

2009

Second-Hand Doubt

by Bill Lockwood

An interesting and instructive interview with Jesus before Pilate is recorded in John 18:33-38. Jesus' remark in verse 37 indicates that Pilate was leaning on a skepticism about truth which he evidently had *inherited* from others. In view of the fact that multitudes today criticize Christians with harboring a "second-hand" faith—from family or culture—Jesus shows us that skepticism can also be inherited.

Before examining the text it should be noted that while it is true that many Christians merely worship and serve Jesus Christ because of family or culture, the Lord actually invites us to examine the evidence and build our faith upon solid ground (1 Thessalonians 5:21; Matthew 7:24-27). Second-hand faith is not strong enough to carry us through life unto eternal reward. That being said, let us see how the Messiah draws attention to second-hand doubt!

As Pilate opens the interview he scornfully asks, "*Art thou the King of the Jews?*" It is not, however, a straightforward question. The word "thou" is in the emphatic position. Read it as it appears in the original: "Are *YOU* the King of the Jews?" It was a ridicule of the Son of God. "You! One so lowly and humble. Are *you the one* they call the King of the Jews?" is the idea.

Jesus responds, "*Sayest thou this of thyself, or did others tell it thee concerning me?*" Driving to the point of what Pilate *himself* might have learned, Jesus was showing that his only knowledge was apparently from others. Pilate snaps back, "*Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and chief priests have delivered thee unto me. What hast thou done?*" Ravi Zacharias points out that Jesus was exposing the "disingenuousness of what lay behind his question—mere ceremonial curiosity." (*Jesus Among Other Gods*, p. 145). Pilate was definitely irritated. As the latter portion of the interview shows, he was skeptical about the very nature of truth itself (v. 38).

You will notice Pilate did not really answer Jesus' question. In essence Pilate was asked, "Are you really seeking truth, or mockingly repeating what you have heard from others?" Exposed was his second-hand doubt. He had obviously not investigated the question of Jesus' deity for himself, nor did he seem to be so inclined. Is it not interesting that with so much scorn heaped upon Christians by a secular world for having *second-hand faith*, some of which is justified, very few turn the tables on doubters? Why "do we not show the same distrust of second-hand doubt? If it is possible for a person's belief to be merely an echo of someone else's faith, are there not hypocrites in doubt also?" (Ibid., 145). This was not really a genuine search for truth on the part of the governor, but a sarcastic thrust.

This is precisely what occurs in today's world. Skeptics are many, but few of them actually have done much investigating themselves. Normally, they are repeating what they have heard elsewhere. Very few actually think for themselves today. But be sure of this. It is **not** because anyone has weighed Christianity in the balances of sound reasoning and found it wanting. It is because they have inherited a **second-hand doubt**.