



14 I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. 15 That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered. (Eccl 1:14-15)

8 The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace. (Isaiah 59:8)

14 Do all things without murmurings and disputings: 15 That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; (Phil 2:14-15)

I remember hearing my father refer to some scoundrel of our town as being “*as crooked as a dog’s hind leg.*” That is a fair description since the hind leg of a dog is indeed crooked; and my father was using the illustration to describe his character and not his physical appearance. The ways of the Lord, and of His elect, are always straight ways. As the Baptist proclaimed, *Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.* (Matt 3:3) John did not mean that the Lord would ever travel a crooked path, but we must prepare the straight ways of our lives by the power of the Gospel and its Author; else the Lord will not deign to abide in our hearts. His way is always straight and, if we have received Him into our hearts by means of grace, He will re-orient our ways to follow in that straight and narrow path which He travels.

The Preacher of Ecclesiastes proclaims “*That which is crooked cannot be made straight.*” In the world of lost souls, that statement is accurate; however, even the heart most destitute of honor can be made straight by the effectual calling of God and the workings of the Holy Ghost in His soul. Perhaps, Solomon was referring to the scars and crooks that sin leaves on the soul even after salvation. Sin does leave scars – even sins that are forgiven. The hateful retorts we made to parents, or friends, or strangers will leave a scar even after we repent of them. An old proverb which is very true says, “*As a tree is bent, so shall it grow.*” Children raised in godless homes and sinful influences are scarred for life. But quite often, those scars, though ever present, become hardened with

time and faith to become strong points for the former child. Many sons and daughters of alcoholics grow up detesting even the sight of whiskey. They resolve early in life to abhor the sin that twisted their childhood experience.

The scars of abusive parents are simply exaggerations of the scars of sin upon every soul born into this life. Our hearts are full of sin, and prone to wicked thoughts and deeds. This has been the case from the beginning. The very first child of Adam and Eve was a MURDERER! And the nature of man's heart did not improve from that time. *"5 And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."* Gen 6:4-5 (KJV) I hope you do not read these words in smug abandon for they apply as much to you and me as to the Ante-Deluvian man. In fact, man has become more ingenious in his sinful nature. There was a time in the past when the Bible was forbidden to be read by the people. But the WORD got out anyway by means of Godly men such as Wycliffe and Gutenberg. So the Bible was Sovereign despite the evil intentions to suppress its message. But the devil neither sleeps nor tarries. So, instead of attacking the Bible, the devil convinced ungodly men to write a competing version of it. The Chinese strategist, Sun Tsu, offered a rule of engagement which read: *"If you are going to attack in the east, make a loud noise and conflagration in the west first."* That is what the devil is doing today with God's Word. He makes a loud and confusing claim that his cheap and corrupt versions are the real Word while spiritually gullible men discard the genuine for a counterfeit – *"new lamps for old"* so to speak (Arabian Nights).

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it. (Prov 22:6) Some parents have been disillusioned by this Proverb. They raise their children to be faithful children of God. Their homes are havens of peace, joy, and biblical living. Yet, the child wanders out into the world and falls into sins that the parents abhor. *"What went wrong?"* they wonder. Was the Proverb not kept? Read it again! No child leaves home without adventuring into paths that are not wholesome. They must learn to fly now that they have left the nest. Do not misunderstand. I do not advocate a young man or woman going out from home and experimenting with sin. But, as realists, we must admit it almost always happens. Read the Proverb again: *" . . . when he is old, he will not depart from it."* The compass may fluctuate with the storm of youth, but it will return to an accurate reading once the storm is past. As the young person becomes bewildered at his own sinful ways that were alien to his godly home, he will begin to yearn for a return – just as did the Prodigal Son. And, in time, he will return. All of those godly lessons he learned at home will restore his soul to faith and biblical living *"when he is old"*, or before.

A young tree is easily bent by the gales of nature, but it will return to its upright position after the winds subside. But when man puts his hand to the sapling and twists it out of shape, that tree will grow up with a deformed twist at its base. Our children are like those young trees. They may be bent in order to correct them, but not cruelly twisted. *12 The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. 13 Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. 14 They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing; 15 To shew that the LORD is upright: he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.* (Psalm 92:12-15)

The Palm Tree bears many marks that describe the child of God. First of all, it stands head and shoulders above all other trees. Christian virtues cannot be compared by any means with those of the world. The Palm Tree is erect and straight. So should be the upright Christian.

The Palm Tree flourishes in both desert and tropical zones. There are Christians who dwell in the learned societies as well as in the jungles of far-flung lands. The Palm Tree is beautiful to behold, especially for the desert traveler who seeks the oasis in which the Palm Tree waves. We see only the tall, commanding Palm Tree in its appearance

above ground. But hidden to our view is the greater part which comprises the deep root system of the Palm Tree. Due to its search for the deep and living waters, its roots sink very far into the earth so that its greatest mass remains unseen. The biblical foundation of the Christian does not immediately appear to the stranger. His great strength is not in the outward appearance, but in his inner strength. It is not known to be a 'crooked' but an erect, straight tree.

The Palm Tree requires the purest soil in which to grow unlike other trees that flourish in filthy soil. So the young Christian flourishes in pure manners and biblical morality. When very young and small, the Palm Tree is the weakest of trees. It can barely remain erect. Baby Christians are fertile soil to be nurtured until strong and durable like the Palm Tree. And the Palm Tree is always Green. Like so, the godly man: *shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.* (Psalm 1:3) The leaves of the Palm Tree are symbols of victory. (Remember Palm Sunday!)

The Cedars of Lebanon are also straight, beautiful trees. They put out a wholesome fragrance and possess medicinal qualities. Chests made of cedar will protect against invasion of pests. Christian living also add a sweet fragrance to society and protect against immoral behavior. Cedars of Lebanon are stately trees of royal appearance such as was used in Solomon Temple. Christians, being children of God, are both princes and princesses and should deport themselves so as to bring no shame upon their Father, the King of Kings. *16 The trees of the LORD are full of sap; the cedars of Lebanon, which he hath planted.* (Psalm 104:16)

Now there are today many bramble bushes masquerading as Palm Trees and Cedars of Lebanon. They flourish in the dark underbrush and in soils that are putrid. They have no fruit as does the Palm Tree (dates) nor do they emit a healthful fragrance as does the Cedars of Lebanon. Heed the words of our Lord: *15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. 16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? 17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. 19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. 20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.* (Matt 7:15-20)

The Serpent of the Garden bears crooked character and features. Like his modern minions, he twisted, misquoted, and denied the veracity of God's Word. *And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? 2 And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: 3 But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. 4 And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: 5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.* (Gen 3:1-5) First, misquote; second, then denial; and finally, misapplication. I see all of these faults and perversions in the modern church. Look around and see! **BEWARE!!!**