

The Old Hickory

Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

841 Old Hickory Blvd.

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THINGS THAT WOULD HELP CHURCH GROWTH

As children of God in this community we are vitally concerned about the growth of the Lord's church. This is synonymous to our love for souls and desire for others to be converted to Christ. I think you would agree that we need to grow. We must exercise diligence in seeking and using every opportunity to teach others the gospel of Christ.

WE MUST USE OUR MOUTHS. Hebrews 5:12 teaches the responsibility that each Christian has to develop himself so he can teach others – “you ought to be teachers.” Every new Christian sets his path to learn and grow, and is always in a position to teach others what he has learned along the way. Certainly one who obeys the gospel knows **WHY** he did, and can at least teach that much to someone else. Our Lord commands us to make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to observe all commands of the Lord, including the command just stated (Matt. 28:18-20).

Many of us use our mouths for the wrong things. As teachers of God's word and agents of Christ, we must be careful what we say. A loose tongue will hurt people, damage reputations, demonstrate that we love to indulge in sins of the tongue, thwart spiritual growth in others and close doors that the Lord has opened for teaching. (See James 3:5-12; Proverbs 10:19; 13:3; 26:20) The church cannot grow as it could when such sins prevail.

WE MUST USE OUR EYES. Just as Jesus' disciples were to use their eyes, we must use ours: "'Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and *then* comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest" (John 4:35). We must see in every person a soul that is worth more than all the world (Matthew 16:26). Until we do, we will not get fired up about teaching Jesus Christ in public and private places (Acts 5:42; 20:20). Every member must come to see his personal responsibility as a Christian to spread the gospel.

In order to save souls, we must get people to take their eyes off of things that this world has to offer and get them to see what God has to offer. That is a self-defeating task if our own eyes are set upon temporal things. Jesus warned about taking our eyes off of heaven and putting them on mammon (material riches). That person is serving the wrong Lord; he is evil, he is full of darkness (Matthew 6:19-24). We must not be like the nations that moved into Samaria: "So while these nations feared the LORD, they also served their idols;" (2 Kings 17:41). Friend, do you attend the services of the church but spend every other minute serving mammon? Do we need to purchase "eye salve" from the Lord? (Revelation 3:15-18).

WE MUST USE OUR EARS. They must always be open to hear the word of God. Cornelius, his kinsmen, and his near friends are good examples of open-eared, gospel-hearers. They listened with a desire to obey God (Acts 10:24, 33, 48). Many throughout history have had hearts that are waxed gross, ears that are dull of hearing, and eyes that are closed (Matthew 13:10-17). Spiritual growth

comes when we eat spiritual food which is received through the holes on either side of our heads.

We must also guard our ears in order to grow. We must see that we kill every lust that would cause them to itch, realizing that a failure to do so will lead us away from truth, “sound doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:3-4). “Leave the presence of a fool, Or you will not discern words of knowledge.” (Proverbs 14:7). We must refuse to give ears of attention to those who advocate immorality, dishonesty, humanism, evolution, abortion, drunkenness, selfishness, covetousness, idolatry, strife, etc. (Romans 16:17-18; Titus 3:10-11).

WE NEED TO MAKE SACRIFICES. Many times when brethren are admonished to make sacrifices they reach for their billfold. It is true that such sacrificial giving of our prosperity spurs growth, but this is not the only area requiring sacrifices. Over the past year, how many times have you given up attending a sporting event, watching a TV program, or some other activity to teach someone the gospel of Christ, to write letters of instruction and encouragement, to visit the sick, or some similar good work? Is it likely that we will *lay down our lives for our friends* if we will not give up our TV programs for them? (John 15) Have we forgotten the discipleship requirement of denying self? (Matthew 16:24) If *wishing* people into the kingdom would work, the whole world would already be saved! There is no successful formula for accomplishing growth without exerting effort.

Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35). If we love our brethren, we will seek only their good through teaching, prayer, right attitudes, and right actions. When we love as we should the church will grow.

WE MUST BECOME PERSONALLY INVOLVED. Each of us serves God as individuals. There is no way to fulfill *every* obligation as Christians through the collective action of the church. Too many brethren feel relieved of their personal responsibility of evangelism, edification, and benevolence when they put money into the collection plate. Christianity has become a "spare time *hobby*" to some, using "spare" time and "extra" money to serve God. There is danger in thinking that an inconvenience excuses us from our responsibility. How inconvenient it must have been for Jesus to take time out of His busy schedule to suffer and die for us. Brethren, let us understand and apply Mark 12:30, "*and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.*"

Further, in our age of specialized skills in the job market, the "specialized" thinking influences our concept of religion. Such personal responsibilities as soul-winning and visiting are viewed by many as, "*Not my job!*" -- as if we have hired someone to do our work for us. We might just as easily try to hire someone to bridle our tongues for us (James 1:26). "Each one of us will give an account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12). A good servant serves his master well. He doesn't look for others to do his work for him. If each of us would bear fruit as we have opportunity and ability to do so, then God will not forget our work and the love we show toward His name (Hebrews 6:10). Brother, get *personally involved* in the work!

The church here CAN and WILL grow if EACH of us will follow the Lord's instructions. We must make use of time in order to learn, grow, develop, and conquer sin in our lives. We must recognize and appreciate the value of every soul. We must love God, love man, and love truth above all else. We must learn the meaning of sacrifice from our Lord Jesus and be gladly willing

to sacrifice also. We must work hard while totally committed and personally involved. We can achieve success at GROWTH if we are willing to pay the price! Are we?

- GFS

THINK TWICE BEFORE YOU PRAY FOR JUSTICE!

"He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities" (Psalm 103:10).

SOMETIMES WE FEEL THAT LIFE HAS NOT REPAID US FOR THE EFFORT WE'VE PUT FORTH. We know that we've made some mistakes, but even so, we feel that there's an unfair difference between what we've given and what we've gotten in return. And so we cry to God for justice. We appeal to Him to set the record straight — and to make up for the blessings that life has withheld from us.

Well, it certainly is true that in specific instances we may have been wronged and that justice has not yet been done. In such cases, the instruction of the Scriptures is clear: "Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator" (1 Peter 4:19). When real injustice has been committed, it is right to make a heartfelt plea for vindication: "How long, O Lord . . . until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (Revelation 6:9-11).

But before we pray for God's justice, most of us need to think twice. However wrongfully we may have been treated in particular situations, if ALL the evidence bearing on our lives were to be brought into the courtroom, it would be seen that, on the whole, the injustices we've SUFFERED don't add up to the injustices we've COMMITTED. We may have been mistreated here and there, but all things considered, if we've been shortchanged, it's in the area of punishment rather than that of blessing! David had grievous enemies against whom he had legitimate

complaints, but David also knew that the larger truth was this: God "has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities."

God is a God not only of justice, but also of patience. Most of us would say we're glad that He's been patient with us personally, punishing us less than we deserve. But if God chooses to be patient with those who've wronged us, punishing them less than they deserve, shouldn't we be grateful for that too? And besides, in some cases we may not even have been wronged. As the Lord sees things, our enemies may have a better argument than we do.

"Could it be that you deserve the unpleasantness you are now experiencing? Did you bring it on yourself? If you are in any way to blame then you should patiently endure the pain" (Lawrence Scupoli).

- Gary Henry, *Reaching Forward*, 2-23-12

SUNDAY'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *"Prejudice and Partiality!"* (text: 1 Tim. 5:17-21); Sunday evening: *"Leviticus: The Priest's Handbook!"*