

## THEY WHO GARNISH TOMBS OF SLAIN PROPHETS

One of the stinging rebukes Jesus directed against the scribes and Pharisees was that they built “the sepulchres of the prophets, and garnished the tombs of the righteous” whom their fathers had slain. They insisted “If we had been in the days of our fathers, we should not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets” (Matt. 23:29-30). They were however more than willing to attack and kill the prophets in their midst. This highlights an ancient and widespread problem among those who like the Pharisees fancy themselves to conservators of the faith and protectors of the ignorant masses. They praise the long dead prophets while persecuting those in their midst.

Most Christians, including preachers, know precious little of our brotherhood history. They may recognize the names of a few heroes of the past and identify with them. Those heroes are often cited by preachers and to substantiate their positions and give some credibility to their declarations. At the same time, the preacher might attack without mercy his fellow gospel preacher who he deems to have failed to measure up to his standard. We speak not those who are heretics or wicked men, but loyal conservative men, who for the Master have worked hard and served well. They have fought the good fight and landed many blows on the devil’s head. Their failure is they disagree with their tormentors on one or two points, or have made some mistakes of judgment or conduct in their lives. For these flaws their prosecutors cannot not excuse them. They launch a campaign to discredit them, drive them from their teaching posts or silence them. If, as a consequence of their abuse, they are discouraged and leave the church, it is hailed as proof that their attackers were correct in their judgments.

The irony in all of this is the further action of the inquisitors. Having washed their hands of their blood of their victims, they take up their pens or mount their pulpits and intone the names of their dead hero prophets to validate their message and conduct. Unknown or unmentioned is the fact that those dead prophets had also had their blemishes in their thinking or their record.

Men praise Alexander Campbell and proudly claim spiritual kinship to him. Yet Bro. Campbell expressed views on the salvation of the unimmersed that no conservative would endorse and was president of the American Christian Missionary Society which was rejected as unscriptural by our brethren.

\* They cite Barton Stone, yet he held faulty views on the nature of the Godhead and was involved in excessive emotional displays by worshippers in his early days.

\* They glowingly speak of Walter Scott, yet he held mistaken views on the millennium and fellowship with denominational bodies.

\* They claim David Lipscomb as their hero yet he held untenable views on civil government, and Christian involvement in voting, warfare, etc.

\* They cite N. B. Hardeman, yet he believed churches should fund his Christian College and on one occasion most of his student body revolted against his heavy-handed administration.

\* This list could be extended to include every man who every filled a leadership role among us. No matter how great their bible knowledge, regardless of the great good they did, someone, somewhere could be found to question them in some matter. The reality is every preacher is human and fallible. He will be mistaken in some aspect of his thinking. Every one is limited in his knowledge and understanding of God’s Word. Every man makes his mistakes and sins in life’s journey.

The mistake in the thinking of the tomb garnishers is they are ignorant of or else overlook the flaws of the dead prophets. However they carefully scrutinize their contemporary fellow prophets to find their flaws and then flay them for it. They seem unaware that they too have their flaws; that they are mistaken in some points of their understanding; that they too are imperfect in their judgment and conduct. The brother who has made for himself a record as a judge and flogger of flawed brethren is often constrained to hide and deny his failures or to attack with vigor those who dare to question him about them.

The point of all this is we should be able to honor and cite the deceased heroes of the past, even with their flaws. We should be longsuffering with our fellow prophets and slow to cast stones at those who fail to meet our standards of perfection. Positively, this is the demand of Christ’s Golden Rule (Matt. 7:12). Negatively, “Judgement is without mercy to him who showed no mercy” (Jas. 2:13). In the eyes of Jesus, those who honor dead prophets but persecute those in

their midst are hypocrites! JHW