

# Kicking Against the Pricks

#0715

Study by W.D. Frazee—February 22, 1958

Saul had been deeply convicted by the preaching of Stephen. God was working in his heart, seeking to impress him of the truth of the Gospel. But his pride and prejudice rose in resistance, so God had to do something special to save this man. On the road to Damascus Jesus appeared to Saul in a vision. A light brighter than the sun blotted out all other things and brought him face to face with the Lord.

“And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecute thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecute: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks” Acts 9:4.

It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. Paul was doing something that was difficult. What was it? He was kicking.

I wonder if there is any heart here that is on a hard road. If you are on a hard road, then Jesus offers you a different way. He called Paul from that hard way, and he never went back to it. From that time on Paul was on a different road. He was on the road with Jesus, the road of submission, the road of surrender and harmony with God.

Until this revelation Paul had been on the road of kicking against the pricks; of resisting the Spirit of God and the convictions of his own conscience.

If there is anyone here who is going contrary to his conscience, you know it is a hard road.

I was going up to Chicago a few nights ago. Riding in the coach in the seats just in front of me were three or four men who had quite a bit of whiskey in them, and were putting more in from moment to moment.

I watched them for several hours, and I got a little picture of what is going on in the world at the present time. I was much impressed as one of them leaned over the aisle and said to a fellow traveler, “I hate this stuff.” But he kept on drinking it.

True, they were laughing and cutting up and keeping everybody awake. I suppose some people think that is the way to have a good time. But as I heard that fellow say he hated that stuff, I recognized that instead of being a free man, he was a slave.

A few days ago a doctor gave me a copy of the latest report released from the American Cancer Society dealing with the question of lung cancer and the relation of

cigarette smoking to lung cancer. While the presentation is in subdued language, nevertheless that makes it all the more powerful. The facts that are presented are that the chances of getting lung cancer are greatly multiplied by smoking.

When this first came out some months ago, the tobacco companies began to get alarmed because their sales dropped. But their sales have bounced back, and now they are selling more than before. Why? Because the people who are using tobacco are by and large slaves. There are millions who would like to quit. Some of the men who worked on these reports continue with smoking even though they know, and were telling the world that tobacco smoke is causing lung cancer.

It is a hard road. But it is not the hardness due to alcohol or tobacco that I would have you think about especially. Neither one of those things were bothering Paul. It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

What was Paul doing that was hard? He was moving in a certain direction, and all the way he had to resist the striving of the Spirit. He had to resist the convictions of his own conscience.

Thousands of people are living that way. The thing they do is the thing they know they ought not to do. And the thing that they would like to do they don't do. Paul describes it in the first person, singular:

“For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I” Romans 7:14-15.

Isn't that a pitiful situation?

“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwells no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do” Romans 7:18-19.

“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” Romans 7:24.

To know that you ought to do a certain thing, and lack what it takes to do it is a wretched state. And to go ahead and do the thing you know you ought not to do is not a comfortable thing. Thousands of people are in that condition.

On the other hand, Paul tells us how to be happy:

“Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemns not himself in that thing which he allow” Romans 14:22.

It is a wonderful thing to look back over the things we have done on a given day and know that conscience approves. It is a wonderful thing to look at the thing we are planning to do tomorrow and know that conscience approves. Is that your experience? If it isn't, then you are kicking against the pricks, and it is a sad road.

If you keep doing the thing you know is wrong, sooner or later one of two things will happen. Either you will get ulcers or high blood pressure or heart trouble or a nervous breakdown from the tension of it, or else you will find some way of getting rid of those striving with conscience. You will find some way to dull them, to dim them, to destroy them so you no longer feel the pricks of conscience.

Medical science have discovered thousands of cases of ulcers and other diseases that can be traced directly to guilt, fear, worry, tension. But sad to say, many a doctor's remedy is to find something to change the patient's attitude toward what he is doing without changing what he is doing. To deliver him from the fear and worry and guilt without delivering him from the sin.

For example, there was a certain man who was having trouble because he couldn't get along with his wife. He got a divorce and got well.

Is that the cure, friends?

We have this great craze sweeping America today in the purchase of drugs called tranquilizers. Millions of those little pills are being sold. What for? To tranquilize people's minds. Their minds are upset. Their minds are worried. Their minds are fearful. And in many cases it is guilt that is troubling them. Just as with Paul, it is hard to kick against the pricks.

What shall we say about the effect of a little pill, which when a man takes it he no longer worries about his conscience? He feels tranquil now. He is at peace.

Is that the road you will take? Is that the way you will deal with tensions and worries that come when you do the thing you know is wrong, and don't do the thing you know is right?

There are other ways to take tranquilizers besides in a pill. There are false doctrines that have the same effect. Paul says:

“Now the Spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils. Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron”  
1 Timothy 4:1-2.

What happens to the conscience under these doctrines of devils? It is like you would take a hot iron and sear the brain. Brain cells are not replaced.

There are many deceptive doctrines today. Some openly are non-Christian, but others bear the Christian label. The effect of these doctrines is to say to the wicked, It will be well with you. Don't get so worried. Don't get fussed up about

things. Don't be so conscientious. God is good. He is merciful. He is not going to hurt anybody. He loves you. He is all love. Go ahead and love God and treat your neighbor well, and don't worry about all these things that are troubling your conscience.

What does it do to the conscience? It sears it with a hot iron. I hope nobody will take that road.

There is another road that is subtle. When Lucifer first started on the road to rebellion, he began to think about his grievances. He began to weigh the matter if he was right and God was wrong, or whether it was the other way around. The thing that caused him to take the final plunge against God in rebellion was that he had a lot of friends who came around and patted him on the back and agreed with him that he was abused. Poor Lucifer, they don't treat you right, do they? And if the other angels had backed up God instead of Lucifer, there would never have been that rebellion in which one third of the angels lost their way.

I want you to think of it. Because Lucifer had encouragement and sympathy in his attitude, he was led to go on in rebellion against God until he withdrew one third of those bright stars.

We are inclined to think that sympathy is always a good thing, but it isn't. It may be a devil inspired thing. We are never to sympathize with rebellion. We are never to sympathize with disobedience. We are never to sympathize with the breaking of the laws of God. If we do we become guilty with the transgressor, and a partaker of his evil deeds.

But my point is that the soul who may be under the convictions of conscience over his evil way is lulled to sleep by the sympathizing words of his so-called friends. So he begins to think, Well, I guess it isn't so bad after all. Maybe it is all right. My friends seem to think so. So he finally comes to the place where he can sleep with it.

I have showed you different ways to get rid of the conscience that keeps you awake. One is through drugs. Another is through the dangerous doctrines of the Devil. And another is through the unsanctified sympathy of friends who would confirm you in your evil course and say, Oh, don't worry about that. You will be all right.

Through any or all of those ways the conscience will be lulled to sleep. It may be put out of working order. You may avoid the ulcers, the heart trouble that the fellow gets through the tensions that are created. But it is better to enter into life maimed than having two feet, hands, or eyes to be cast into hell.

The worse thing in the world is not to have a guilty conscience. The worse thing is to be in guilt without the conscience recognizing it and crying out against it.

I couldn't help but think of that text that Ezekiel and Jeremiah speak of. The ancient prophets were want to repeat it, for God saw that they needed to repeat it. Speaking of the false prophets of that time, Jeremiah and Ezekiel says:

“They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace” Jeremiah 6:14.

Peace pills, as someone has called these tranquilizers, are not the way to God's peace. It doesn't make any difference whether they come in bottles or books. Every attempt to quiet the conscience without getting rid of the thing that is pricking is labor lost. It is worse than lost, it is wicked.

“It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.” Do you get the picture? God is moving in a certain direction. He is pleading with the soul, but the soul resists. If pulled along at all it is pulled against the pressure of his own desires. Constant turmoil and strain between conscience on the one hand and the soul's desires and acts on the other.

It is a hard thing to pull a car when it is in reverse gear. It can be done, but it is hard on the motor. It is hard on everything in the car.

Are you expecting God to pull you ahead with all that going on? Why not get in gear with God? Why not get in harmony with God? And the same thing is true with our brothers and sisters that God wants us to work with.

It is a hard thing on a child in the home when the parents are trying to lead toward heaven and harmony with the law of God, and the child is in some underhanded way trying to pull in a different direction. Son or daughter, why not be above board? Why not get in gear with God and your father and mother? It is hard to kick against the pricks.

Sometimes it is in the school. The teachers are trying to lead in a certain direction toward lifting up the standards of God. But some student has an idea. Solomon tells what the idea is:

“Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant” Proverbs 9:17.

The real fun is to break the rules. If you want to have a good time, you will never find it with this slow bunch. You will never get it waiting for them to let you do this or that or the other things. If you really want a good time, you will have to find your own way to get it.

In putting this down, Solomon doesn't say that is the truth. He is quoting the words of a foolish woman (verse 13). And it leads to the depths of hell (verse 18). To partake of the idea that to do the thing that is forbidden is the way to have a good time is the philosophy of hell.

But hell is not just when you get to the lake of fire. No, no. One of the phases of hell a person enters by taking a defiant attitude toward the regulations God has set up in the home, the school, the church, the institution, is that he puts himself out of gear. Then he begins to have a guilty conscience, and he blames it on other people.

Lucifer did in heaven. He began to feel constricted and restricted. Well, he wasn't. All heaven had been in unity and harmony for ages. But just as soon as a person begins to do the thing that is contrary, and gets himself out of gear, then he begins to feel that other people are wrong and too hard and cruel. So he begins to have all sorts of strife in his heart. He communicates that to others. And if he gets a bit of sympathy, it is all the worse.

It is hard to kick against the pricks. I am glad it is. It ought to be. And I hope that none of us will be giving out the tranquilizing drugs of wrong sympathy. Let us encourage everyone who is in a tumult because they can't get what they want in the right way. Let's say, Friend, maybe you are going at this thing in the wrong way. Maybe you are kicking against the pricks. Maybe that is why you are upset. Might it not be a good thing to get in gear with God and your brethren, and find the way of peace the Scriptures offer?

I pray that God will teach every one of us that way.

Saul, Saul, why persecute thou Me? Who is this who is talking? That's what Saul said, and the Lord said, "I am Jesus whom thou persecute."

The man who is kicking against the pricks is persecuting Jesus. That is the thing I want you to see. The man who is violating his conscience, who has put himself out of gear with man and God, who has chosen the way of disobedience, is persecuting Jesus.

It is not only hard on the man, it is hard on God. Jesus said, Saul, what you are doing is hard on you, and it is hard on Me.

Do you know why it is hard on Jesus? Because He loves you and me. Every time we get wounded, it wounds Jesus. Every time our spirits are torn the heart of God is torn. Every time we are burdened under that load of guilt and sin, the heart of Jesus is burdened. He identifies Himself with us.

You and I are the only ones who can release Him from that suffering. You and I are the only ones who can bring an end to that burden.

So Jesus said, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me? Why do you do it? Oh, why do you keep on doing the thing that hurts you and hurts Me?

The best answer to that is that there is no answer. There are a lot of excuses, but no good answers. Saul didn't ever give a good answer on that. It wasn't intended that he should. The thing that Jesus wanted him to see was that there was no reason for him to do it.

That is exactly the conclusion Saul came to. He threw down his weapons in full submission, and from that time he walked with his Lord instead of walking contrary to Him.

I think of those words addressed to the Lord hundreds of years ago, God, Thou hast made us for Thyself, and we are restless until we rest in Thee. That is true. Always kicking against the pricks. Always finding that which wounds and burdens us until we lay down our arms in full submission and surrender to Christ.

But the thing we must see tonight is that when we suffer, Christ suffers. While we suffer because we are out of gear with God, God is suffering because we are out of gear with Him. And there is nothing God can do about it but plead and follow us with His love, and seek to help us. Yet how many are fleeing from the One who would give them life?

One of the reasons Saul went to Damascus was because he was trying to flee from his conscience. He was so upset and burdened and afraid that he plunged into another mad endeavor to drive those thoughts from him.

That should be a lesson to all of us in soul winning. Just because someone seems to be far from God and peace is no reason we should cease to pray for them. They may be near the point where they will lay down their arms and make a full surrender to Jesus. Shouldn't that encourage us?

Saul was trying to flee from God, but Jesus was following him. If there is any soul who has been kicking against the pricks, I tell you, Jesus is following you too.

When we see that God is seeking us not to chastise us but to love us, not to make us slaves but to make us free, not to bind us but to deliver us, and when we see that smile of love it breaks the heart as it broke Saul's heart on the Damascus road.

It is a wonderful thing to surrender to love.

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