



Voices From The Past—The Stamp

by: Steven J. Wallace

Ignatius (30-107 AD), was born about the time Jesus picked up small children, **“And He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them”** (Mk. 10:16). Later he became influenced by the peculiar teachings of Jesus and became a disciple. He accurately described that everyone

bears a stamp and ultimately “goes to his own place.”

“Seeing, then, all things have an end, these two things are simultaneously set before us—death and life; and every one shall go unto his own place. For as there are two kinds of coins, the one of God, the other of the world, and each of these has its special character stamped upon it, [so is it also here.] The unbelieving are of this world; but the believing have, in love, the character of God the Father by Jesus Christ, by whom, if we are not in readiness to die into His passion, His life is not in us” (Letter to the Magnesians, chap. 5)

What is the image of your stamp? Is it of the world or of Christ? Whatever *impresses* us most is the *impression* we bear in this life. The image we carry, is to a large degree, etched by our spirit’s willingness to suffer and willingness to receive the word of God with humility. Even as Ignatius spoke, so it is, “...if we are not in readiness to die into His passion, His life is not in us.” How true it is. We often sing songs where we long to be like Jesus. We may boast in our willingness to die and be faithful to Christ. We may call on others to revere the great trait of total surrender. But, if we cannot possess doctrinal humility, and receive with meekness the implanted word in its entirety, then we would surely never follow through with “readiness to die into His passion.” Becoming irritated at sermons that call on us to surrender all and diligently pursue a faithful walk in the house of God, serves as a strong indicator that we are not bearing the stamp of God. My relationship to the word reflects my relationship to the world and to God. Is my character stamped by God’s fashioning or the world’s?

Ignatius proved his genuine coinage. He (like many other Christians in the first and second centuries) invited the world to crush him if that is what it desired to do. Denying the Lord and His word was not an option, however. Prior to being killed, he wrote the brethren in Rome,

“Let fire and the cross; let the crowds of wild beasts; let tearings, breakings, and dislocations of bones; let cutting off of members; let shatterings of the whole body; and let all the dreadful torments of the devil come upon me: only let me attain to Jesus Christ” (Letter to the Romans, chap. 5)

What a difference the church would make today if we would meet the world with such an attitude. For many, that calling is just too much. "Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, 'Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you'" (Acts 24:25). And it is just that, "a convenient time" that has enraptured our thinking. We make our choices often because of the god of "convenience" rather than piercing conviction in the cross of Christ. This is expected from those content in the world but not for those who were baptized into the death of Jesus. For those of us who have knowledge of the future judgment and terror of the Lord, I should think convenience would weigh little on our mind in our spiritual quest. But how many times do we make decisions that fail Christ? Why do so many take vacations where there is no sound church? What about the decision to take a job that takes you away from the worship services? What about choosing a church based on locality rather than spiritual content? What about complaining about sermons that are longer in nature? Why is it that so many have Sunday sickness that is somehow miraculously healed on Monday? One can clearly see the worldly influence upon those who profess to be Christians by the wicked display of greater excitement for football on Super Bowl Sunday than the resurrection of the Creator and the church that He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28). I wonder in God's record keeping how many so-called Christians declined a "spirit and truth" worship to watch millionaires fetch points with a leather ball? God only knows. The worldly Christian is not really a Christian at all, but simply one playing "fools-ball" with eternity. He will deride articles and sermons like this in an attempt to justify himself (Lk. 16:14, 15). But in the end, he is only playing the fool.

"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But he who heeds counsel is wise" (Prov. 12:15).

"A wise man fears and departs from evil, But a fool rages and is self-confident" (Prov. 14:16).

Felix's homage to convenience rather than the pursuit of the cross landed him in the abyss of torment. In contrast, the Ignatius' Christ-like conviction leads to temporary torment here, but a paradise in eternity. Yet Christians who start out with humility and zeal for truth can become confused and dazzled by worldliness to ultimately vacate their post for someone else to fill, even as Demas loved the world and abandoned Paul, "for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica..." (2 Tim. 4:10).

"But when I suffer, I shall be the freed-man of Jesus, and shall rise again emancipated in Him. And now, being a prisoner, I learn not to desire anything worldly or vain" (Ignatius, Letter to the Romans, chap. 4)

What is your stamp like?