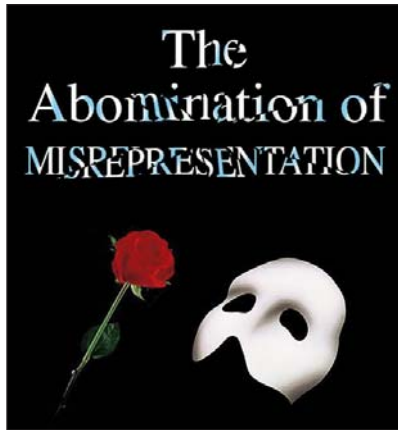


Keith Steady
PRESSIN' IN

The Teaching Letter of **Toward the Mark**

Have you ever been falsely accused? Have you ever been blamed for saying something that you never said or for doing something that you never did? Have you ever had something that you said or wrote so distorted that it literally had nothing in common with what you originally said or wrote? If so, then you can surely empathize with those who have experienced the terrible feelings that come with being falsely represented in the eyes of others.

This happened to me when I played football in college. After the final game of our season in which we won the National Championship, someone on my own college football team falsely accused me of stealing my home jersey. It was the most horrible feeling I had ever had in my life. Why? Even though I wore the jersey to play the game, it was not mine to keep. Like the



helmets and shoulder pads we were issued, the jersey was the property of the college's Athletic Department. Therefore the theft of the jersey was an offense committed against the school. Far worse than that,

however, was the deliberate attempt to kill, steal, and destroy the good reputation that I had worked so hard for years to achieve.

Curiously enough, this took place just after my precious grandmother sent me my first Bible and shared with me a dream she had of my preaching God's Word to large crowds. I later realized that this incident was perhaps my first substantial spiritual attack; an unclean spirit of false accusation had come to steal the Word of God that my grandmother had spoken over my life. Here is how it happened.

On the day after our final game of the year, everyone on the

team reported to the training facility on campus to clean out our lockers and turn in all of our gear. Three days later, much to my surprise, I was called into the coach's office and told that a member of the team had reported seeing me steal my home jersey. I felt as if someone had kicked me right in the stomach. I explained to the coaching staff that I had turned in my jersey, along with the rest of my equipment, to the team trainers. After about an hour the coaching staff let me go. I will never forget the heaviness and frustration that consumed me for weeks afterward! I knew I was innocent, but I could see that the coaching staff was not so convinced, or at least I felt that way. All I could think of was how everything that I had done to win the respect of my coaches had all been destroyed with one lie.

I remember going around to certain members of the team asking them if they had heard of anyone finding the jersey. After a few days I was approached by our defensive team captain, who informed me that he had heard who had my jersey, and that the thief had taken it because he was angry at me about something. The plot thickens! During that school year I had spent some time with a young lady, and I soon learned that one of the team trainers had a crush on her. That was where the problem became difficult! Why? The team trainers were off limits to the players; much like diplomats from foreign countries, they had complete immunity from us. We could not touch them physically or accuse them before anyone; to do so meant immediate dismissal from the team. As my mom would have said, "he had me over a barrel and he knew it!"

I would like to tell you that the matter was resolved, but it never was. The fellow that had stolen the jersey never came forward, and there was no way that I was going to file a complaint- which I later discovered was exactly what he wanted me to do. I simply had to wash my hands of it and go my own way, no matter how much I was tempted to do otherwise. Do you see how much damage one false accusation can cause? In my case, it almost cost me both my hard-earned reputation as a football player and my place on the team I had loved and worked so tremendously hard to be a part of.

However, you might enjoy knowing that about five years later, a band that I was touring with performed about fifty miles from my old school. One morning while we were in town I drove out to the campus just to walk around the stadium and visit the awards room. Before I left I thought that, by some long shot, head coach Norton might be home, and I drove up to his house and knocked on the door. Much to my surprise coach, Norton answered it. When he saw me, he smiled and invited me in, and we must have talked for an hour about all of the things that happened the year we won our division's national NCAA

championship. It was a season that none of us will ever forget! Just before I got up to leave, I asked, “Coach, you do know that I did not take my jersey, don’t you?” He replied, “Shealy, I knew your heart, son—I knew you could have never taken any thing. Besides, you earned something that no amount of money in the world could have bought. You walked away from here a champion; you walked away with a ring!”

As I stood up and made my way to the door coach Norton reached up, gave me a big hug, and said, “You know you still have a few years eligibility left.” At that I smiled real big, hugged his tree stump of a neck again, got back in my car, and drove off. The ride back that day was perhaps the lightest that I had felt in years. I had finally been released from the weighty chains of having been misrepresented and falsely accused in the eyes of the one person that I had loved and respected the most at that time in my life.

Why do we feel so badly when we have been falsely accused or misrepresented? The answer is to be found in this verse from Proverbs: “A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.”

(Proverbs 22:1) A good reputation are worth more than great

riches! Of all the things a person can possess, one of the most precious is a good name and reputation.

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Now, we are told that Satan comes to kill, steal, and destroy, and the good reputation is one of his favorite targets. When it comes to attacking a person’s good name, the tongues of people are quite useful to him. “And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.” (James 3:6-8)

Consider this example from the life of the prophet Jeremiah. His words of warning to God’s people stirred them up, but not to repentance. Instead, they attacked the prophet for bringing God’s Word to them. “Then said they, Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah.” “Come, and let us smite him with the tongue.” (from Jeremiah 18:18) Upon hearing this, Jeremiah made this supplication to the Lord. “Give heed to me, O LORD, and hearken to the voice of them that contend with me. Shall evil be recompensed for good? for they have digged a pit for my soul.” (from Jeremiah 18:19-20) What was the evil these people had devised against God’s prophet? What was

the pit they dug for his soul? Words! They said, “let us smite him with the tongue.” They called him a liar! “Let us not give heed to any of his words.” (from Jeremiah 18:18) The witness of the people against the prophet was false. They were engaging in slander. Now, you may still be wondering why this is a big deal. Do you remember that bearing false witness against a person is forbidden in the Ten Commandments?

“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.” (Exodus 20:16)

In addition to being one of the Big Ten, bearing false witness is one of the Seven Abominations. “These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.” Proverbs 6:16-19

God hates all sin, but these seven are especially abominable to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, murder of the innocent, a heart that imagines wickedness, feet that quickly get into mischief, a false witness, and those who sow discord within families (including God’s family). Observe how prominent the tongue is in the Seven Abominations. Notice also that God looks at a lying tongue the same way He does murder.

Slander, libel, and gossip (even in the disguise of “prayer requests”) are tantamount to murder. This is why it is also called character assassination, because the unjust destruction of a person’s good name is akin to murder.

Think about it for a moment: false accusation strips its victims of all credibility. In many cases, it destroys a person’s ability to benefit society altogether, fulfilling satan’s agenda of hindering the fulfillment of God’s will for every individual. Lies and misrepresentation brand the accused as unclean, whether they are guilty of the offense or not, making it all but impossible for anyone to receive the words of the accused as credible. Once the accusation has been made, taking it back is all but impossible, much like reverting an omelet back to eggs. How many times have liberal-leaning television news channels repeated baseless, empty charges against someone who had a stellar, lifelong reputation in service to our country? Or, what about the heartbreaking stories of innocent people who have sat in prisons for years because they had been falsely accused of crimes they did not commit? Misrepresentation has destroyed many lives; that’s a fact!

Making and repeating false accusations are satan’s devices, and people who engage in such practices are his accomplices. Satan especially delights to use false accusation and deception in an attempt to destroy God and His people in the eyes of those who do not know

God. It is incredible that one of his greatest allies in that endeavor is the Church in America. These words from the book of Revelation describe what has happened:

“And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” (Revelation 3:14-17)

What had the Church of the Laodicians done? They had claimed to represent God’s ways, when they did not. They were bearing false witness against God. The Lord, describing Himself as “the faithful and true witness,” said that made Him want to vomit! The words “spue thee out of my mouth” signify throwing up.

The Lord would rather they had been cold, that is, wicked with no pretense of righteousness, or hot, that is, truly righteous. But the Laodecian Church was lukewarm, while claiming to be hot. They were therefore assassinating the character of the Lord Jesus. It is no wonder, then, that the Lord said He would vomit them out of His mouth!

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That is the condition of the Church in America today. The Church has given the enemies of the Lord great occasion to mock God and to speak evil of the way of Truth. This includes all of the well-meaning, sincere people who go about doing damage to the cause of Christ through being busy for God but not with God, all the while believing they are serving their Creator. This is no isolated problem, either. Many ill prepared Church folks distort all that God wants to do in the lives of all mankind.

Those who claim to be Christian but do not walk according to their new nature in Christ are both lying about God and effectively claiming that God is a liar, for not only are they misrepresenting Him, they are not trusting Him. Furthermore, those who bear false witness against God and do not trust Him are walking in hatred of Him: “A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it; and a flattering mouth worketh ruin.” (Proverbs 26:28)

The lukewarm Christian flatters God; they know all the right words to say, but they do not really believe it. As Jesus said, “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” (Matthew 15:8-9)

Unless we are walking in the Truth, all of our works, including worship, are worthless. For instance, how much can be taught by a pastor who does not know God and His Word? Not much! Why doesn't he know much? He was taught by others that did not know much, who in turn were taught by others that did not know much either, and the cycle goes on. "And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." (Matthew 15:14) [By the way, do you know what they call a medical student that graduates at the bottom their class? Doctor! Selah.]

How could such a decline take place in the Church? It happens much like this. When I was in the fourth grade, our teacher had the entire class stand shoulder to shoulder around the classroom, facing in toward the center of what had become a large circle. She then asked us to join hands. Once we had done so, she stepped in as part of the circle, took the hands of the students to the right and left of her, and asked us to be very still. She then said that she was going to show us how something someone has said can be taken totally out of context. She told us that she was going to whisper something in the ear of the student that was holding her left hand, and that she wanted them to repeat exactly what they had been told to the person next to them, and so on, until the last person repeated what they had heard back to the teacher. Once the message had traveled around the entire circle and had come back to the teacher, she asked us all to return to our desks. Once we were seated, our teacher went to the chalk board and wrote down her original message and the message the last student had relayed to her. The difference was astonishing! The two had nothing in common.

Similarly, when people's opinions of God's Word are taught and repeated in Christian circles instead of "every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God", great misrepresentation of our heavenly Father will be the result, hence the lukewarm condition that most of the Church finds itself in today. Many years ago, Thomas Jefferson said, "Had the doctrines of Jesus been preached always as pure as they came from His lips, the whole civilized world would now have been Christians."

Billy Graham, another great American, once told a story that also makes this point. On one occasion, after Billy had finished preaching a fiery message, a rather irritated older man walked up to him and said harshly, "Mr. Graham, I am very disappointed in you, sir!" Billy replied, "Why?" The man said, "Are you aware that your message tonight has set the church back fifty years?" At that, Billy replied, "I'm terribly disappointed. I hoped to see it set back two thousand."

You see, what both Thomas Jefferson and Billy Graham were describing is the abomination of misrepresenting God. Both men could see that what passes for Christianity bears little to no resemblance to the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Much like diluting paint to the point

that it has become useless, both God and His Word are so misrepresented by so many that the Gospel is discredited in the eyes of masses of uneducated people. We ignore this situation to our own destruction, because the Scripture contains this warning:

“There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.” (2 Peter 2:1-2)

So, what do we as individual Christians do to not misrepresent God in today’s society? I once heard a man of God say, “the best thing that we can do for the poor is to not be one of them.” as the Scripture says, “Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord.” (2 Corinthians 6:17) The Scripture also says, “Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” (Ephesians 5:14-16)

“Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.” (2 Timothy 2:19)

The words “depart from iniquity” mean stop sinning! This includes sinning through ignorance. The word “depart” also

means we are to leave sin behind. We are not to linger or be slack. We must not hide behind the false righteousness of “Well, I’m not as bad as others.” Consider the fly in the ointment: “Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour.” (Ecclesiastes 10:1)

What does this verse mean? Well, today we use the word “pharmacist” instead of “apothecary.” If we go to the pharmacist to fill a prescription and take it home only to open the package and find a dead fly floating in the bottle, would we still take the medicine? No! The dead fly ruins the entire contents of the bottle. Similarly, the fly in the ointment of our testimony is only one sin! For even one sin — it could be a habit or a single act — will cause us to appear as false witnesses for Christ.

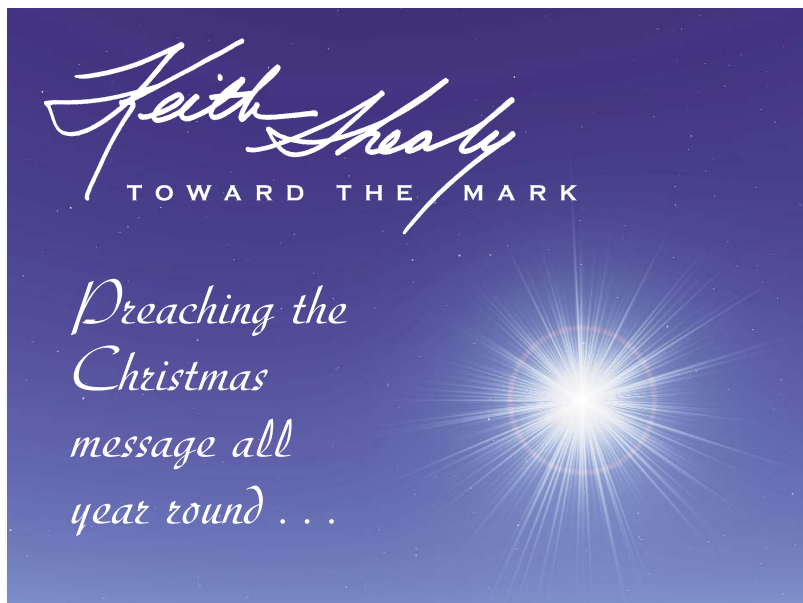
“Abstain from all appearance of evil.” (1 Thessalonians 5:22)

We who name the name of Christ are His ambassadors, and we must be ever mindful of the reality that we carry His reputation with us wherever we go. Spiritual slothfulness in our walk with God will be a stain that cannot be hidden, and we will be perceived as false witnesses for our Lord and Savior. This is the abomination of misrepresentation!

“...we must be ever mindful of the reality that we carry His reputation with us wherever we go.”

The answer is to awake from our spiritual sleep, put off the old man and put on the new man in Christ, created unto good works by God the Father. This means that we must die to our old flesh nature with all of it's selfish cravings. Only then can one truly understand that a false witness, toward God or anyone else, is murder and should never so much as be mentioned among us. God desires that each of us abide in Him- that we love Him with all of our hearts and love our neighbors as ourselves.

All of this, of course, is humanly impossible, but with God all things are possible. If we will but humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, then He will lift us up. As we walk with God, we will become more like Jesus, and our lives will become living proof of the Gospel and faithful witnesses of God. "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men." (2 Corinthians 3:2)



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