

# The Waldensians Are We Ready?

By: Jim Hohnberger

"They loved not their lives unto the death." Rev. 12:11. The Waldensians were a pure, simple and fervent people, treasuring the word of God and liberty of conscience above life itself. Their greatest enemy was the apostate church; those who would not conform their characters to the great standard of God's word, but erected a standard to suit themselves, and determined to compel all to conform to it or suffer loss of rights, property and life itself.

No charge could be brought against the moral character of the Waldensians. Even the Apostate church declared them to be a peaceable, quiet, pious people. But their grand offense was that they would not worship God according to the will of the apostate church! For this crime, every humiliation, insult, and torture that men or devils could invent was heaped upon them. History reveals that it was an apostate church that crucified Christ and slew the apostles, it was an apostate church that persecuted the Waldensians and Scripture foretells that it will be an apostate church in the closing hours of the earth's history that the devil will most effectively use to make war with "the remnant of her seed."

"The remnant of her seed", that's us, or is it? Are

we ready? Are we ready to stand as these pure, simple, fervent people stood? That's the question our family continually asked ourselves as we visited the Waldensian valleys in northern Italy. This is a question we all must seriously ponder! For there will again be a pure, simple and fervent people, who will so live for the glory and honor of God that the indignation of the apostate church and world will again be aroused and persecution such as this world has never witnessed revived.

*Are we ready?* That question kept reoccurring in our family's conversation as we roamed through their valleys that were home and a shield to this pure church in the wilderness. We viewed Mt. Casteluzzo, where 1000's of fathers, mothers and their children were flung from the mighty precipices to be dashed upon the rocks below and left to die a lingering, painful death, rather than surrender their apostolic faith to that of an apostate church. As we did I asked my family, "Are we ready to stand in defense of the pure truth even at the cost of our lives?" To my surprise the question didn't seem to stir the response I anticipated. Then later that day when we were standing on the edge of a precipice, I again asked the question, and again to my surprise there was not

much of a response. Then I took my son's arm, as if to toss him over the cliff and told him, if he would cease his worshiping on the 7th day Sabbath and agree to attend church on Sunday and follow the majority, I would not fling him over the precipice to be dashed on the rocks below. As I moved him toward the edge, the reality of the life or death decision took hold. His flesh was aroused to preserve life at all cost. What would he do? Would he compromise and preserve his earthly life? Or choose to live by the word of God, regardless of the consequences?

We all agreed in "profession", we'd choose principle, but when standing on the edge of the precipice and being moved toward the thought of a violent death, every cell in our bodies revolted from such a fatal decision. Would we "love not our lives until the death" for the sake of a conscience void of offense toward God and man? We all decided that God never gives the needed grace until the moment of actual need. We did however come away with the stark reality that, if we are not making choices for right today, we won't make the principled choices for right when its a matter of life and death! God doesn't just magically prepare us at the time of the crisis, no He prepares us day by day with principled decisions, until these decisions become habit and habit becomes our character. That's how it was with the Waldensians and that's how it must be with us, if we are to live as they did. Are you making those decisions? Are you daily choosing against inclination and impulse, against feeling and emotion, appetite and passion, if so then you will most likely stand for truth as did the Waldensians. If not you are not ready for what is soon to come upon us as an overwhelming surprise.

In all there are seven valleys that run like fingers from a hub that make up the natural fortress of the Waldensian valleys in the Alps of northern Italy. They were accessible only by foot through some areas, so steep and rugged that but one person could walk the trail safely. Some of these trails or remnants of these trails still exist today. One trail that we were on skirted a sheer rock ledge and to veer more than six or eight

inches from the trail would have been to plunge oneself into the raging torrent that lie beneath. Today most of the trails in the lower valleys have succumb to paved roads, but in the upper reaches of these valleys are still the ancient paths that these committed people walked.

We hiked and trekked through all seven of the valleys; Rora, Bobbio, Prali, Lucerna, Balsiglia, Angrogna and our favorite the Pra Del Torno. We agreed that we'd search out its remotest parts and look for a site that we as a family would have settled on. We enjoyed walking up and through the lower settlements. Here the stone homes were often clustered together in little hamlets comprising of up to 10 or 12 family units. These quaint hamlets were almost always associated with a mountain stream, winding its way through. They were always situated in such a way that their slopes caught the southern sun and had ample ground that could be terraced for their gardens.

Desiring a more remote location, we hiked even higher, entering one hamlet after another until we were in the very heart of the Pra Del Torno, where 1000's had given up their lives over the decades rather than succumb to an apostate faith. Here at 5,500 feet, where the tree line begins to cease and the rocky crags take over, we found our refuge. We named it Kintla, which means, end of the line. Off by itself was a simple rock home measuring 12' X 30', having the living quarters above and the stable beneath. It was nestled into the mountainside and shielded by a large rock out cropping to the south and a ridge of large pines to the west.

Here they methodically terraced the mountainside; every inch of ground that could be used was used, and by God's blessings, the earth produced enough food to sustain their lives. It was evident that at a later date a one room addition was added to the humble stone lodging, probably for their children. Then as the children grew into adulthood, it was evident that two more small stone dwellings were added. We speculated that as the children married they opted to live close to their parents, for to venture out of these valleys meant sure death or apostasy. We discussed the setting, the

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hard life style and the self-denial and self-discipline it would take to live such a life. Would we have chosen to live such a life for the sake of scriptural purity, for freedom to worship God according to our conscience and the word of God? Or would we have chosen to follow the majority? Would we have chosen privation over ease? Would we have chosen loss of every worldly comfort for a conscience void of offense? As we discussed the degradation of the times we live in, we knew that the time wasn't too far distant in which we'd have the opportunity to answer these questions in a practical way.

My wife had noticed that there were no bathrooms nor even outhouses in any of the homes or hamlets. It was also evident that most of the dwellings had no kitchens. The cooking area quite often was located outside in the midst of the dwellings and here the wives would meet, in the open air, to fix their simple fare.

As our family viewed the Waldensians simple life and fair we all sensed the utter devotion these people possessed and in comparison sensed our need to recommit our lives that we too might live for His honor and glory alone. We sensed the need to go beyond the believing and voicing of the principles of truth, to the **living them out** more in our lives, in our marriage and in our family. Let us take still another look into the lives of these people and ask ourselves, are we ready? Are we, are our families ready to stand through a time of trouble such as never was? See Rev. chapters 13 & 14.

The Waldensian parents, tender and affectionate as they were, loved their children too wisely to accustom them to **self-indulgence**. Before them was a life of trial and hardship, perhaps a martyr's death. So they were educated from childhood to endure hardness, to submit to parental authority and yet to think and act for themselves. Very early they were taught to bear responsibilities, to be guarded in speech, and to understand the wisdom of silence, for one indiscreet word might imperil the lives of hundreds of their brethren.

From our observations in our travels it is obvious that the vast majority of our youth are self-indulged, are not accustomed to difficulties or hardships. Most do not

submit to parental authority nor bear responsibility well and certainly are not guarded in their speech, nor understand the wisdom of silence. Such a work lies ahead of us, if we are truly going to be, in reality, "the remnant of her seed." We are not ready friends, we need to desperately get our base camps in order, for our children are not ready and neither are their parents.

Parents ask yourself and be honest, are your children self indulged? Are they guarded in their speech? Do they bear hardship and difficulty well? Are they responsible? When under trial do they prove to be Daniels? If not they are not ready. To prepare them will require time, lots of devoted time. To get this time will require sacrifice of that which is stealing our time such as worldly prosperity and ease and a thousand topics that invite attention, that consume our time and end in nothing.

The Waldensians sacrificed their worldly prosperity and ease for the sake of the spiritual welfare of themselves and their children. Their homes were so simple, built without mortar from the native rock in their mountain valleys. Their modest homes varied in size from 200 to 800 square feet and were located in a country or secluded setting, free from the corrupting influences of the society about them. Every spot of tillable land including the less fertile hillsides and mountain sides were arduously and perseveringly made to yield their increase. No mortgage encumbered their properties nor were worldly influences allowed within their borders. Hard work, simple fare, close economy, often hardship and privation was their lot, but what a blessing was theirs in the asylum from the corruption, wickedness and wrath of the world and the apostate church.

Have we sought such an asylum for our families? Are we sacrificing our families for the sake of worldly prosperity and ease? The apostle Paul pleads for us to seek such an asylum when he admonishes us to, "come out from among them, and be ye separate." II Cor. 6:17. John the Revelator also has echoed the call, "And I heard another voice from heaven saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye

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receive not of her plagues." Rev 18:4. The Waldensians took seriously these principles of God's word and thus, for over a thousand years maintained the ancient faith.

Are we determined to maintain our allegiance to God and to preserve the purity and simplicity of the apostolic faith? How many of us are following the counsel found in God's word to get out of the cities, to get out of debt and to provide an asylum from the corruption and wickedness of the world and the fornication of the apostate church? The counsel is all there but how many of us are following it? When Noah was given instructions to build an ark of safety, he followed every detail to the letter! If he wouldn't have, neither he nor his family would have been ready for the storm! The vast majority of us are not ready for the storm. God has provided us with the instructions, but we have not been as diligent as Noah and thus we are not ready for what is soon to come upon us as an overwhelming surprise. My heart aches as I think of the privileges and advantages we have had and yet are not ready!

For over 1,000 years the Waldensians preserved the apostolic faith, in its purity, and were responsible for planting the seeds of the reformation. But this could not have been, if their base camps weren't in order. Friends, our base camps are in disarray, lets put them in order and then like the Waldensians, send out missionaries to the front lines to not only warn the world but to practically show them how to put the base camps in order. The world is starving for such a demonstration, and God is patiently waiting, let us not linger any longer.

"They loved not their lives unto the death", Rev. 12:11, is all encompassing, it goes beyond where any of us have yet ventured, but are all called to! It involves such a commitment that we'll be willing to sacrifice everything and anything to know God better and experience Him more. There will be no sacrifice too great, if we can be but drawn closer to our Lord and Saviour. Only the Holy Spirit can tell you what it is that is keeping you from possessing Him to the fullest. Each of us needs to search our own hearts and with Christ by our side, enter into the needed changes. Some may have to change their employment or occupation in order to get control of their lives. Some may need to sell their homes, property and possessions in order to simplify and be debt

free. Others will have to learn to manage anew their time, talent and finances which will call them to new levels of self-denial and discipline. Still others will have intense struggles with their hereditary and cultivated habits and traits of character. But if we are going to be ready, then we must now begin to possess that which we are called to.

Are we willing to suffer **all** things for, "the Word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." Rev. 1:9. Are we ready to make such a commitment? Will it be said of us that, "They loved not their lives unto the death?" Rev 12:11. If so, then like the Waldensian's eternal vigilance will be our only safety for we must choose to follow Christ at the loss of all things. We left that historic valley with renewed interest in our hearts to live out all the principles that God has called His last day people to. Viewing their dedication, renewed and instilled new dedication in our lives. As a family we agreed we would "love not our lives till the death." we would value the principles of truth above houses and lands, friends, kindred, even life itself.

### **Power for Living**



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