

# **The Old Hickory Bulletin**

## **Old Hickory Church of Christ**

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### **Self-Control at the Ball Field**

It was a tense day at the ball field as the Yankees and Tigers met to see who could prove victorious. Fans, eager for victory, anxiously watched to see if the players could meet their expectations. Then it happened. An umpire, making a questionable call, found himself surrounded by howls of protest. Soon, the protestors not only voiced their complaints, but took to the field, throwing punches at one another in the melee that ensued. There is good news; the umpire left the field without suffering physical damage. There is bad news; the Yankees and Tigers were two t-ball teams made up of four and five-year-old's in Miami, Florida. These shocked tots watched as the men who serve as role-models in their young lives fought it out over a kid's sporting event. Sadly, this is only one of a number of similar incidents throughout the nation.

As Peter teaches how to partake in the divine nature, a key component of his teaching is the need to supplement faith with self-control. Simply put, he admonishes that each develop self-mastery, thus refusing to allow emotion to triumph over reason or, in spiritual matters, over what is right. Those who desire to take Peter's teaching to heart must understand that he is not speaking of "highbrow theology"; he is speaking of the everyday decisions about one's personal thinking, behavior, and actions...even at the ballfield.

One of the greatest challenges to self-control is when perceived unfairness is directed toward either one personally or those one loves. This unfairness often opens the starting gate of emotions, with anger in the lead. On such occasions, it is important to remember what God has spoken on the matter: "Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath. Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil" (Psalm 37:8); "A man of quick temper acts foolishly, and a man of evil devices is hated" (Proverbs 14:17); "Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly" (Proverbs 14:29); "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1); and on and on the list could go!

Parents have grave responsibility in this area. There is no disputing the importance placed on childhood sports in 21st century America; parents devote vast amounts of time, money, and energy to make sure that children are “well-rounded” by being members of multiple sports teams. As in all things, parents must realize that their children are watching, observing, and modelling; thus, they must realize that their duty to “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” is not put on hiatus at the ballfield. Sadly, on occasions where they perceive their child is being treated unfairly by the opposition, it is not uncommon to hear parents yell, “Don’t take that from him...push him back!” When coming from Christian parents, one must wonder how they justify such outbursts in light of, “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them” (Matthew 7:12a).

Christians must also be very cognizant of the example they are setting for others besides their children. While disagreement about a particular call in a game is harmless, angrily voicing the disagreement for all to hear is another matter. One can hardly imagine such behavior from our Lord were He to frequent a sporting event; thus, the behavior should be just as unimaginable for those who are seeking to live by His standards. Before such an outburst, a Christian must ask how this action will correspond to teachings such as, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (Romans 12:18). Those desiring to partake of the divine nature will certainly exercise the self-mastery needed to demonstrate godliness on such occasions.

Young Christians who play sports must also determine to exercise self-control. Youth is the training ground for adult maturity; it is during these formative years that life-impacting attitudes will be developed. Interestingly, the very first Christian principle learned by children is that of obedience; thus, the Lord says, “Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Ephesians 6:1). Young people who have given their lives to Jesus must pay close attention to the words “in the Lord.” In this, He is stating that the decision to obey is made out of the desire to please the Lord and to accept the authority He has put in place within the family. Learning to submit to parents is paramount in learning to submit to God. Sports officials also represent authority. Just as children learn godly submission through obedience to parents, they learn godly submission by obedience to “the ref.” Like parents, he or she will not always be right; “obvious” calls may be missed and, even on some occasions, true unfairness may be displayed. Still, a young Christian must realize that this is a test; it is an occasion where God expects one to act in a spiritual manner despite the real or perceived error. As in all things, this takes training; it requires mastering emotions and never putting them in the proverbial driver’s seat. With such self-control, a Christian athlete can take the situation in stride, refusing to surrender to pride and anger.

Great life-lessons are learned from youth athletics; discipline, rigor, and stamina are but a few of the great outcomes gained. Christians of all ages should also use these

occasions to learn spiritual lessons. Refusing to surrender to out of control emotion in the midst of a heated game is concrete proof one is truly interested in partaking of the divine nature. Refusing, either on or off the play area, to join in the chorus of contempt for presiding officials demonstrates mastery over uncontrolled anger. Though athletes and not a few parents may dislike the phrase “it’s only a game,” it really is only a game that will most likely be forgotten in a short time. Eternity, however, is forever and those who desire to one day be with “the Divine” will partake in His nature in every area of life; therefore, whether young or old, enjoy the event, yet always remember the words of the Apostle Paul: “Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable” (I Corinthians 9:25).

- Greg Chandler

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## **No One Can Take Your Place**

(Story: Ask the Funeral Home)

A lawyer phoned the governor’s mansion shortly after midnight. “I need to talk to the governor — it’s an emergency!” exclaimed the lawyer.

After some cajoling, the governor’s assistant agreed to wake him up. “So, what is it that’s so important that it can’t wait until morning?” grumbled the governor.

“Judge Pierson just died, and I want to take his place,” begged the attorney. “Well, it’s OK with me if it’s OK with the funeral home,” replied the governor.

As an aside, timing is everything, isn’t it? If you are wanting someone to do something for you then you need to use a little wisdom in knowing how and when to ask. The wise man said, “To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.” (Eccl 3:1).

After the children of Israel made a golden calf to worship, claiming it was the god who brought them out of Egypt, Moses asked God to either forgive their sin or blot him out of the “book which you have written.” (Exodus 32:32). The Lord was not at all interested in Moses’ offer because it would not be in keeping with His nature. God responded, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.” (Exodus 32:33).

Each one of us will individually stand before God to give an account for the life we have lived. No one can stand in for us, nor can we ride in on the coat tails of anyone else. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

And then finally, we each must live our own lives and face our own deaths. It is true that our lives do overlap, that “no man is an island,” and we have influence over others. But, ultimately, we each must make our own decisions and face the consequences, whether good or bad. The Bible calls that “reaping and sowing.” We will each “reap what we sow.” (Galatians 6:7,8). That same passage says that “each one will bear his own load.” (vs. 5). Or as Paul said in Romans 14:4, “To his own master he stands or falls.”

But always remember, that just as you must live your own life, you must face your own death. No one can answer for you. We will all die. We will all be judged. That is certain. (Heb. 9:27). Jesus died so that the outcome of our judgment can be, “well done good and faithful servant... enter into the joy of your Lord.” (Matt 25:23). The choice is yours and yours alone. No one can live life for you nor take your place at death.

- Ben May

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> “All that *God* has and all that *God* is, is at the disposal of prayer!”

> “What one is in little things he is also in great!”

> “A lot of people go into debt just to keep up with their friends who already are!”

> “The roadway to success is dotted with many tempting parking places!”

> “Use what talents you possess: the woods would be very silent if no birds sang there except those that sang best!” - Henry Van Dyke

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**THIS WEEK'S LESSONS:** Sunday morning: “*If A Man Dies, Will He Live Again?*” (Text: Job 14:14); Sunday evening: “*Christ and the Bread!*” (John 6:41-50).