

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

841 Old Hickory Blvd.
Jackson, TN 38305
oldhickorycofc.com

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You Are Who You Choose To Be

Imagine the scene: the nation of Israel has conquered Canaan and each tribe has received its inheritance. The great leader, Joshua, has become an old man and is giving a final encouragement to the people to serve the Lord (Joshua 23:1-2). Near the conclusion of his speech he exhorts them saying, "Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord! And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 23:14-15). At the center of Joshua's words is the key to the whole endeavor...choice! One of the greatest powers God has given to us is the power to choose.

These choices are made daily and have an accumulated effect. Each choice is added to another, and then another, and another, until eventually we have established a way of life. Our character is defined by that pattern. Moreover, our eternal destiny is determined by these choices.

Notice the words of our Savior in Matthew 7:13-14, "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." Jesus' cry for men to "enter" is a plea for men to

choose to enter. We should choose to live our lives according to the disciplined principles of God's most holy way. To do otherwise is akin to building a mansion upon shifting sands (Matthew 7:24-27). So, let us choose Jesus, and Him alone, "...for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Let us choose to seek out Godly wisdom. After all, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward" (Psalm 19:7-11).

The most important choices in life are the spiritual ones. You can be a wise godly person, but it demands making the proper choices. Remember Joshua's bold invitation, "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15). You are who you choose to be!

- Eddie J. Caskey

Unread Letters

A childhood accident resulted in poet Elizabeth Barrett becoming an invalid and recluse. Despite her isolation her early poetry drew the attention of Robert Browning who began courting her. He eventually asked for her hand in marriage in 1846. But there's more to the story.

In her youth, Elizabeth had been watched closely by her tyrannical father. He was strict beyond reason and attempted to prevent suitors from courting her. In fact, he did not want any of his children to marry. As a result Elizabeth and Robert eloped, their wedding held in secret because of her

father's disapproval. After the wedding the Brownings sailed for Italy, where they lived for the rest of their lives - exiled from her parents. Even though her parents had disowned her, Elizabeth never gave up on the relationship. Almost weekly she wrote them letters. Some were fairly lengthy, others short and poetical in form. Not once did they reply.

After ten years, Elizabeth received a large box in the mail. Inside she found all of her letters. Not a single one had been opened. Elizabeth's years of writing, her letters pleading for reconciliation - were for naught.

Today those letters are among the most beautiful in classical English literature. Had her parents only read a few of them, their relationship with Elizabeth might have been restored. These events were reported in the Daily Walk on May 30, 1992.

What makes the story of Elizabeth Barrett Browning so compelling is that it is so similar to another story, the story that is repeated over and over again – generation after generation. You see, I am aware of other letters which have been written but not read. Beautiful letters. Letters of reconciliation. Letters of hope. We know them better as epistles. These letters, written by men, but authored by God through the Holy Spirit have been written for our reconciliation, for our salvation. Sadly, they often go unnoticed, unread, unheeded. Indeed, the entire Bible, God's Word, is a book pleading for reconciliation.

What is amazing is that God is pleading with us for reconciliation, but He has done nothing wrong. We are the ones who have gone astray (2 Peter 2:15), and yet God stoops to beg for our reconciliation. In Colossians 1:18-23, Paul speaking of Christ says, "It was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him and through Him to reconcile all to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross." Why? Why would God give His only begotten Son for all of us who have gone astray? Paul tells us in verse 22: "in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach." Paul's letter speaks of reconciliation and of hope. Are you listening?

What a beautiful letter. It would be a shame if it were never read, or if read, ignored.

- Matt Hennecke

Buy the Truth and Sell It Not

One of the most important attitudes one can have in striving to go to heaven is that of intense zeal for the truth of God. Too often, people settle on something far less than the truth. Remember, a counterfeit, though it may look relatively genuine, is nevertheless worthless.

Likewise, we cannot enjoy the benefits of truth just by getting pretty close. We must take our position firmly and foursquare on the truth. “Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

There are many among us who, like Pilate, would ask, “What is truth?” (John 18:38). Many do not believe in absolute truth. The Bible, however, is absolute, unchanging truth. “Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven” (Psalms 119:89). The belief that there is absolute truth is fundamental to one who desires to “buy the truth and sell it not” (Proverbs 23:23).

One Can Be Wrong

It is a fact that anyone can mistakenly be wrong. Paul, when speaking of his past manner of life, before his conversion, said, “I have lived before God in all good conscience until this day” (Acts 23:1). Yet he was before a “persecutor, and a blasphemer, and injurious” (1 Timothy 1:13). How could he have lived in all good conscience when he had been so wrong? The answer is simple. He thought he was right. “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 16:25). The fact that we can be wrong means that it does not behoove us to close our minds to further investigation. Jeremiah said, “Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Jeremiah 6:16).

Faith vs. Opinion

Naturally, study brings us to certain conclusions. All of us live by certain principles. But upon what do our conclusions rest? All too often they rest upon mere opinion. Realize that if something is a matter of faith, then God

must have said something about it. We cannot know the words of eternal life by opinions. One man's opinion is just as good as another man's; but no man's opinion is worthy to be compared to God's.

You would not want to risk crossing the ice over a river merely because somebody thinks you can. Neither should we risk trying to go to heaven by the opinions of men. The difference between an opinion and conviction is that an opinion is usually a spur-of-the-moment conclusion someone comes up with based upon skimpy premises, if any. A conviction is a conclusion based upon evidence which has been thoroughly studied and meditated upon.

God has given us a wonderful book. It furnishes man with doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness, that he may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Bible is our evidence. It is the truth. When believed, it becomes subjective faith. The Bible did not come from men, so there need be no question about its reliability. It was given unto men though, and designed so they could understand it when they read it (Ephesians 3:3-5). This is not to say that all the Bible is simple to understand. There are difficult portions of it that demand much study. The matters of conversion to God and everyday living are simple and easy to understand. What many find difficult about such matters is the application of that which may be so simple to understand.

Feelings - A Poor Standard

Do not base your conviction upon some peculiar feeling you might have. Feelings are a poor standard of truth. We have already mentioned Paul. We might mention Jacob also who believed with all his heart that his son Joseph was dead, but that did not make it true. Remember, God has given us revelation, facts. Our convictions must rest upon these facts or else we will find ourselves upon shifting sand.

Conscience - Not a Reliable Guide

Neither is conscience a reliable guide in determining whether your convictions are sound or not. The conscience is very pliable to begin with. Our conscience is usually formed at a tender age. At that time it may be trained to approve good or evil. When we reach maturity our conscience alters and becomes almost unchangeable. From then on it tells us only

whether we have done as we learned to do or not. Changing the conscience then is a slow, difficult project. If your conscience were trained correctly, well and good. If it were trained incorrectly, then it will approve even when you do things that are really wrong, because it was taught that which was wrong. "Let your conscience be your guide" is therefore poor advise.

This brings us back again to the fact that we must ultimately make our stand upon the word of God. Everything is to be judged by it.

- Bob Waldron

Where Jesus Found Them

It is interesting to notice where Jesus found some of the folks who became His friends. For instance, He found Matthew busy collecting taxes in the customs house, Nathanael under a fig tree, Peter and Andrew at the lake, the Samaritan woman at a well, Zacchaeus up a tree, and the thief on a cross.

Where did He find you when He called you to follow Him? Where will he find you when He comes again?

- Roy J. Wilkins

'Tis beauty that doth oft make women proud;
'Tis virtue that doth make them most admired;
'Tis modesty that doth make them seem divine.

> "Christ is not valued at all unless He is valued above all!"

- > "Christ sends none away empty except those who are full of themselves!"

 - > "Life with Christ is an endless hope; life without Christ is a hopeless end!"

 - > "If we want an increase of Christ, there must first be a decrease of self!"
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THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *"Words From Below the Cross!"* (Text: Matt. 27:39-44); Sunday evening: *"If Anyone Thinks ...!"* (1 Cor. 8:2).