

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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THE CHURCH'S PURPOSE

What is the purpose of the Lord's church? Is it to eradicate poverty, disease, social injustice, illiteracy from among men? Is it to bring about a cessation of war and conflict? Is it to campaign for a temptation-free society for Christians to live in?

If the church had as one of its great goals the eradication of disease, the Lord could have easily equipped it to accomplish that goal. Could not the same power that enabled one blind man to see have enabled all blind men to see; that enabled one lame man to walk have enabled all lame people to walk; that cured many people of varied diseases have cured all people of all diseases? And could not this same power have been given to the church in all generations?

If the church had as one of its great goals the eradication of poverty, the Lord could have easily equipped it to accomplish this purpose. After all, he fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fishes. He similarly fed four thousand on another occasion. Could not he who did these marvelous works have enabled His church in all generations to feed, clothe, and shelter the impoverished masses of the world through miraculous powers?

If the Lord had wanted His church to become a lobbyist group to apply political pressure toward a temptation and persecution free society in which to live, He would have given instructions in that direction. He did not even

lead His church into a direct effort to destroy slavery, but taught the Christian slave to be a better slave and the Christian master to treat his slaves as he would have his heavenly Master to treat him (Col. 3:22-4:1).

The church's purpose is to save souls and prepare people for eternity. It holds out to the impoverished the hope of someday walking a street of gold; to the suffering a time when there will be no more pain; to the sorrowing a moment when "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." It tells the tempted and persecuted that there is value in these afflictions, that the testing of their faith is "more precious than of gold," and to rejoice. It tells all to live godly lives in whatever environment they find themselves. It seeks to change people through the power of the gospel, not society through the coercion of legislators. Its weapons "are not carnal, but are mighty through God." Its motivating theme: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

When churches become involved in hospital and health clinic work, or when they build schools for the education of their children, or when they see as one of their great missions to provide for the world's poverty, or when they feel obligated to create social upheaval and campaign for human rights, or when they feel called upon to express their views on the government's use of nuclear armaments or whatever, they have a distorted view of the purpose of the church.

- Bill Hall, via Perspectives, March, 1983

Remember History

The little book of Jude is a big reminder. It was written to offset the influence of false teachers whose doctrines made sin okay. Jude reminds us of two things:

1) People have a history of turning away from God.

Sodom and Gomorrah did so by indulging in gross immorality. Cain did so by self-centeredness, first in worship, then in human relations. Balaam did so via materialism. Korah openly rebelled against God's order, seeking a position God had assigned to another. The nation of Israel did so by unbelief - they simply lost confidence that God could or would do what He promised. Even angels have been guilty.

2) God has a history of punishing those who turn away.

He sent fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah "as an example." Cain was banished to the life of a vagrant. Those who followed Balaam's counsel were killed in a divine plague. Korah was swallowed up by the earth. The entire adult generation of Israel, except Joshua and Caleb, died in the wilderness. God is keeping the disobedient angels bound under darkness for the judgment.

While people turn from God in different ways, the expression is the same: disobedience. While God has punished in different ways, the effect is the same: decisive, complete cutting off. Jude's point is this: take sin seriously, and do not be deceived by anyone who says otherwise.

- Frank Himmel

Re-Stating an Abiding Principle

"We have now a plain work - simply the work of the Lord and no other. We have nothing to preach but the gospel, nothing to believe but the truth of God, nothing to do but the will of God, and nothing to hope for only what is promised in the word of God. Our

work is not new and untried, but old, well tried, and nothing can stand before us. We have truth and righteousness to maintain - sin and the world to oppose. We can make change only at our peril - no departure without losing all. We started simply to be the people of God, and to give ourselves unreservedly to the Lord. We can not turn away."

- Benjamin Franklin
(gospel preacher, 1812-1878)

A Forgotten Word: Duty

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

We need to think about the word "duty." A more important word (for Christians) can scarcely be thought of, yet rarely does one hear it spoken. Do you ever ask yourself "What is my duty here?" Is anybody doing his or her duty anymore, or is this just an outmoded, forgotten word?

The Oxford American Dictionary tells us that duty is, "a moral or legal obligation, a task that must be done, action required from a particular person" (p. 200). Can I shorten that down some? Duty is "doing despite." Doing what you are supposed to do (that "moral or legal obligation") despite hardship, despite fear, despite opposition, despite anything or anyone. Duty is doing despite it all.

Duty is the recognition that the obligation is more important than anything else and so the obligation must be fulfilled.

Noah serves as a fine example of this idea. He was tasked to build an ark. He did this duty, despite opposition and despite a lack of perfect understanding on his part. He performed this duty despite its inconvenience. Over and over the text emphasizes that Noah obeyed God exactly (see Gen. 6:22; 7:5). He did his duty.

What does any of this have to do with our walk with God? Simply put, God has given His people certain "moral obligations" and "tasks that must be done." Those tasks must now be accomplished despite the times and environment we live in. We must do our duty.

Christians are obliged to be morally pure, to read their Bibles, to worship, to teach others the Gospel and more. Do you take those obligations seriously? Do you stop to consider "What does God want me to do? What is my duty to Him?"

Duty is oft forgotten in our "me-first" society. Rarely do we see people who bravely struggle on doing their "moral and legal obligations" despite so many other factors. Dare we allow such to be said of our spiritual lives? Remember, Solomon came to understand that serving God was the "whole duty of man" (Eccl. 12:13). Are you doing your duty to God? Are you doing what God commands you despite every reason not to? Let's remember our duty!

- Mark Roberts

> "Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured."

- "Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned."
 - "Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them."
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THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *"The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus!"* (text: Acts 9:1-19); Sunday evening: *"Christ: Our Priest and King!"* (text: Zech. 6:11-13).