

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Lightening the Load

So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea. (Acts 27:38)

This passage is taken from the story of Paul's shipwreck on his way to Rome. Two hundred and seventy six people were on the ship when it left Fair Havens of Crete. They only wanted to skirt around the Island to the other side. But the weather turned bad and sent them among the many Islands of the Mediterranean. Two days out they started lightening the ship (27:18). We do not know what they threw overboard, but the next day the passengers and crew threw over the ship's tackle to lighten the ship more.

The storm winds blew the ship far from Crete. Weeks later they did not even know where they were. But they could tell they were drawing near land (27:28). They checked the water depth and realized it was getting shallow fast. Paul convinced them to eat and, afterwards, they threw the ship's cargo of wheat into the water.

I wonder how important that wheat was when it was first loaded on to the ship? Maybe it was the ship's staple food supply. Maybe some merchant planned to make a lot of money when it was sold in some port. It no doubt seemed good to have on board at first, but it was only a liability to a storm-tossed ship running fast towards the Isle of Malta.

In shallow water it is imperative to float as high in the water as possible. The bottom of a ship can "run aground" miles from any dry land. With the prospect of being tossed into the sea, it is amazing what becomes expendable—even an undesirable burden. The tackle and the wheat had not only become unnecessary, it was just plain dangerous.

Wise sailors do not wait for the ship to hit the under-water rocks before lightening the ship. Once-precious cargo is happily dumped overboard before the ship is damaged.

Christians live in treacherous waters. Sin easily besets us (Hebrews 12:1). Our enemy roams around seeking to devour us (1 Peter 5:8). Lack of contentment leads to love of money, and this has shipwrecked many, many souls (1 Timothy 6:9). There is also our untamable tongues (James 3:8) and a host of other risks.

We may need to lighten our load. Any number of things may be weighing us down, leading us to sin, or making sin harder to resist. The wise Christian does not wait for a shipwreck to cast these things overboard.

Are you too busy? How often I hear someone say, "I've got too many irons in the fire." How seldom do I see that one pull any irons out! Many of us convince ourselves that we can give up just about anything "if we have to." It will be too late when our lives are already on the rocks. So, while all of our time is spent, our spirituality—our godliness—is giving way to worldliness, Christians in need are neglected and strong Christian bonds wither to scorched threads.

But there is no time to worry about that now. We need to put another TV on the credit card or buy a newer car. We may have the money and to spare, but we pay dearly in godly devotion: our treasures pile up on earth and our hearts are here also (Matthew 6:19-21).

Then there are sports and other activities. Let us "cash in" some more family time or prayer time or time for Christian exhortation. I am riding mighty low in the water, but I am having a good time. Or I would if my nerves would let me. At least I have a lot of toys, and, maybe, my kids can play ball better than any of yours.

"Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content." (1 Timothy 6:6-8) Have I taken on too much earthly weight for safe sailing? Have you? More importantly, do you—do I—really want to know?

"There's none so blind as they that won't see." - Jonathan Swift

I cannot answer for you, nor you for me. But I can tell you this for certain: the sea is shallow and rocky and the weather is unpredictable. You and I should consider lightening the load.

- Jim Hendrix

A Good Reputation

Do you have a good reputation? I know most of the people in this congregation well enough to know that your answer to that question is probably “Yes!” However, I may not know you well enough to answer the next question, “Have you honestly earned the good reputation that you enjoy?”

You see, there are several ways to come by a good reputation. It does not have to be earned. For example, people may think highly of us because we associate with the right people. Or, maybe we inherited a good reputation from our parents. Or, like the Pharisees, maybe we have falsely impressed people with an outward show of piety (Matt 6:1-18).

A reputation therefore, is only how we are known. It is only what people believe or think about us, and what they think may not be accurate. It may only be based upon outward appearances. Concerning our reputation, Proverbs 22:1 says, “A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.” As this verse points out, a good reputation is desirable, but true character is more important because character is what we really are. If you have a good reputation, have you honestly earned it? Is it an accurate reflection of your true character? Or, is it based on a false impression?

God wants us to have a good reputation that has been earned. Anything less would be hypocrisy. The example of Ananias and Sapphira is that of a couple who had a good reputation with the church in Jerusalem, but it was only an outward show of piety, and did not reflect what was truly in their hearts. They sought to impress the church by stating that they were going to give all the proceeds from the sale of a piece of property to the church, but secretly decided to keep some of the money back for themselves. They were severely disciplined by God. Again, the church in Sardis according to Rev 3:1 had a reputation of being alive but was dead. Almost any servant of God who tried to get away with an evil deed survived for a while on a false reputation (Achan, King David, the sons of Eli, etc.)

We want a good reputation, but one that has been obtained the old fashioned way, by earning it, and we do this by building the kind of character that God requires. God wants his children to be honest, sincere, genuine, above reproach, pure in heart. This is true character. The only kind of reputation worth having is one rooted in a godly character. Psalm 15 states “Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth

from his heart and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman, who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the Lord, who keeps his oath even when it hurts, who lends his money without usury and does not accept a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will not be shaken."

God wants people who are more concerned about their character than their reputation. A good reputation is worth having, but make sure it is based on character. A good reputation which is based on lies will eventually be found out, whereas a godly character, regardless of reputation, will eventually be rewarded (Matt 7:16-23; 1 Cor. 4:5).

- Ed Barnes

BEWARE!

"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23). Christians are engaged in a lifetime struggle with sin. We must constantly be alert remembering that:

Sin is SEASONAL. Moses refused "to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a SEASON." (Heb. 11:24). This recognizes that there is some pleasure in sin but reminds us that the sorrow which comes at the end of sin's pleasurable season is never worth the pleasure of that season.

Sin is a SEEKER. The Bible warns, "Be sure your sin will find you out." (Num. 32:23). In 1950 eleven men stole \$2,775,395 in the great Brinks robbery. For four years and 361 days it appeared they had committed a "perfect crime." But just four days before the statute of limitations expired and the crime could not have been acted upon, the F.B.I, caught them. Sin always seeks out its doer and sooner or later destroys him.

Sin is a SEPARATOR. Isaiah lamented over Israel, "Your sins have separated you and your God." (Isa 59:2). Sin subtly but surely brings a breach between man and God, until eventually the separation is for eternity.

Sin is SLAVERY. Jesus teaches, "Everyone that commits sin is the slave of sin." (John 8:34). Sin works like a vise in slowly binding its victim until escape is impossible. Let us ever be thankful that we can conquer sin.

— Ellis Long

BUILDING CHARACTER

O, did you know the little thoughts
That flutter through your mind
Are always either good and pure
Or selfish and unkind?
And did you know that what you think
And what you say today
Will make you what you are to be
Because you grow that way?
Your life is built just like a house
The things you think and do
Are like the brick the builders use,
For they are building you.
The brick that crumble none would want
To build into a wall,
Because when winds begin to blow
The house would quickly fall.
And so to build your character
And build it strong and sure,
Use pleasant words, do kindly deeds
And let your thoughts be pure.

- unknown

- > "You will never have a friend here on earth, if you must have one without a fault!"
 - > "Many people have too much to live on, and too little to live for!"
 - > "Anger is a wind which blows out the lamp of the mind!"
 - > "If you cause a man to think he is right when he is wrong, you are a hypocrite!"
 - > "When children begin to sow "wild oats," it's time for the parents to start the threshing machine!"
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THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *"Expressing Grace From the Cross"* (Text: Luke 23:33-34); Sunday evening: *"Never Again Will They Train For War!"* (Micah 4:1-3).