

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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The Other Side of the Door

Scout the cat has been a resident of the Chandler household for a little over a year. During this time, it has become quite apparent that she suffers from a common feline malady which might simply be termed “the other-side-of-the-door syndrome.” Whether in or out makes little difference; what lies beyond her barrier appears more satisfying and appealing. In this regard, Scout demonstrates a challenge that can also be found in the human world.

It was a statement of genuine faith. As the apostle Paul closed his letter to the Philippians, he spoke of his appreciation for their concern over his needs; yet, he indicated the status of his spirituality: “I have learned in whatever situation I am in to be content” (Philippians 4:11b ESV). The word content, as used by Paul, means self-sufficiency; however, this does not mean that Paul viewed himself as living by his own wits. The remainder of his message demonstrates where he gained this sufficiency: “I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:12-13). It was through the peace of God that Paul could find his strength; it was trusting that no matter the situation, God was always present with him. In other words, the apostle did not suffer from “the other-side-of-the-door syndrome.”

The principle demonstrated by Paul is one which every Christian should strive to attain. Life can lead one into very unexpected circumstances; yet, no matter the circumstance, God must be trusted. An area where this trust must be seen is in one’s marital status; whether single or married, contentment through God must rule. Sadly, dissatisfaction with one’s status sometimes creates personal misery and the faithful words of Paul become a distant echo drowned out by unfulfilled dreams. When this is the condition, life is wasted and God is neither pleased nor honored.

Most everyone has a desire for companionship and, from an early age, efforts are made to find the one with whom this companionship can be shared. God encourages such

behavior: “He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord” (Proverbs 18:22). There are times, whether by choice or circumstance, marital companionship is not found. For some, this leads to both depression and discouragement, believing that what is on the other side of the door would make life happy and complete. To fall prey to such thoughts is to miss the true source of happiness in life: God. The man who wrote the most on home and family issues in the New Testament was none other than the single man, Paul. Far from pining over not having a wife and children, the apostle put himself in service to God. In fact, he viewed his single status as a great blessing which provided opportunity for greater service: “To the unmarried and widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am” (1 Corinthians 7:8). This single status allowed a laser-like focus on the matters of God without distractions that come from caring for family. Like Paul, single Christians have great opportunities for service that are not always available to the married. Lack of financial obligations to family allows the opportunity for increased generosity in the Lord’s work. A schedule not driven by family obligations allows time to travel in teaching the gospel and encouraging families who have dedicated their lives to teaching the gospel in distant areas. Time not spent helping children with homework can be dedicated to teaching young people within a local congregation’s Bible class program. Many more opportunities could be listed; yet this sampling demonstrates work that can be done. Far from feeling unfulfilled, a single Christian must see the tremendous opportunities and resources he or she has that can be used in service to the Lord. May no single Christian ever feel that life is somehow unfulfilled without a spouse. The good that is done in glory to God will crown a well-spent life.

Sadly, the “other-side-of-the-door syndrome” can also occur when one who is married desires to be single. This, too, disallows contentment. It may be that familial obligations are viewed with drudgery in comparison to the freedom one once had when single. Due to a lack of sobriety when entering into marriage, the discontented spouse may not have realized the time and energy necessary to build a family. As a result, he or she longs for the days of freedom and prefers a lifestyle that is now out of reach. Just as with a single Christian longing for marriage, a married Christian who has fallen out of love with his or her lifestyle must consider life in relation to God. Returning to a single life through divorce is simply not an option and the words of God spoken through the prophet Malachi must be heard: “‘For I hate divorce,’ says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘and him who covers his garment with wrong,’ says the Lord of hosts. ‘So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously’” (Malachi 2:16 NASB). Such thoughts of breaking the family must be put to rest by appreciating the blessing God has provided. The wise man Solomon gave a solid admonition when he wrote, “let your fountain be blessed and rejoice in the wife of your youth” (Proverbs 5:18). The book of Ecclesiastes echoes this sentiment: “Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life” (9:9a). With such a mindset,

feelings of dissatisfaction are replaced with godly contentment, allowing both husband and wife to serve their ultimate purpose for the other: an encourager helping the other reach Heaven.

Scout the cat can be excused for her discontentment and having the blessing of long-suffering owners, her "other side" whims can be daily satisfied. Humans, however, are far above animals; they are created in the image of their God. No matter one's marital status, God is always supreme and He is honored when men and women dedicate their lives to His service. May every child of God learn to be content, no matter the situation.

- Greg Chandler

Brotherly Love - The Real Test

What kind of people were the Christians of the first century? Were they "super-Christians," totally dedicated, so devoted to the Lord that they would put twenty-first century Christians to shame? We tend to think so. And if we look only at the Christians of Jerusalem before the church was scattered, our conclusions will be well founded. But by the time Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians, the churches of his day were much like those of our day. His description of those with whom he was associated is given in this verse: "For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's" (Phil. 2:21). There were notable exceptions, however, among Paul's associates, men and women whose devotion to the Lord and love for their brethren serve as wonderful examples. Paul himself was one: "Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all" (Phil. 2:17). Timothy was another: "For I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state" (Phil. 2:20). Epaphroditus was yet another: "Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me" (Phil. 2:30). Not regarding his life! There is the real test of brotherly love. This is the love manifested by Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus. These did not regard their own lives when their brothers and sisters were in need. The love which they manifested is the love required of all: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16). The phrase, "Love . . . seeketh not her own" (1 Cor. 13:4, 5), suddenly takes on new meaning. Love does not just send a card to the sick, or prepare a dish for the bereaved. Love does not just do repair work for a widow, or carry a fruit basket to the aged. These are all good works and are manifestations of love. We do not mean to minimize the value of such works. But real love, if the occasion arises, goes beyond such acts of service. Real love does not seek to preserve even her own life. Real love willingly lays down her life for the brethren. Love gives more than material things; love gives herself. Few Christians of the first century had that kind of love. And when we observe

the selfishness, the petty jealousy, the greed, the desire for pre-eminence, the gossip, the backbiting, feuding, and quarreling that are characteristic of brethren of our day, we are sure that few have that kind of love today. Aquila and Priscilla once "laid down their necks" for Paul (Rom. 16:3, 4). Let the reader make a list of the Christians of his acquaintance for whom he would lay down his neck! It is easy to think that we would die for the Lord if our faith were so tested, but "he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen" (1 John 4:20)? Doctrinal error that threatens the salvation of God's people must be fought. Sin must be corrected. But we have little doubt that many of the problems that trouble the church today result from our being like the "all" who "seek their own" rather than like those who "regard not their lives" for the sake of brethren. How is this love developed? The same chapter of Philippians provides the answer: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). Here is the great goal of Christians -- becoming "conformed to the image of His Son." When we reach that goal, we will have found maturity in all aspects of Christianity, and we will have learned to love others as God would have us to love, even to willingness to die for them.

- Bill Hall

- > "Much smoking kills live men and cures dead hogs!"
 - > "A nominal Christian (if such a term may be rightfully employed) is one who follows Jesus so long as the Master's teachings do not infringe upon his life's practices!"
 - > "To handle yourself, use your head; to handle others, use your heart!"
 - > "The world is only a wonderful place to live to those who are not of the world!"
 - > "One may take a vacation from Christianity, but it is not a paid vacation!"
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THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: "*A Tree And Its Fruit!*" (Text: Matt. 7:15-20); Sunday evening: "*Growing: Know The Lord For Who He Is!*" (John 6:16-21).