

ROADBLOCKS TO FAITH

By Roelf L. Ruffner

“Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:42-43).

Who were these “chief rulers” who believed on Jesus but did not want to confess it publically? They may have been members of the Jewish religious council, the Sanhedrin, composed of seventy prominent citizens of ancient Israel. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were among their number. John indicates that “many” “believed on” Jesus. They had heard His teachings for over three years and may have witnessed some of His miracles, yet they refused to confess Him as the Christ. They knew the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament but failed to acknowledge them regarding Jesus. “Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?” (John 3:9,10).

Why did they not confess the obvious – that Jesus was the Christ? What was the roadblock to obedient faith? John indicates that one reason was fear of disgrace. The Jewish officials had determined that if anyone confessed that Jesus was the Christ they would be cast out of the synagogue. “These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue” (John 9:22). The synagogue was the center of Jewish life and to be expelled was a disgrace. What about our fear of disgrace? Many Christians have undergone persecution by society, friends and family because of their decision not just to believe on Christ but to obey Him. “And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name” (Acts 5:40,41).

Another reason lay in the opinion of many of the Jewish officials had of Jesus. They saw Him as a backwoods preacher who threatened their positions (John 7:41,52). Those who wondered if Jesus was the Christ had great regard for these men. How many today fail to obey the Gospel because of the regard they have for men who are in essence false teachers? They teach and preach a gospel that is not the old Jerusalem gospel and which will not save anyone in eternity. They may hold some position of authority in a denomination or a religious institution but they teach a false gospel and are accursed (Gal. 1:8,9).

John indicates that these wan-a-be believers valued the “praise of men.” They liked being called “Master” or “Rabbi” in the market place (Mat. 23:1-12). They would probably have lost that title if they confess that Jesus was the Christ. But following the Lord often requires going to the back of the bus. And we all secretly long to be praised by others. “Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets” (Luke 6:26).

This brings us to the root of all roadblocks to faith – a lack of self-denial and a lack of love for God. These rulers could not humble themselves and confess that Jesus was who the evidence says He was – the Son of God. They would have had to dethrone themselves in their hearts and enthrone the Lord. “And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Mat.18:3). For most folks to believe in Christ they must first disobey self to obey the Lord, in other words to love Him more than they love themselves. “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3).

The sad point of this event in John 12 is that some of these same rulers a few days later sided with the high priest Caiaphas and demanded Jesus be crucified by the Gentiles on the false charge of blasphemy. Their belief in Jesus was shown to be only an inch deep.

Dear reader, what about us? Are we so wrapped up in ourselves and what others think that we fail to show obedient faith? “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46).