

(Held in) Sin's *dread* Sway

"What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ..." *Philippians 3:8, NIV*

When I hear the tune, "I'd Rather Have Jesus," it transports me back to my childhood. In my home, growing up, whenever the Billy Graham Crusades were televised, the TV was tuned to them. Many times, a white-haired George Beverly Shea would be the soloist, with that booming voice singing the lyrics by Rhea Miller to the music composed by Shea himself. The song was written (1922) long before my time; my childhood was no doubt the end of that particular era of ministry with Shea and the loved and respected evangelist, Billy Graham.

The song conjures up for me the evangelical culture that raised me. Recently, a talented musician from my church played and sang this hymn of the past. He gave the song a new sound, however, with the same simple lyrics. I was struck by how the words still echo such strong truths: don't follow fame and fortune, but set your life by following Christ. The chorus is simple: *Than to be the king of a vast domain / Or be held in sin's dread sway; / I'd rather have Jesus than anything / This world affords today.*

I thought about the phrase, "held in sin's dread sway." We live in a world where we deconstruct everything. We get degrees in

philosophy, psychology, and sociology. We think about our thinking and other people's thinking and draw conclusions of why certain groups think and respond in certain ways. In our twenty-first century world, public opinion is completely devoid of the idea of what it means to be "held in sin's dread sway." Yet there is truth in these words that cannot be omitted when we deal with young people or ourselves, no matter what century. It isn't a very popular concept—dealing with our sin nature.

We want to give everyone and everything a label, a reasonable explanation of why our behaviour doesn't make the mark. I believe that in our attempts to understand what is going on inside a person's mind, society can miss a key root that explains the depravity of our soul as is stated in Jeremiah 17: "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? 'I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve'" (9–10, NIV).

Christians have to look in the mirror and face that the reality of our humanity includes sin. The classical definition of sin was stated first by Augustine of Hippo: a word, deed, or desire in opposition to the eternal law of God. We have this based on the authority of Romans 3:23: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..." The beautiful picture of the gospel story is that we have a hope of redemption to deal with the sin that stains our soul. However, as George Beverly Shea sang, it is so much better to follow Jesus than to be held captive in "sins dread sway." With every culture on the globe and every time period in history, there is that sin that, as the writer of Hebrews says, so easily besets us (12:1).

Experimentation with substance, negative peer pressure, poor media selections, relationship choices: these are all roads young people need to navigate. The Christian Action Federation purposes to help young people make wise decisions and encourages them to live in the way God wants us to live. The mission of living a life pleasing to God can't simply be done through our own efforts, but by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to avoid the pitfalls of a sinful life. Ravi Zacharias gives us insight into the wrong path of sin: "Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay." **Teach the youth in your sphere of influence to be led by "His nail-pierced hand."**

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Ravi Zacharias

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