chief priests’ decision to destroy Christ (cf. Mk. 11:15-18; Jn. 2:14-17). Money was used to incite men to betray Jesus and cover up the resurrection. “It caused the man with very many flocks and herds (in Nathan’s parable) to steal the poor man’s little ewe lamb, the rich young ruler to turn away from Christ, the rich fool (of Christ’s parable) to deceive himself into thinking all was well, the rich man (of another parable told by the Lord) to neglect poor Lazarus..., Ananias and Sapphira to tell lies, and the rich oppressors of James’ epistle (cf. Amos 2:6, 7) to exploit those who worked for them. None of these escaped punishment.”¹² The love of money is the chief reason for Sabbath desecration. It is the root of organized crime, the dealing of drugs, prostitution, the pornography industry and many other crimes. It is one of the chief causes of divorce, warfare, robbery, fraud and even murder.

(3) We should learn from this bribe not to support wicked church authorities with our tithes. Believers have a moral responsibility not to subsidize denominations and churches that are unorthodox in doctrine or behavior. When the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. went apostate in the early twentieth century, the denomination did far greater damage to families, the nation and the world because most conservatives and evangelicals did not secede and support the truth and the faithful ministers. Professing Christians who tolerate heresy and corruption and support it with their money share in the sins of their leaders. The Jews before the death and resurrection of Christ could do little in that the visible church was bound by one nation, one locality and one temple. But now that the church is multinational, believers must seek out and support the churches that are the most faithful to Scripture and the attainments of the Protestant Reformation.

Second, the Jewish leaders made up a false story that the soldiers were to spread. The Sanhedrinists said, “Tell them, His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.” There are a number of things to note regarding this lie.

(1) The falsehood to cover up the truth of the resurrection is absurd and self-contradictory. If the soldiers were sound asleep while the body was stolen, then how can they assert that our Lord’s disciples stole the body? If any of the guards were awake so as to identify who took the body, then why did they not wake the others and put a stop to this crime? Further, if they knew it was the disciples, then why did they not pursue them or arrest them? The theft of a corpse was a serious crime punishable by death in the Roman Empire. The Jewish leadership’s false account doesn’t make any sense at all.

(2) How could all the guards remain sound asleep while the apostles pried open the great stone? Once a large gravestone is placed into its special slot carved in the rock, it can only be removed with great difficulty. It would take a number of strong men with pry bars to move the

¹¹ Patrick Fairbairn, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles: I and II Timothy, Titus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, [1874] 1956), 239.

¹² William Hendriksen, *Thessalonians, Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 2:200-201.

stone aside. The idea that such a difficult, noisy, time-consuming project could occur without waking the guards is ridiculous. Only someone grasping after an excuse to disbelieve and reject the gospel would embrace such a thought.

(3) According to scholars the number of soldiers guarding the tomb would have been probably between twelve to sixteen men. These men would have been well armed and trained. The idea that the poor, weak, cowardly, dispirited disciples (who abandoned their Savior at Gethsemane and fled for their lives) would attempt what would amount to a virtual suicide mission to recover a dead body is ludicrous. If they were unwilling to take a stand and fight for Jesus when He was alive and well, why would they risk their lives for a corpse? What would they have to gain from perpetrating such a fraud? “Moreover, had they took it away by stealth, it is not reasonable to think that they would afterwards have reported such a lie every where, that he was risen from the dead, when they were sure to obtain nothing by it, but reproach, afflictions, persecutions and death.”¹³ Also, why would men who, at this point in time, neither understood nor believed in the resurrection of Christ fake a resurrection? It is obvious that the disciples did not have a reason, motive or means for stealing the body of Jesus. Further, if they did, why and how did they remove the grave clothes which were glued to the body by the mixture of aloes and myrrh?

(4) It is clear from both the narrow and broad context of Scripture that the chief priests and elders were fully convinced in their own minds that the resurrection of Jesus actually took place. They never for a moment doubted the guards’ story, upbraided them, or threatened to complain to Pilate about the guards’ dereliction of duty. Further, there is no indication that the guards’ behavior was ever investigated. Moreover, if the disciples were guilty of such a serious offense why were they allowed to walk about openly and preach on the day of Pentecost? If the story of the stolen body was true, they would have been rounded up and arrested immediately when they appeared in public.

Everyone who rejects the resurrection of Christ must attempt to explain away the empty tomb, the grave clothes, the eyewitnesses, the many post-resurrection appearances and the radical change in the apostles. The truth of the resurrection, however, has been so strongly proved by the testimony of Scripture and history that disproving the resurrection has always been a major problem for unbelievers. Therefore, unbelievers like the Jewish leadership can only rely on falsehood to deny it. The falsehoods of unbelief, however, are so obvious that true believers can only laugh at such arguments. It is only because fallen man’s hearts are depraved and blind that such stupid, inconsistent and arbitrary theories are embraced. The simple truth is that unregenerate man would rather embrace the ridiculous than bow the knee to the resurrected King. “Calumnies and lies devised by Christ’s adversaries are the special engine which they use against the gospel. When all other devices fail they make service to Satan by this means such as this lie here.”¹⁴

(5) The fact that these guards were willing to accept a bribe and lie about what occurred, even though they were eyewitnesses to an obviously miraculous event, proves that objective sensible proof of the gospel will not convince men unless it is attended by a powerful work of the Holy Spirit. In other words regeneration logically precedes saving faith. Men who are dead in their trespasses and sins cannot be convinced of the truth of the gospel by evidences and arguments alone. But, when the Holy Spirit raises dead hearts and opens blind eyes, the gospel is embraced. It is important that we understand that faith itself is a gift of God merited by Jesus’

¹³ John Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament* (Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, [1809] 1979), 1:374.

¹⁴ David Dickson, *Matthew*, 412.

work and applied by Christ Himself. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8).

Third, the bribe and the lie are accompanied by a promise of protection. “And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will appease him and make you secure” (28:14). In order for the chief priests and elders to close their deal with the soldiers, they offered to smooth things over with the guards’ superiors. This part of the deal was important for sooner or later this false story would be reported back to Pilate, their supreme commanding officer (cf. Mt. 27:65). If the governor was not somehow appeased these guards could be in serious trouble. They could be imprisoned or even executed for dereliction of duty. The Sanhedrinists’ promise contains two elements.

(1) The Jewish leaders promise to appease or persuade Pilate that everything regarding this matter was satisfactory. What this specifically involved, we are not told. It involved a meeting with the governor where the Jews may have admitted to Pilate what really occurred. In this scenario the chief priests would persuade Pilate that a lie was necessary to suppress the Jesus movement. Perhaps the Jews simply bribed Pilate with a large sum of money to avoid any investigation or both. “Wet. gives several passages of Greek authors in which mention is made of *persuading* men by means of money. Philo expressly states...that Pilate was a bribetaker, as we know was true of Felix.”¹⁵ The word “persuade” “meant more than it would have been quite polite to have expressed. *We shall see to it that he be satisfied. You understand us? We have the means, as you can readily apprehend, of getting such things hushed; and you may depend on us using these means.*”¹⁶ Keep in mind that the Jewish leadership was not really concerned about the soldiers’ welfare. What they were afraid of was an official Roman investigation which would prove the soldiers had lied. In any case the governor was conciliated and the matter was dropped.

(2) The soldiers are assured that they have nothing to worry about. The phrase “make you secure” (*humas amerimnous poiesomen*) literally means, “make you worryless” or “rid you of care.” “They would try money also on Pilate and assume all responsibility. Hence the soldiers have no anxiety (*amerimnous*, alpha privative and *merimnao*, to be anxious). They lived up to their bargain and this lie lives on through the ages.”¹⁷

The Consequences of the Cover-up

After Matthew says that the guards took the bribe money and did as they were instructed, he tells us their lie was particularly effective among the Jews: “and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day” (28:15). There are a number of things to note regarding this statement.

First, it demonstrates from the inspired Word of God that modern Judaism is a religion founded upon a bribe and a lie. The Jewish leaders were so corrupt and wicked that they were willing to drag the whole Jewish nation and religion into the abyss with them in order to preserve their own reputations and hang on to their power. “It was bad enough that they themselves willfully rejected the truth, but infinitely worse that they misled their nation.”¹⁸

The widespread acceptance of the Sanhedrin’s falsehood can be explained as a result of three factors.

¹⁵ John A. Broadus, *Commentary on Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, [1886] 1990), 586.

¹⁶ James Morison, *A Practical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 620.

¹⁷ Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 1:244.

¹⁸ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 1166.

(1) The propagation of this lie by the Jews teaches us that the rejection of the truth about Christ always involves the acceptance of a lie as an alternative. There can be no neutrality when it comes to the gospel of Jesus. There is really no such thing as an agnostic. Those who do not embrace the gospel must come up with a false reason as an excuse. Modern secularists simply dismiss the resurrection as a myth. Christian liberals redefine it out of true historical existence. Many scholars assert that the whole thing was made up long after the death of Jesus by the second-century church. Is there any evidence for any of these assertions? No. There is absolutely no evidence. Such arguments are no more reasonable or trustworthy than the lie of the Sanhedrinists. But, because people do not believe in Christ, they embrace the lie. Their whole lives are built on the shifting sands of humanism.

(2) Both in Scripture and history we see a tendency of people to follow their political and religious leaders. The shepherds of the visible-national church in Israel took a stand against God's anointed and most people followed their lead. "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so" (Jer. 5:30-31).

Throughout history, many professing believers have not carefully studied their Bibles and theology as a bulwark against the corruption of doctrine and worship, with the result that many people have blindly followed their leaders when they apostatize. This sad reality is as true today as it was in the first century or the Middle Ages. Every Christian (especially covenant heads) has a biblical responsibility to test all things, to hold fast what is good (1 Th. 5:21). When the leaders turn from the truth they must be rejected and abandoned by the people. "It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes" (Ps. 118:8-9).

(3) It also shows that the people in Israel had been taught bad doctrine for a long period of time. The central message of the ceremonial law that forgiveness and redemption can only be secured by the sacrifice of a perfect substitute was ignored or downplayed and replaced by Pharisaical legalism—the idea that man can obey the law and, in effect, earn his salvation before God. The connection that the people should have made between the sacrificial system and the once and for all sacrifice of Jesus was not made clear to the people. The cross of Christ was a great stumbling block to Jews (1 Cor. 1:23), because they had been indoctrinated in salvation by works.

Second, the fact that the large majority of Jews followed their leaders into apostasy reflects a pattern that is found throughout the Old Testament. When Paul discussed the fact that most of national Israel did not believe in Christ, he explained that "at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.... Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded" (Rom. 11:5, 7). There is national election—the nation of Israel or the visible church—and within Israel, the visible church, there is true Israel—the invisible church. Throughout the history of Israel, God preserved a godly remnant within the nation, even during times of great declension and apostasy. When Elijah was disheartened by the widespread idolatry around him, God assured him that He had reserved to Himself 7000 men who had not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Ki. 19:18; cf. Rom. 11:3-4). When Isaiah prophesied, things in the nation were so bad spiritually that he wrote, "Unless the LORD of hosts had left to us a very small remnant we would have become like Sodom" (1:9). During the captivity there was a godly remnant represented in people such as Esther, Mordecai, Ezekiel, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. After the Babylonian captivity, only a small remnant returned under Ezra and Nehemiah. When Jesus was born there were people such as Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth,

Zachariah, Simeon and Anna “who looked for redemption in Israel” (Lk. 2:38). Even in times of widespread apostasy, “God has not cast away people whom He foreknew” (Rom. 11:2). God, according to His sovereign plan, only directs His eternal-unchanging-electing love toward some and the rest are passed by and hardened. The widespread acceptance of the Jewish leaders’ lie by the Jews was used by God, according to His sovereign plan, to benefit the Gentiles. As Paul says, “Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness.... For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead” (Rom. 11:12, 15)?

Third, the invention and spread of this horrible lie was intended by God as a judgment against the Jews for their rejection and murder of His beloved Son. God had placed the light of Christ in their nation. The Jews had rejected that light and thus were rewarded with an even greater darkness and delusion for their sin. Because they stumbled at the truth presented so vividly before them, God gave them over to an intellectual and religious madness. This great lie kept the nation in the dark and thus was instrumental in the destruction of the nation by the Romans in A. D. 70. If they had not believed this falsehood and had embraced their Messiah, the great rebellion against Rome would have never taken place.

It is often the case that God rewards those who embrace darkness and falsehood with even greater delusions and foolishness. Calvin writes, “For God would never have permitted them to be deceived by such foolish credulity, but in order that those who had despised the Redeemer might be shut out from the hope of salvation; as he now inflicts a similar punishment on the ingratitude of the world, by giving loose reins to the reprobate, that they may go from bad to worse.”¹⁹ Since the so-called “enlightenment,” the Western nations have completely abandoned any professed commitment to Christ and have become more wicked and irrational in their worldviews. Germany, which is the fatherland of unbelieving higher critical views of Scripture, had a large shift toward secularism, atheism, the occult and mysticism which led to the rise of the Nazi movement. Western nations today are, for the most part, statist, socialistic and Darwinian in their approach to reality and ethics. Having cast off Christ they are increasingly in bondage to their new false god—corrupt humanity. “They who are entered in the service of ungodly masters can hardly win out; still new and worse employment is furnished to them...”²⁰

Fourth, we learn from this scene that the propagation of false teaching can be one the most long-term, destructive forces upon a people or nation. Matthew reports that this damnable lie was accepted among the Jews “until this day” (28:15). That is the day when Matthew penned this section of the gospel (probably around A. D. 63) about thirty years after the death of Christ. In fact, this blatant falsehood has been accepted by the Jewish community throughout its history to our own time. In the second century Justin Martyr (c. A. D. 114-165) wrote in his *Dialogue with the Jew Trypho* (c. A. D. 148): “You have sent chosen and ordained men throughout the whole world to proclaim that a godless and lawless heresy had sprung from one Jesus, a Galilean deceiver...whose disciples stole him by night from the tomb.”²¹ The African church father Tertullian (c. A. D. 150-220) wrote also about the Jewish tradition: “This is He whom His disciples secretly stole away... (*de Spec. 30*).”²²

¹⁹ John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke*, 3:352.

²⁰ David Dickson, *Matthew*, 412.

²¹ Justin Martyr as quoted in William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 994. “Trypho, whom Eusebius calls ‘the most distinguished among the Hebrews of his day,’ was not a fanatical Pharisee, but a tolerant and courteous Jew...” (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, (1910) 1989], 2:718).

²² Quintes Septimus Florens Tertullianus as quoted in Willoughby C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1977), 305.

The physical destruction of war is usually repaired within one generation. This was certainly true of Europe after WW II. But the devastation to families, communities and even whole nations through the propagation of false doctrine and deadly lies can last for thousands of years. Think of all the Jews doomed to hell during the last twenty centuries because of the deception of the Sanhedrin. How many millions of people lie in darkness because of the deceit of the Jewish leaders? How many millions of people lie in darkness because of the lies of Mohammed? How many multitudes have existed in spiritual darkness through the centuries because of Roman Catholicism?

From the deadly effect of this falsehood over the centuries we need to learn and apply some important truths. (1) The propagation of false doctrine can have severe negative consequences. One lie about the divinity of Christ (Arianism), or Jesus' sacrificial death (Romanism), or the resurrection (Judaism), or the doctrine of salvation (Islam, Judaism, Catholicism, etc) over time is more destructive than all the bombs of World War II. Therefore, it is very important that we preserve and pass on to our children the true biblical religion delivered to us by the apostles and emphasized by the Protestant reformers. Where the truth is fervently taught the lies of the devil will be rejected. Where the truth of God is neglected, falsehoods are easily embraced. Aggressive cults (Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, etc) have learned from experience that the seeds of deception are most effective upon the fertile soil of a nominal Christian household. The covenant head that is irresponsible and does not indoctrinate his children in the truths of a full-orbed Reformed system of doctrine is placing his whole heritage in grave spiritual danger. If his children succumb to the lies of this world or the heresies of Satan, every subsequent generation may be condemned to the pit of hell with them. It is a very sobering fact to consider that the millions of people who now attend modernistic, unbelieving, thoroughly wicked, mainline Protestant churches had ancestors that were very orthodox in their confession and walk. All it takes to destroy one's heritage for generations or perhaps even forever is one person's spiritual carelessness or sloth. Thus, we must be diligent and bring up our families to be fervent for the truth.

There must also be great carefulness in choosing which church and communion we attend and support. If one's denomination is careless about doctrine and regards the *Westminster Standards* as something that can be disregarded at will as long as the church bureaucracy allows exception after exception, then it is time to find a more faithful church. If our church officers or denomination departs from any of the foundational, essential doctrines of the faith (e.g., by embracing sacramentalism, the Auburn Ave heresy, Shepherdism, Arminianism, etc), then we must fight against this heretical departure with every fiber of our being. And, if the church courts do not care, or attempt to simply smooth over the heresy with equivocations and talk about love and unity, then it is time to separate from such corruption. A lie or heresy that is allowed to spread and take root is one of the most dangerous and destructive forces known to mankind. To tolerate it or ignore it, or compromise with it in the name of compassion, brotherly love or so-called unity is wicked and foolish. If we leave our children in a backsliding, deforming denomination, then we are placing our children and grandchildren in grave spiritual danger.

(2) The rejection of the establishment principle or the idea of an explicitly Christian state for the acceptance of post-enlightenment pluralism is anti-Christian and destructive of society and culture. When a state allows Jewish synagogues, Islamic mosques, Hindu Temples, Jehovah's Witness congregations, Mormon churches to *openly propagate* their lies about Christ, it has taken a position antithetical to Scripture. The Bible teaches that the foreigner, stranger or sojourner in the land is not required to convert to the true religion or participate in the worship of

Jehovah. Thus, in a Christian nation people who are not believers are free to live in peace. But, they are not allowed to spread their false teachings *openly* among the population (read Dt. 13). To allow such behavior is to allow the subversion of a Christian law-order and worldview. In modern pluralistic states all religions are treated as both equally true and equally false and laws are determined by the secular humanistic elite or by majority vote. Thus, Scripture and the truth of the resurrection are relegated to the prayer closet or the heart of the believer. Since Scripture says that Judaism is founded upon a falsehood, then, by way of application, synagogues should not be allowed in a Christian commonwealth. This does not mean that Jews should be persecuted, hated or mistreated; but only that their false, blasphemous religion not be allowed to *publicly* function in a Christian society. This, of course, sounds radical to modern ears. But the only alternative is secular humanistic pluralism which will eventually lead to the persecution of Christians through pro-sodomite rights laws and so-called anti-hate speech legislation.

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