

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Your Conscience: Dead or Alive?

Hardly anyone speaks of the conscience anymore. As a society, our “conscience” hardly even “bothers” us any longer. We have become so accustomed to all kinds of wrong and all types of filthiness that we don’t even know how to blush. A Christian, however, is a man who lives by a properly ordered, well-trained conscience. In fact, violation of one’s conscience is sinful (Rom. 14:23) even if there is no inherent wrong involved. Meat-eating was not sinful per se, but if a person had scruples against it, Paul said he should not eat meat. The lesson: Don’t violate your conscience. If careful study of God’s word and earnest prayer causes you to change your scruples and allows you to begin eating meat, then that is perfectly fine. But if your conscience cries out in anguish at the very sight of hamburger — then leave it alone. It would be sinful for you to go contrary to this inner sense of right and wrong.

Why is Scripture so insistent that the conscience not be violated? Paul, in fact, always worked “to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.” (Acts 24:16) He paid attention to his conscience, made certain that he did not abuse it, and determined not to violate it. In order to secure a clean conscience, the blood of Jesus redeemed us (Heb. 9:12-14). Baptism is an “answer of a good conscience toward God” (1 Pet. 3:21). Concerning deacons, 1 Timothy 3:9 says they must “hold the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.” The conscience, therefore, is a vessel — a container in which is held the mystery of our faith.

This being so, we can understand the necessity of an unbroken, clean conscience. Deliberate violations of conscience rupture the container in which our faith is held! If we persist in violating our conscience, our faith will leak away like water from a cracked drinking glass. When you do what you know is wrong, you cannot have a pure conscience. Without an intact conscience, sensitive to the will of God (cf. 1 Tim. 4:2), we are destroying the very thing that will keep us in the faith. 1 John 3:21,22 says “If our heart does not

condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things pleasing in His sight.”

- Mark White

Doing Good Things Better

"Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:12-14, ESV)

This article is not about exposing sin, demanding you renounce some wickedness, quit lying or stealing. While those guilty of these misbehaviors need to repent and be forgiven, this kind of thing is not the subject of this article. This article is about pressing on and straining forward to start doing good things better.

Can you pray better? Not just longer prayers, though that might be part of the progress you need to make. Consider giving more thought in framing your prayers, or expanding who and what you pray for. Initiate petitions that honor Christ, praise God, and advance the proclamation of the gospel. But also, pray for people you don't agree with and don't like. You've been engaged in prayer for many years. Now find ways to do that better. "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." Can your prayers become more effective and fervent?

Can your attendance be improved? Can you give up some of the weak excuses, gain better control of your schedule, re-think your priorities and improve your attendance? By attending every service you enjoy the advantages of edification and the encouragement you lend to others and receive from them. Christians in the early church were together and that unity was critical to their survival and their capacity to share the gospel with others. "All who believed were together," (Acts 2:44).

Can you reach out to people in a better way? Are there people you know who need you to move closer to them, get to know them and help them? For most of us, I believe, there are people we are acquainted with who need something we can give. But we have not taken the time. We have been too busy with so many of "our things." I speak not of money primarily, but of encouragement, listening, praying with, studying with and befriending.

Can you help someone begin reading the Bible? Make a list of 5 people you know. Are all five of those people reading the Bible? Pick out one and ask if they read the Bible daily? If not, offer to show them and help them get started. Periodically review or re-make your list. There is no better endeavor you can invite someone to begin. All many people need is a little encouragement.

Again, this article was not written to the idolater, the liars or false teachers. Rather, to Christians who are doing good things already. I believe we can do these things better. Let's press on toward the goal.

- Warren E. Berkley

“A Gentle and Quiet Spirit”

Many American women celebrated International Women's Day by taking the advice of some of the organizers of January's Women's March: “take to the streets and protest.” They were also encouraged to boycott their jobs, thinking that would go a long way in making people feel the adverse impact of "A Day Without a Woman." Surely there were uncountable hospitalized people who were elated that their nurses didn't boycott the medical facilities!

In the midst of contemplating the boisterous and volatile women who were screaming for the protection of what they called their “constitutional rights” to murder their unborn children (even though they confuse the innocent life inside them with “their own bodies”), I think it is a good time to remind people who have become comfortable pushing boundaries, that the God of heaven has not allowed American culture to change His views regarding the kind of character He, as Creator, expects from women making a claim to godliness (being a Christian).

One such instruction is found in 1 Peter 3. The inspired Apostle is teaching women to be submissive to their husbands, which by such behavior, they would win their husbands to Christ, “as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. Your adornment must not be merely external--braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.” (1 Peter 3:2-4). The gentle spirit does not question, object or complain against God or His word. The gentle spirit submits, without being bitter or harsh, to the role given her by God in relation to her husband. Her inner disposition is quiet and tranquil; she is at peace with God and within herself. Such tranquility of heart will manifest itself in her behavior: she causes no disturbances to other people. It is this inner self that God regards as of tremendous value!

When protestors take to the streets, the atmosphere is not very conducive to “chaste and respectful behavior.” What is one to conclude when a woman screams her support for abortion and other abominations, that she is making obvious her “gentle and quiet spirit?” Surely some have already squashed their inner tranquility (their consciences also) by the lack of natural affection displayed by murder of innocent unborn babies. Staunchly continuing such advocacy probably leaves little room for introspection regarding the development of her Christ-like character. Obvious also is the absence of respect for God and His word. How I wish it were not so!

- Gary Smalley

A Point from the Past:

I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. If it were possible for a created soul fully to 'appreciate,' that is, to love and delight in, the worthiest object of all, and simultaneously at every moment to give this delight perfect expression, then that soul would be in supreme blessedness. To praise God fully we must suppose ourselves to be in perfect love with God, drowned in, dissolved by that delight which, far from remaining pent up within ourselves as incommunicable bliss, flows out from us incessantly again in effortless and perfect expression. Our joy is no more separable from the praise in which it liberates and utters itself than the brightness a mirror receives is separable from the brightness it sheds.

- C.S. Lewis

- > “A bitter world cannot be sweetened by sour Christians!”
 - > “What we have done for ourselves dies with us — what we have done for others remains!”
 - > “Maybe you can't understand all you read in the Bible, but you can obey all you do understand!”
 - > “Religion indicates man searching for God ... Christianity shows us God in search of man!”
 - > “Nothing is more dreadful for a sinner nor more wonderful for a Christian than to be alone with God!”
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THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: “*God’s Eternal Plan!*” (Text: Eph. 3:8-13); Sunday evening: “*Jesus’ First Converts!*” #1 (Text: John 1:35-51).