

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Unread Letters

A childhood accident resulted in poet Elizabeth Barrett becoming an invalid and recluse. Despite her isolation her early poetry drew the attention of Robert Browning who began courting her. He eventually asked for her hand in marriage and Elizabeth and Robert were married in 1846. But there's more to the story.

In her youth, Elizabeth had been watched closely by her tyrannical father. He was strict beyond reason and attempted to prevent suitors from courting her. In fact, he did not want any of his children to marry. As a result, Elizabeth and Robert eloped, their wedding held in secret because of her father's disapproval.

After the wedding the Brownings sailed for Italy, where they lived for the rest of their lives -- exiled from her parents. Even though her parents had disowned her, Elizabeth never gave up on the relationship. Almost weekly she wrote them letters. Some were fairly lengthy, others short and poetical in form. Not once did they reply.

After ten years, Elizabeth received a large box in the mail. Inside, she found all of her letters. Not a single one had been opened. Elizabeth's years of writing, her letters pleading for reconciliation -- were for naught.

Today those letters are among the most beautiful in classical English literature. Had her parents only read a few of them, their relationship with Elizabeth might have been restored.

What makes the story of Elizabeth Barrett Browning so compelling is that it is so similar to another story. A story that is repeated over and over again -- generation after generation.

You see, there are other letters which have been written but not read. Beautiful letters. Letters of reconciliation. Letters of hope. We know them better as epistles. These letters, written by men, but authored by God through the Holy Spirit have been written for our reconciliation, for our salvation. Sadly, they often go unnoticed, unread, unheeded. Indeed, the entire Bible, God's Word, is a book pleading for reconciliation. What is amazing is that God is pleading with us for reconciliation but He has done nothing wrong. We are the ones who have gone astray (II Peter 2:15), and yet God begs for our reconciliation.

In Colossians 1:18-23, Paul speaking of Christ says, "*it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross*" Why? Why would God give His only begotten Son for all of us who have gone astray? Paul tells us in verse 22: "*in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach.*" Paul's letter speaks of reconciliation and of hope. Are you listening? What a beautiful letter. It would be a shame if it were never read, or if read, ignored.

- by Matt Hennecke

ON OUR WAY, DAY BY DAY

Wherefore we faint not; but though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16). The "outward man" is simply the house of the inward man. Day by day that house is "decaying" and wasting away. Who, past forty, needs reminding? Nevertheless, with relentless rapping on the door of our minds come the messengers of aging; the hoary head, the stooped shoulders, the wrinkled skin,

the dimmed vision, and all the other infirmities that won't let us forget what Paul says. All men know that much. But God's people know something else.

They know that just as surely as the outward man is decaying, the inward man is being renewed day by day. They know that for the faithful Christian, growing older means growing better. He is growing better because he is growing in the knowledge of God's word. As the newborn babe, he continually longs for the "spiritual milk which is without guile" (1 Pet. 2:2). As he grows in knowledge of the word, he also grows in the faith that is produced by the word (Rom. 10:17). As he grows in knowledge and faith, he also grows in usefulness to the cause of Christ. He is renewed in his determination to live closer to the Lord, to do what is right and oppose all wrong. In his spiritual growth, the aging Christian has learned that death is not the end, but merely a transition to something very far better. The happy anticipation of being in the Father's house makes leaving this worn out tabernacle a welcomed blessing!

That's why the apostle Paul saw death as gain. But death is gain only when living is for the Lord. Every living man knows that he will keep his appointment with death (Heb. 9:27). He should know that living for the Lord is living at its best because it is living that prepares for death. Though the outward man is perishing and bound for the dust, we nourish and cherish him; we spare no expense to care for him and tend to his needs. Will we neglect the needs of the inward man that we know will survive the grave? With every tick of the clock and every beat of the heart we are getting closer to the end of this life.

The question is are we getting closer to heaven?

by Dan Shipley

**Upon my birth I began to see;
Nourishment and time made me grow.
Now I choose what will be
From what my Dad made me to know.
Did he give me what I needed
To fight harsh evil the world has known?
To stand for the Lord as Mama pleaded,
Leaving the world to praise at His throne?**

- > A reduction in the wages of sin is unlikely.
 - > Destroy the faith of a nation and you destroy the nation.
 - > Character is like the foundation of a house; it's below the surface.
 - > The Bible is a book of principles as well as promises.
 - > Many people who "know the lingo" don't know the Lord.
 - > We can't make Jesus mean anything to others until He means everything to us.
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SUNDAY'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *"The Priestly Blessing!"* (text: Num. 6:22-27); Sunday evening: Jesus Christ: A Closer Look – *Teaching Many Things in Parables!* (Mark 4:1-20) [pt. 2].