**Tragically Ironic**

*By Stan Cox*

Irony is defined as follows:

(1) Incongruity between the actual result of a sequence of events and the normal or expected result. (2) An event or result marked by such an incongruity. (Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary, 1977 edition)

One tragic example of real-life irony about which I recently read concerns a motorcyclist in New York last July. The helmetless man was riding his motorcycle as a part of a large group of cyclists staging an organized protest over the state’s mandatory helmet law. The 55 year old man crashed, hitting his head on the road, and suffering a fatal skull fracture. A state trooper was quoted, “The doctor felt that the death could have been prevented if he simply had been wearing a helmet.”

While some might say that such an end could have been foreseen because of the lack of protective headgear, it was certainly not expected by the man doing the protesting. No doubt he had many times ridden successfully sans helmet, but on the specific occasion of the protest, his actions led to his death. Tragically ironic.

The story brought to mind a passage from Paul’s pen:

“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

The primary thrust of the text is the importance of discipline as a Christian. But, it comes within the greater context of evangelism. The apostle had just indicated in verses 19-23 his willingness to make himself subservient to all men in an attempt to win them to Christ. As he stated, “I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (vs. 22). After having expressed his desire to save men, he now expresses the importance of spiritual discipline, that he too might be saved.

It is an intriguing thought. It is possible for me to teach and influence others to the point that they become obedient to the gospel and faithful to the Lord. It is also possible for me, having done so, to fall short of heaven myself.

It might be that after teaching others those things necessary to please God, I do not make the attempt to please Him myself. This was a problem with the Pharisees, and brought forth the following reproof from the Lord: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers” (Matthew 23:2-4).

It might be that while I appear to others as righteous, my righteousness is external only. I hide my apathy and sin behind a patina of righteousness. Again, the Pharisees serve as an example, because “all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, ‘Rabbi, Rabbi’” (Matthew 23:5-7).

It might be as Paul proposes, that after I teach others I might, through a lack of discipline, falter in my profession. Through this lack of steadfastness, Paul warns, “I myself should become disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Regardless, consider the tragic consequence of hypocrisy. I serve as an example to others, and serve to instruct them in the way of righteousness – but in the day of judgment, I fall short. Again, consider Jesus’ condemnation of the Pharisees, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness … Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?” (Matthew 23:27-28, 33).

Paul did not want to be a victim of such a tragic irony. As such, he said, “I discipline my body and bring it into subjection” (vs. 27). We must be diligent, taking care to exercise self-restraint, and cultivating zeal to righteousness. In so doing the life we live will match that life we profess, and we will be saved. “But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will blessed in what he does” (James 1:25).

**Something to Think about…**

Contentment is not based on what you have, but who you are; not what is happening now, but where you are headed eternally; not feelings, but faith; not pride, but principle; not locality, but love; not satisfying present desires, but upholding timeless values; not in multiplying earthly relationships, but in cultivating your relationship with the heavenly Father.

Thoughts about the past can take us in different directions. If we learn from them, they help us towards wisdom. If we dwell in them, they take away our hope and our zeal in present action. If we rejoice in them, they help us to be thankful. If we seek to live in them, they lead us to despair. The past was a beginning, the present is where we live, but our hope must always be focused on a future at home with God.sent is where we live, but our hope must always be focused upon a future at home with God.
5) Good hymns display a precision of poetic technique and expression.
6) Good hymns turn the heart heavenward.

She noted that writing good hymns was “a matter of looking on the face of God, of worshipping in his presence, of embracing his will, of accepting his cross and living daily under its obedience; then, having learned the disciplines of good writing, of singing his grace.”

Sometimes our fears overcome our effort, so that we do nothing in order to avoid those fears. True courage is not the absence of all fear, but the determination to act according to principle despite the presence of our fears. Great things are never accomplished by those who wait until all fear disappear. Rather, great things are accomplished when one acts according to God’s principles of truth because he trusts God’s helping power as greater than any fear.

When we invest the true biblical love that seeks the best interest of another without regard to self, it is never wasted. Though we may not see the effects now, it is a seed ready to germinate and grow when the heart of the one loved is prepared to receive it. If that heart never reaches preparation, the love we give helps to us dispel bitterness from our own heart and to grow closer to God in character.