

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Do We Have Religious Freedom?

We certainly do have religious freedom in these United States of America! This is one of the greatest (to me the greatest) freedoms granted to each of us by the Constitution of the USA. Let each one of us work and pray that this freedom shall be enjoyed by our posterity.

It is up to us to preserve and give to our young the liberties and freedoms that our fathers won and gave to us. Our nation has always had to keep watch over and defend her liberties. If the time ever comes when ease, pleasure, selfishness, and prosperity lull us to sleep, liberty and freedom will be destroyed. A sad awakening may suddenly come by force and tyranny. It will thunder in our ears and rob us and ours of all the liberties which inalienably belong to all mankind. Therefore, may God help us to appreciate and use our liberties for the good of all, both now and forever.

The Constitution gives us civil rights and liberties but it is not, neither does it claim to be, the standard of measurement in religion. Regardless of what a person is religiously, he is right constitutionally. But this does not mean that he is right with God.

The Bible is the rule by which God judges a person. Hence, we contend for our constitutional right of religious freedom while, at the same time, we earnestly contend for "the faith once delivered to the saints" in the Bible.

The Constitution is to govern our civil affairs. The Bible is to govern our religious life. One cannot judge or regulate his religious life by the Constitution. He must go to God through the Bible.

The Bible teaches one to respect "the powers that be" because they are "ordained of God." These powers are for the good of man: "For rulers are not a terror to good works. . . Render therefore to all their duties: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor" (Rom. 13:3, 7).

Each Christian has an obligation to respect and be under subjection to the government so long as the government is according to God's ordained purpose. This is the more reason that each person living and enjoying the great privileges afforded under our Constitution should work for, cooperate with, and keep a vigilant eye open for anything that might undermine it.

Nevertheless, and notwithstanding all our love and appreciation for the Constitution, it is not a religious standard of measurement, but a provider of the inalienable right to choose one's own religion. This leaves the matter of religion completely and wholly to the individual. The Constitution is a civil document designed, and it should be executed, for the good of the country and her citizens. We must and should gladly pay tribute, customs, fear, and honor to our great government and pray for those in places of responsibility that our government may stand.

God has not left it to man to govern himself in matters of religion. Paul makes this plain when he wrote to the Corinthians, "For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves; but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise" (2 Cor. 10: 12). The reason is simple. Man is not capable of directing his own affairs spiritually. Jeremiah 10:23 says, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." Isaiah 55:8-9 tells us that God's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are God's ways our ways. This means that man must forsake his thoughts and ways and accept God's

(Isa. 55:6-7). Proverbs 14:12 proves that man must depend upon God to direct his way: "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

Does God force man to serve Him? No. God reveals His will to man with all the blessings promised to man on the condition that man will obey Him (Matt. 7:21). But He leaves man to choose. "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve." Or as Jesus said, "Come unto me." Yes, it is an individual matter. However, God has a part in man's salvation and He will execute His part well.

God's part is to provide salvation. This He has done. It cost the death of His only begotten Son (John 3:16), but He gave Him freely.

God must reveal His thoughts and ways to man. This He has done (1 Cor. 2:8-13). Man didn't even know God through his (man's) wisdom so "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:21). Man has a choice to hear the word of God, believe, obey, and be saved, or to reject it and be lost. It is up to man. Yes, you must choose whom you will serve - God or Satan.

The Bible is God's revealed will to man. Jesus commissioned His disciples to go into all the world and teach all nations (Matt. 28:19-20). This is the means through which one can know the thoughts and mind of God. Jesus said, "And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me" (John 6:45). Again, the same writer tells us that this is the reason the Bible is written (John 20:30-31).

Christ is the only lawgiver (James 4:12). He has all authority (Matt. 28:18). He is the "only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:15). Therefore, we must hear Him (Matt. 17:5).

Christ's teaching is revealed in the Bible, and we must abide in it if we are to have God as our Father and Christ as our Savior (2 John 9). May God help us to understand, believe, and obey.

Our only liberty with God is to choose whether or not we will obey Him (Acts 5:29). Our freedom in Christ is our own choosing to abide in His doctrine (2 John 9); "love Him with all our heart" (John 14:15; 15:9-10); obey His every command (John 8:31-36; Heb. 5:8-9; Luke 6:46); and enjoy every blessing in Christ (Eph. 1:3; Rom. 8:1). Like Elijah said to those following Baal, "How long will you halt between two opinions: If the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). Which do you choose?

- S. Leonard Tyler, Guardian of Truth, 04/17/1986

LIVING IN AN AGE OF RAGE

Our nation has been shocked once again by an act of violence that seems beyond belief. A few weeks ago, at a hockey rink in the Boston suburb of Reading, Massachusetts, 42 year old Thomas Junta became enraged when his young son took an elbow to the face while playing hockey. Junta confronted 40 year old Michael Costin who was skating with his two sons. An argument erupted. While all the details are not yet completely clear, newspaper stories described Junta, a 270-pound truckdriver, sitting abreast the 170 pound Costin and banging his head on the concrete floor. What is clear is that Costin died in a local hospital of a cerebral hemorrhage the day after the fight. A tragic incident has once again reminded us that our world desperately needs more warm hearts and fewer hot heads. We are living in an age of rage: road rage, fan rage, air rage, and now we can add sports rage to the list. And people in our homes and schools and communities are dying because of human anger and uncontrolled rage.

The Bible seeks to warn us about the danger of uncontrolled anger. Ecclesiastes 7:9 (New Living Translation) comes right to the point when it says, "Don't be quick-tempered, for anger is the friend of fools." Ephesians 4:26-27 charges us: "Be angry, and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil." People who fly into a rage

almost always make a bad landing. Colley Cibber punches home an important truth concerning anger with this powerful little piece of prose: *"He that strives not to stem his anger's tide, Does a wild horse without a bridle ride."* No meter on earth could measure the harm that is done in our world by uncontrolled anger. Many an innocent child or mate or driver or student has suffered unreasonably at the hands of one who has a "short fuse."

How do we control our own anger in an age of rage? Some would suggest that you count to ten, but the Bible would direct us to look to the cross. As the hostile, rage-filled men who orchestrated His death blasphemed and insulted Jesus, Luke 23:34 tells us He said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." The Roman soldiers who crucified Jesus did not kill an angry man. Jesus shows us the way to deal with our anger as we live in an age of rage. The power to cool down doesn't come from counting to ten or from flying off the handle. As always, it comes from staying on the cross.

- Dan Gulley

- > "When your attitude is wrong, the correctness of your opinions is of little importance!"
- > "Ability will enable a man to get to the top, but it takes character to keep him there!"
- > "Think right, act right. It is what you think and do that makes you what you are!"
- > "A lot of kneeling will keep you in good standing!"
- > "Give God what's right -- not what's left!"
- > "Too many of us complain that our days are few while acting as if they will never end!"

THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *"The Foundation of Marriage!"*
(Text: Gen. 2:18-25); Sunday evening: *"Christianity: Active and Reflective!"*
(Acts 11:19-24).