

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

*841 Old Hickory Blvd.
Jackson, TN 38305*

November 04, 2012

Volume 32, # 45

GOD AND GOVERNMENT:

WHAT OUR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS NEED TO HEAR

The Great Commission in Mark's Gospel account states, "*Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*" (Mark 16:15). The apostles were to preach to every creature in every nation (Matt. 28:19). They were to preach to the rich and to the poor (Matt. 19:22; Luke 7:22), to the handicapped, brokenhearted and the oppressed (Luke 4:18). They were to preach to servants and to masters (1 Pet. 2:18; Col. 3:22; Col. 4:1). They were to preach to men who were lowly or of low estate, as well as to dignitaries and government leaders (2 Pet. 2:10; Rom. 12:16).

Governments are to use wisdom as they rule (Prov. 8:15-16). Proverbs 17:7 says, "*Fine speech is not becoming to a fool; still less is false speech to a prince.*" In other words, politicians and elected officials are not to lie. Proverbs 28:2-4 and 29:4 advises rulers to be orderly and to keep the law, striving against the wicked. Government rulers should punish the wicked (Prov. 20:26) and not pervert justice.

The New Testament reveals that government officials (elected or not) are ministers and servants of God (Rom. 13:3-5). Christians are to *“be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people”* (1 Pet. 2:13-15).

Government leaders will be held accountable to God for how they have conducted themselves. Moses instructed the judges to *“not pervert justice,” “show partiality,”* or *“accept a bribe.”* They were only to follow justice, *“that you may live and inherit the land that the LORD your God is giving you”* (Deut. 16:18-20).

Consider some of the preachers who preached to the government leaders of their day. Joseph influenced Potiphar. Moses warned the Egyptian Pharaoh as he worked with God to deliver the Israelites. Elijah influenced Hazael and warned Ben-ha-dad, kings of Syria. Elisha instructed Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria. Daniel took a stand and influenced Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. John taught Herod the Tetrarch. Jesus taught governor Pontius Pilate, Paul taught King Agrippa, who was *“almost persuaded”* to be a Christian.

Perhaps one of the most impressive accounts of a preacher teaching a government official is that of Paul and Governor Felix. Sometime after Paul made his defense, Felix and his wife Drusilla wanted to meet with Paul to hear him concerning the faith in Christ. Paul discussed three topics with Felix that all government leaders should hear. Paul reasoned of: 1) righteousness; 2) self-control; 3) and the coming judgment (Acts. 24:25). Felix trembled, being terrified, and said, *“Go away for the*

present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you.” At the same time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul. So he sent for him often and conversed with him” (Acts 24:26).

The Bible never mentions whether Governor Felix ever obeyed the Gospel. The last we hear, *“after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix’ room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound” (Acts 24:27).* As Christians, living in a government “by the people and for the people,” let’s consider our responsibility to preach the gospel to “every creature” and in particular to our government officials.

- Kris Groda

SEEING THE BIG PICTURE

For years I have marveled at the face-to-face encounter Jesus had with Satan in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). Like many, I have studied this account since my youth. Yet every time I revisit it, I am amazed at the spiritual strength of our Savior during a time of what must have been extreme physical weakness. Thus, when given the opportunity to provide food for Himself by His new-found power (which I believe He received at baptism), it must have been a real and difficult temptation.

Thankfully, unlike Esau of old, our Savior was able to look past His own physical interests and see the big picture. In reality, when we fail to overcome temptation it is usually because we fail to see the big picture. Consider the big picture that Christ saw when tempted to use His powers for selfish interests.

- He saw that character was more important than reputation. Satan's initial statement called into question the very deity of Jesus Christ. There was a challenge in the very first word-the word "if." In essence, Satan was saying, "Prove it to me! Prove to me you are the Son of God!" Christ would have seen this as a challenge to His reputation. Yet, He knew that answering this challenge would have been an abuse of His power and would have revealed a lack of trust in His Father. In short, Christ saw His character was more important than His reputation. We would do well to see the same.

- He saw that commands were more important than circumstances. The fact that Jesus had been fasting for forty days and that He was severely hungry did not change the commands of God. Nor did these circumstances change Christ's approach to the commands of God. He could have gone another forty days without food and the principle of Deuteronomy 8:3 would have still been the same. For many in our current society, circumstances serve as the deciding factors for moral decisions. That is why things once considered wrong are now socially acceptable. The fickleness of situational morality or situation ethics is both illogical and unbiblical.

- He saw that the eternal was more important than the temporal. Again, taking this approach means seeing beyond today or next week or next year. Have you ever finished a big piece of lemon ice box pie only to regret the indulgence because you were on a diet? Just ten minutes before it seemed like the right thing to do. But with clear reflection (and a satisfied appetite), it is much easier to see that it was not the wisest choice. For many people, such is the case with sin. A moment, evening, or life of pleasure can satisfy for now, but eventually there will be regret and remorse. Christ had the ability to see His true purpose for coming to earth and how that purpose could have been nullified by one moment of self-indulgence.

One man has called the temptation of turning stones into bread the "temptation of provisions." Overcoming this type of temptation boils down to answering this question: How much do I trust God? Paul reasoned that if God gave us His own Son, then He will also freely give us all that we need (Rom. 8:32). Do you trust God enough to put character over reputation, commands over circumstances, and the eternal over the temporal?

- Wayne Jones

THE PRICE OF CORRECTION

When the Levite sent pieces of his concubine throughout Israel, after she had been raped by men of Gibeon in Benjamin, the men of Israel gathered around "as one man" in response to hear the Levite's story (Jdg. 20:1-7). When they heard what had happened, they promised that they would all provide help in addressing the problem (Jdg. 20:8-11). First, they asked the Benjamites about it and requested that they present the guilty parties for judgment and execution, but the Benjamites refused (Jdg. 20:12-13). Instead, they prepared for war (Jdg. 20:14-17).

Therefore, the Israelites prepared, as well, and part of that preparation was going to God in prayer and looking to Him for guidance (Jdg. 20:18). They followed what the LORD said, but the first day they lost 22,000 in battle (Jdg. 20:19-21). Then they repeated this process, including asking the LORD, and the next day lost 18,000 (Jdg. 20:22-25). Once more they went to the LORD, this time offering burnt offerings and peace offerings after a period of fasting, after which the Lord promised them victory (Jdg. 20:26-28). So when they next went against Benjamin in battle, they lost only thirty men, compared to the

25,000 that Benjamin lost in battle (Jdg. 20:29-46), and Israel destroyed Benjamin as a result of the behavior of the men of Gibeon and their own behavior in protecting them (Jdg. 20:47-48).

When one of your own sins, it is a difficult situation to handle. You care for the one involved, while being repulsed by his or her behavior. Both Israel and Benjamin had decisions to make when the behavior of the Gibeonites became known. Benjamin chose to "protect its own." Israel chose to "address its own." Benjamin was taught a severe lesson because of their choice to stand with the sinners in defense of the sin. Israel also learned a valuable lesson.

Disciplining one of your own is not a matter of revenge, but a responsibility toward God. To discipline properly, our own relationship with God must be at the forefront of what we are doing and why. There will almost always be a cost to discipline, but we must see it through with unflagging faith. There will be casualties along the way, but ultimately purity will be restored and God will be glorified. Most of all, we must see it as a war against sin and never a war against a brother. When we learn these lessons, perhaps our spiritual relationships will be strong enough to prevent the necessity of "war" in the first place.

- Kevin W. Rhodes

THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: "*The Church and Politics!*" (text: John 18:36); Sunday evening: "*But Not With a Loyal Heart!*" (text: 2 Chron. 25:1-2).