

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Standing Alone

It is human to stand with the crowd; divine to stand alone. It is man-like to follow the people, to drift with the tide; God-like to follow a principle, to stem the tide. It is natural to compromise conscience and follow social and religious fashions for the sake of gain or pleasure; divine to defy fashion and sacrifice both gain and pleasure—worldly glory, too—on the altar of truth and duty.

"No man stood with me, but all men forsook me," wrote the battle-scarred apostle Paul describing his first appearance before Nero, to answer for his life, for believing and teaching contrary to the Roman world. Loyalty and truth have been out of fashion since man changed his robe of fadeless light for a garment of faded leaves.

Noah built and voyaged alone. His neighbors laughed, doubtless, at his strangeness, and perished in style. Abraham wandered and worshiped alone. Sodomites smiled at the simple shepherd, followed the fashion and fed the flames. Daniel dined and prayed alone. Elijah sacrificed and witnessed alone. Jeremiah prophesied and wept alone. Jesus lived and died alone.

Of the lonely way his disciples should walk, he said: "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Of their treatment by the many who walk in the broad way, he said: "If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, therefore the world hateth you."

The church in the wilderness praised Abraham and persecuted Moses. The Church of the Kings praised Moses and persecuted the prophets. Caiaphas praised the prophets and persecuted Christ. The church of the popes praised the Savior and persecuted the saints. And multitudes now, both in the church and in the world, applaud the courage of the patriarchs and prophets, the apostles and martyrs; but condemn as stubbornness, ignorance or foolishness, like faithfulness to truth and duty today.

Wanted, today: Men and women, young and old, who will obey their convictions of truth and duty at the cost of fame, fortune, friends, and life itself.

- From *Life, Letters and Sermons of T. B. Larimore*, by Mrs. T. B. Larimore, 1931, pp. 147-148, via Christianity Magazine, June, 1987.

Should We Be Envious Of The Workers Of Iniquity?

It is hard for a poor youngster to not be envious of the community drug dealer riding the streets in his Town Car or Cadillac. It is hard for a hardworking man to not be envious of his neighbor who, although known for his questionable business practices, lives the life-style befitting the "rich and famous." It is hard for young Christians to not be envious of their more popular peers, who may not be constrained by the moral strictness that should govern a Christian's behavior. It is hard for evangelists, elders and other members of congregations where the attendance and facilities are paled by some of the more "progressive" churches in town, to not be envious of their religious neighbors' inflated crowds and fantastic facilities.

David, Asaph and Solomon all address this problem. Please read Psalm 37, Psalm 73, and Proverbs 24:1, 19-20 now. David warns, "Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity" (Psalm 37:1). Asaph relates his own experience with such envy: "For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (Psalm 73:3). Solomon gives a similar warning to that of David, "Do not be envious of evil men" (Prov. 24:1) Again; "Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the wicked" (v. 19).

All three writers reach the same basic conclusion. It is foolish to be envious of the seeming success and prosperity of those who are not obeying the Lord because such prosperity is just a mirage. It is not real. It is not lasting. David says: "For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb." (Psa. 24:2). "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass . . . For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more. But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace" (Psa. 24:7, 9-11). You see, one of the troubles with envying the prosperity (?) of the wicked is the temptation to forge ahead with creating our own prosperity without waiting on the Lord.

Asaph, after admitting his own envy (Psa. 73:3) goes ahead and points out both why he was so envious and why it was so foolish. He was envious because of the perception that he had of the prosperity of the wicked: "They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride serves as their necklace; violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes bulge with abundance; they have more than heart could wish. They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walks through the earth. Therefore his people return here, and waters of a full cup are drained by them. And they say, 'How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?' Behold, these are the ungodly, who are always at ease; they increase in riches." (Psa. 73:5-12). Then he looked at his own perceived lack of prosperity: "Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence. For all day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning. (Psa. 73:13-14). He then says, "When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me -- until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end." (Psa. 73:17). Once one understands their end, those who are boastful and wicked are no longer objects of envy but of pity.

Solomon says, "For there will be no prospect for the evil man; the lamp of the wicked will be put out." (Prov. 24:20). Then he admonishes his son: "My son, fear the Lord and the king; do not associate with those given to change; for their calamity will rise suddenly, and who knows the ruin those two can bring?" (Prov. 24:21-22). The wicked, not content with God's way and His established order, call for change to their own ruin. There is no reason to be envious of such.

Young man, let the drug dealer have his big cars. You play it straight and obey God. You will prosper long after his cars have rusted in the junk yard.

Hard working brother, let your neighbor, with his questionable ethics, have his mansion on earth. Long after his mansion has fallen to the ground you can have a mansion in heaven.

Young Christian let your popular peer have his or her moment in the sun with his or her compromise-gained popularity. When you mature as a Christian and then go on to the end of your earthly journey, you will see that it is you who should have been envied and not the other way around.

Brother or sister let the First Denominational Church or the First Liberal Church have their huge crowds drawn together by carnal enticements. Let them have their fantastic facilities designed to appeal to the secular notions of a carnally-minded public. Let them have their unscriptural practices that appeal to those who have little respect for

scriptural authority. Such balloon prosperity will burst sooner or later. Plant and water; leave it to God to give the increase. (1 Cor. 3:6). Again, "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass" (Psa. 37:7).

Let us work hard to convert every soul possible to the Lord and to build up the church. Few would argue that we are doing enough along these lines. Yet, we need to understand that the Lord's way may not produce the dynamic and spectacular visual results that men often desire and experience, but it will produce the lasting results that the Lord wants. If the Lord prospers us with great numerical growth and comfortable facilities to aid in doing His work, let us rejoice and be thankful. However, before we look at the growth and facilities of our religious neighbors either with envy or admiration and start calling for changes in the Lord's church that would compete with them, let us first ask ourselves from whence did their prosperity come -- from God or men? If from men, it will not last. It is a mirage.

- Edward O. Bragwell Sr.

THE SAVED ARE THE CHURCH!

Do you need to be saved? Then you need to be in the body for Christ is the Savior of it (Eph 5:23).

Do you need Christ as your head? Then you need to be in the body for Christ is its head (Col. 1:18).

Do you need the love of Christ? Then you need to be part of His church for Christ loved it and gave Himself up for her (Eph. 5:25).

Do you need the blood of Christ? Then you need to allow the purchase price that He paid for the church, His own blood (Acts 20:28), to purchase you.

Do you need to be cleansed? Then you need to be sanctified and cleansed by Christ (Eph. 5:25-26), as He adds the forgiven to His church (Acts 2:47).

His church is the body of all who are saved!

- Gary Smalley

➤ "It is better to be nobly remembered than nobly born!"

➤ "Quiet people aren't the only ones who don't say much!"

- > "Life is a measure to be filled, not a cup to be drained!"
 - > "Those who bring happiness into the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves!"
 - > "You can see Jesus Christ better with your knees bent!"
 - > "Trying to be a Christian without getting far enough from the world to miss anything it offers is like tuning in two radio stations at the same time - you get nothing from either program!"
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THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *"The Challenges of Youth!"*

(Text: Prov. 1:8-9); Sunday evening: *"Question Box: 'When Christians are threatened by militant (aggressively active) powers, what can they do?' "*