

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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God's Persuading Power

Coming to a right relationship with God involves change, and genuine change is brought about by persuasion. Only persuaded people turn from serving sin to become servants of righteousness; only the persuaded have the kind of courage necessary to acknowledge and renounce past wrongs. None but the persuaded give themselves to the Lord. But if conversion is essentially a matter of persuasion, how is it to be accomplished? How does God persuade men to change?

Contrary to popular opinion, the persuasion that brings men to Christ comes from being informed. "Everyone that hath heard from the Father, and hath learned, cometh unto me" says Jesus (John 6:45). This principle is made apparent in every case of conversion recorded in the NT. What was done was always in response to what was heard and learned. Look at the believing Jews on Pentecost. They were pricked in their heart by what they heard (Acts 2:37) and were baptized in consequence of having received his word (v. 41). So with Cornelius who was to be persuaded by certain words he would hear from Peter (Acts 11:14). The jailor learned what he must do to be saved by being taught the word of the Lord by Paul and Silas (Acts 16), not by a direct intervention of the Holy Spirit. The faith that led these early converts to obedience had come through hearing the word of God from men who were being divinely directed into all truth (Rom. 10: 17; John 16:13). The conclusion is inescapable! These converts did something; what they did was right and it was the result of their being

persuaded by gospel truth and it alone! Hence, it is imperative that the gospel of Christ be recognized as God's exclusive persuading power for changing sinful men. Not miracles, not experiences, but the gospel! It took a miracle to bring Philip to the eunuch, but it took the gospel to bring the eunuch to Christ (Acts 8:26-39), which included baptism. Likewise, miraculous visions prefaced the meeting of Peter and Cornelius, but once together, Peter instructed in the way of salvation (Acts 10:33; 11:14) — which included the command to be baptized (Acts 10:48). Saul had the amazing experience of seeing Christ on the Damascus road, yet even this was not a saving experience for he was told to enter the city where he would learn what he must do (Acts 9:6). There, God sends Ananias who tells Saul to arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name (Acts 22:16). No New Testament convert ever considered his experience as evidence of being saved. Like the Romans, they were made free from sin after being persuaded by and becoming obedient to that form of teaching that had been delivered unto them (Rom. 6:17, 18).

Truly transformed lives are the inevitable result of sincere hearts being united with gospel truth. The Thessalonians "turned unto God from idols because they received the gospel as being the word of God (1 Thess. 1:9; 2:13). Feelings, experiences or circumstances may turn people to religion, but only the gospel can turn men to Christ. Armed with only that gospel and a consecrated heart, Paul said, we persuade men (2 Cor. 5:11). We can too.

- Dan S. Shipley, via Plain Talk, Aug., 1974

CONFESS YOUR SINS

We should always seek to walk by faith. We are to be in harmony with the will of God in every aspect of our work and worship for His ways are high above our ways. We need to follow Bible principles, commands, or examples in all that we do. It pays to walk circumspectly (Eph. 5:15) or to

be very careful where we put our feet when we take a step. Let any devout saint feel free to advise me freely on the things stated in this article.

In the matter of confessing our sins we look two ways. We confess to God, and there are times when we confess to men. To which men do we confess our sins? The questions of when, where, and why may also enter into the matter of confessing our sins to men.

In fighting the grace-faith-unity doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ to each baptized believer, some may have gone past Jerusalem and on down to Jericho. The idea seems to be around that man must confess every sin to God explicitly and repent of it to be forgiven. I have made some grievous mistakes (sins) that I did not realize until years after the mistakes (sins) were made. For example, I worked to help some new congregations get started in the decade of the forties. In those years, my relationship with the brethren at those places was very pleasant. I was happy to see the new works begin and grow, and my conscience was clear. I did not teach some things that were sorely needed. The brethren would almost certainly have listened if I had taught them earnestly, carefully, and patiently. In my failure some of these churches became what we usually call liberal. It hurts to realize this fact. The sin was a classic example of failure to teach the whole counsel. My ignorance was the occasion of my sin.

Would I have perished in my sins if I had died in the decade of much unselfish work in seeing these new churches begin and grow? If I am saved it will be by the grace of God. I do now see my mistake and confess it to God and men. When the mentioned work was being done I was aware of my need of mercy and prayed for forgiveness, but I did not know how to list my sins one by one. I do not claim that ignorance will cover any and every sin, but I see no way short of mercy for my salvation because I do not have perfect knowledge. That perfect knowledge will never be mine. All of us have room to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord (See 2 Peter 3:18). Any time I preach, I may find myself wondering if I have selected the appropriate lesson for the occasion and if I have said the proper things in

the right way. May the Lord have mercy. We may sin by omitting some things that should be said and done.

In preaching we try to help people have a stronger faith (Rom. 10:17). We also seek to persuade them to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38). These things are essential as parts of God's plan for our redemption. When we plead for people to repent we are not telling them that they must recall every sin and confess each to God as they turn from their sins in repentance. Repentance leads to a new life, and the old man of sin is crucified. We do not go to heaven by ignorance, but if we do go it will be in spite of some ignorance. As the newborn babe takes the milk of the word that he may grow thereby, he learns more and more of the errors of the past.

The Philippian jailor could not have written out a complete list of all his errors in thoughts and deeds on the morning after his baptism (Acts 16:23-34). The Lord has left this story as an example of conversion. The jailor knew of his change of mind, and his repentance was accepted as genuine, but he still needed to be taught more of the things Christ had commanded. He could not have learned everything in one night in one sermon (Matt. 28:18-20). His faith, repentance and baptism led to the remission of his sins.

There is no doubt in my mind about my forgiveness in October, 1928, when I obeyed the gospel, but there was much growing for me to do. I was a babe indeed. I can claim in all good conscience that for fifty years I have preached, thought, learned, and stumbled along the way in trying to walk by faith. My confession of sin and my plea for forgiveness today are just as earnest as in my youth. I need help and I know it. I am not a thief, alcoholic, or fornicator, but I work with the minds and hearts of people, and that requires skill, Errors on my part are serious. You and I must walk in the light to have forgiveness, and we must remember our littleness and our need of help. We are to confess our sins even though we are walking in the light.

We should read 1 John 1:5-10 again and again because we find instruction as to what we as servants of the Lord are to do that we may be cleansed from all sin. We also need to read this passage that we may be reassured that there is power in the blood. The blood cleanses as we give ourselves to the Lord in humble obedience. The best people need forgiveness since we all sin, but we can count on the cleansing as promised. I could not give the Lord an itemized list of all my sins this month, but I can realize that I am weak and can correct blunders as completely as possible when I realize them. The Lord knows if I really want to go to heaven. Repentance here would be parallel to repentance at the time of baptism.

There have been many pages written on 1 John 1:5-10 in the last several months, and more should be written. Some of the things written have been in error. In some cases people who believe the same things may have thought they were arguing with one another. The erroneous teaching can make it harder to teach the truth. More teaching will finally help us to find the sharp line between truth and error.

Some who would object to our insisting that repentance and confession are necessary to forgiveness have sarcastically talked of one's falling in and out of grace every thirty minutes. The Lord knows us so He is fully aware if we are giving the proper diligence to make our calling and election sure (1 Peter 1:10; 1 Cor. 10:12; Phil. 2:12). Paul could at three or four o'clock in the day have written about the crown of righteousness which was awaiting him (2 Tim. 4:8). The Holy Spirit used him to remind us that we all sin and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). He knew that he was saved by grace, but he was just as aware as was the beloved John that we must walk in the light and confess our sins.

- Irven Lee, Guardian of Truth, September 24, 1981

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- > Every person in the New Testament who was converted to Christ was a person who learned he was wrong - and changed!
 - > Does your life create in others the thirst that only the water of life can satisfy?