

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Faith Is Non-Transferrable

Heirs are a headache! As the wise man of Ecclesiastes thought of the future, he envisioned the labors of his hard work quickly squandered by unappreciative generations that followed. Concerning this, he wrote, "I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity" (2:18-19). Statistics bear out the legitimacy of his fear. Wealth counselor Tim Voorhees, in his 2009 article *Why Most Families Lose Their Wealth by the Third Generation*, notes that 60% of inherited wealth wastes away by the second generation and 90% of families have almost none of the original wealth by the end of the third generation. Indeed, the wise man knew that, "An inheritance gained hastily in the beginning will not be blessed in the end" (Proverbs 20:21).

Such statistics come as no surprise to Christians who understand that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evils. Christians, however, must appreciate the same lesson with a far more precious commodity: faith in God. Like wealth, generational faith quickly disappears because it is not grounded in the hard work and study necessary to build a relationship with God that will endure. Barna research undertook an intensive five-year study to determine how and why young people leave the "faith of their childhood." Researchers divided those who lost their faith into three categories: prodigals, nomads, and exiles. The prodigals are those who once claimed Christianity, yet lose their faith later in life; the nomads are those who still claim Christianity, but are relatively inactive with their church; the exiles are those who feel torn between the morality of their church and the culture in which they live. All told, researchers determined that 3 out of 10 young people who grow up in Christian churches remain faithful.* Such statistics bear out the simple fact that faith cannot be inherited!

Why do so many young people fall away from the Lord? At the base of this problem is the hard truth that they never belonged to the Lord in the first place. Outward show may have created a façade of faithfulness, with young people able to parrot their parent's views on various issues and perhaps even participating in religious activities their parents deemed

important. Yet, like the second-generation families of wealth, the second-generation “Christians” did not work to understand what it truly means to be a Christian. Much of the “heavy lifting” was done for them and thus a true appreciation for surrender to God was never learned. Blame for this outcome can many times be found with both generations. Children who grow up in Christian homes are given a very great blessing, yet parents in these homes must realize that there really are no “second-generation” Christians. Though they give their children a firm foundation in Bible knowledge, they must allow the child, as he or she matures, to question what has been taught without making the child feel like a rebel. The words of the Apostle Paul are standard fare when discussing faith: “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). To develop an appropriate faith, anyone, including children raised in Christian homes, must develop that faith only through the words of Jesus Christ. Parents can guide, help, and shape, but ultimate salvation is found only between the believer and God.

Blame can also be found in a generation that is happy to allow parents to do the heavy lifting. To this ilk, religion is reduced to its bare minimum and basically viewed as what one does “at church.” The idea of changing one’s life, seeking holiness, and becoming Christ-like is viewed as church-speak with no appreciation given for the real change that is needed. Simply put, this is laziness! Though parents labor to get their children to take the word of God seriously, no real need is seen since, ultimately, the children see no real need for God. “Going to church” seems to satisfy all that is needed and thus, when the tests of life come, such unprepared individuals are quickly swept away. It soon becomes painfully obvious that the “inheritance” received from godly parents is lost on an unaccepting second generation.

Since faith is non-transferable, anyone who desires to enjoy the salvation of the Lord must first understand that this relationship is developed solely between the individual and the Lord. This requires the serious work of first accepting that there is a God and that this God is in control. Following this, it is coming to understand that Jesus Christ is the only means to salvation and this salvation is found strictly through the standard laid down by the Lord in His word. Finally, it is accepting that sins are washed away in the waters of baptism and that life following baptism is dedicated to becoming holy as the Lord is holy. While parents can teach this to their children, they cannot live this for their children. While children can learn this from the parents, they cannot live this through their parents. When this is accepted, a strong faith that rests solely on the strength of the Lord is begun.

In the long-run, what happens to wealth in the second and third generations is of relative little importance. Development of faith, however, has eternal consequences and must be taken as a literal decision of life or death. Families should work hard to help one another grow in faith, but must refrain from believing that faith can be transferred. As the Apostle

Paul, may all desire “that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (I Corinthians 2:5).

- Greg Chandler

*See Five Myths About Young Adult Church Dropouts at barna.org for citation and further information concerning these statistics.

“Hellcats of the Navy”

“Hellcats of the Navy” is a World War II movie that explores the question of whether a commander's duty towards a single seaman in obvious danger outweighs his overall responsibility to his crew. Commander Casey Abbott (Ronald Reagan) is assigned a strategic mission and positions his submarine, The Starfish, where Navy diver Wes Barton leads the expedition. Before completion, an enemy destroyer approaches, forcing Casey to abandon his mission and submerge his sub, a tactic that results in Barton's death. Casey's executive officer Lt. Commander Don Landon protests Casey's decision, implying that Casey was motivated by the fact that Barton had been dating Casey's former sweetheart. A young sailor, Freddy Warren, is seriously injured during a subsequent mission. To save Freddy's life, Casey orders the sub to surface, aborting his mission. On yet another mission, The Starfish is irreparably damaged and abandoned. Sixty men were lost. Once ashore, Landon discovers that he has been denied the post of commander due to a negative performance review written by Casey. Landon then challenges his commander's review. Much of Casey Abbott's dialogue is a composition on the burden of leadership, and how only a special few are fitted to bear it. It is a demonstration in the separation of personal and professional motivations as a leader.

The commander ruled Landon as “unfit for the responsibility of command” because: (a.) He was “ruled by personal emotion.” For example, “your inability to interpret the decision of command in anything but personal terms.” (b.) He stated, “you attribute that behavior to everyone around you.” His Commander's example: “You think, too, that out of remorse and sentimentality I risked the Starfish and crew in order to save Freddy Warren. And now you think, that for reasons of personal ambition, I risked the passage of the Tsushima Straits and lost my boat and men.”

Probably you are not pursuing the post of submarine commander, but maybe you are striving to imitate Christ. Even if you do not see yourself in a leadership role as a shepherd, you will still face the challenge of selecting things you rule over, and things you allow to rule over you. Daily speech and personal example must demonstrate that you have mastery over sin, even when it crouches at the door, desiring to have you (Gen. 4:7). You may never lead the local church, but you must lead yourself! Are you unfit for the responsibility of such a command?

(1) Are you ruled by personal emotions? Have you witnessed a demonstration of “road rage,” or parents unleashing anger upon umpires, referees, or other parents at children’s sporting events? These are clear depictions of the kingship of personal emotions. Some religious people claim that God loves people too much to allow any of them to be lost. Therein, personal emotions are allowed to rule one’s convictions rather than God’s word! Further, some brethren “wear their emotions” and get all upset over some disliked decision of judgment made by their elders. Lordship of their emotions prompts sowing of discord, backbiting their brethren, assigning false motives to servants of Christ, twisting the word of God, pressing their personal opinions into faction, promoting strife and open division of the body of Christ, even causing unbelievers to blaspheme the Lord! Will the Lord hold these professing Christians guiltless, who allow their personal feelings to rule their actions, while ignoring “Thus sayeth the Lord!”?

(2). Are you unable to interpret the words and actions of others in anything but personal terms? Are the preacher’s sermons always aimed at you? When he opposes the works of the flesh and clarifies the threat of worldliness, is it only being done to stab you in the back? When your personal favorite is not appointed as the new preacher, do you take that as a personal insult, spreading the seeds of personal grievances to others? Is your relationship in the body of Christ really all about you? Should you not rather put the best construction on the actions of others (1 Cor. 13:7)? To suggest that the elders or the preacher are always after you is a comment unworthy of those servants of Christ and any who wear His name.

(3) Do you attribute characteristics of your behavior to everyone around you? In the movie, Landon was ruled by personal emotions. He also believed that about his commander. When those who are spiritual oppose the sins you are committing (Gal. 6:1), are they just trying to “get even” with you, or “settle the score?” If you are brazen enough to lie to other Christians and God’s elders, is it any big deal for you to accuse them of lying to you?

After the crucifixion, the Jewish Sanhedrin requested that the governor provide security at the grave, “otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, ‘He has risen from the dead,’ and the last deception will be worse than the first” (Matt. 27:64). Since these Jewish leaders showed no hesitation in using deceitful methods whenever it suited their purpose (Matt. 26:59), they attributed the characteristics of that behavior to the Lord’s disciples, thinking that they too would deceive if given the opportunity. They were wrong to assume that others thought and felt as they did. This should serve as warning to us about making such assumptions about others and being ruled by personal emotions.

- > "Do not let Satan deceive you in thinking that when you plan carefully to sin secretly you will not be harmed!"
 - > "Lord, help me to remember that nothing is going to happen to me today that You and I together cannot handle!"
 - > "Remember the tea kettle: up to her neck in hot water, yet still she can sing!"
 - > "The tact needed for evangelism is contact!"
 - > "If a man is too busy to worship God, he has more business than God intended he should have!" - J.C. Penney
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THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: "*Lord, I Need Wisdom from Above!*" (Text: James 3:13-18); Sunday evening: "*Seeking Jesus!*" (John 6:22-29).