

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Jackson, TN 38305

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January 17, 2016

Volume 36, # 03

Is it Still a Mystery?

Some people read the Bible every day. Others read it once in a while, and there are others who never open it. All have some different views as to what it teaches. Do you think God had it written so we would "understand" it differently so that each of us could believe what we want to believe? I think not!

According to Ephesians 4:5, there is just "one faith." This means there is just one body of truth. Paul had earlier (Eph.3:4) told these people that when they read (studied) the things he wrote, they would have the same understanding that he had in regard to God's will. Later (Eph.5:17), he commanded them to be not unwise but to understand what the will of God is. All of this does not sound like God gave a revelation that He knew people could not understand, but that they would have the freedom to "understand" it as they chose.

There are times when one will need to pray for wisdom (Jas.1:5) so he can rightly divide (2 Tim.2:15) the word of truth. There may also be times when one needs to ask help from another who has more knowledge (Acts 8:30, 31). The personal study, the prayers

for wisdom, and the seeking help from others are all part of God's plan for people understanding His will for us today. At one time it was a mystery, and rightly so, but now it has been uncovered. We just have to study.

How to become a Christian is something that can be learned quickly if one will take the time to read the book of Acts. This is what it is all about. One can learn how Christians are supposed to live if he will study the letters written to churches and individuals. God has revealed all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet.1:3), but we have to study it to understand it.

Acts chapter 2 tells people what they have to believe and do in order to be saved. But it will remain a mystery until one reads it carefully. Yes, the will of God for man today is still a mystery to many people simply because they don't study and rightly divide the word of truth. But God did not intend it to be so. That is why we have the New Testament. It is the mystery of God revealed!

Study is hard work (Eccl.12:12), and it is easier to let someone else tell us what God wants us to do. This was also true in the first century. 1 John 4:1 tells those who are interested in learning the will of God to test the teachers because there are those who don't teach the truth. Let us search the Scriptures as did the people in Berea in Acts 17:11. We can know the truth and by obedience to it be made free from our sins. God's will for us today has been revealed and is there waiting for us to study and obey it.

-- J.F. Dancer

Applauding the Practice

Long ago at the Olympic Games in Athens, it is said a feeble old man came in late. No seats were left. As he passed their seats, the Athenians laughed at him. Then he passed two Spartans. Quickly they rose to offer him a seat, for they had been trained to be modest and courteous. When the Athenians saw this, they cheered the Spartans. "Ah," said the old man, "The Athenians admire what is right; the Spartans practice it."

A godly man died suddenly. People were shocked -- stunned by the unexpected. Brethren in Christ felt keenly the loss of a dependable worker and companion. Men of all classes and persuasions gathered in small groups to sadly shake their heads, recall the past, and applaud a good man.

"He was sure a hard worker -- always tried to do more than was expected." That was true. He exemplified Paul's admonition: "...let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth" (Eph. 4:28). It was not the statement that was amazing but who said it -- a lazy fellow who did nothing he could get out of.

Another added, "He was surely honest -- as honest as the day is long." A thought flashes to mind: "Provide things honest in the sight of all men" (Romans 12:17). No one disagreed, but these words of praise fell from lips skilled in lies wherever a dollar is at stake.

The applause continues: "He was a church-going man. Surely if there was ever a Christian, he was one." Heads nod agreement, but neither they nor the speaker are accustomed to filling a pew when people gather to worship. They are more in the habit of

walking roughshod over the principles of Christianity than keeping them.

A preacher spoke to mourners of his dead friend and the Bible he lived by. "What a beautiful eulogy." Yet many who were impressed by the words spoken refuse to live so that such can honestly be said of them. When the applause subsides, an observer is compelled to add a final word - "Go, and do thou likewise" (Luke 10:37). No greater tribute can be paid a good man than to imitate his devotion to good. "That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Hebrews 6:12).

I can't help thinking as a result of listening and observing:

Many people pay little attention in life to the things that are so important when it comes time to die.

We are so prone to compliment others for the very virtues which we carefully avoid cultivating in ourselves. A godly man commands the admiration of all -- even the vile and irreligious.

There are far more people willing to applaud a good life than are willing to make the sacrifices necessary to live one.

Some folk are content with the office of spectator -- applauding good but not practicing it.

--Joe Fitch

A Prepared Heart

"Ezra the son of Seraiah . . . the son of Aaron the chief priest . . . went up from Babylon; and he was a ready scribe In the law of Moses . . . for Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 1:1-10). "So king Rehoboam . . . did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord" (II Chronicles 12:13, 14). What a contrast between Ezra and Rehoboam. Ezra was helpful in teaching Israel the law; Rehoboam was instrumental in the cause of division among the tribes. What a difference preparation of the heart made. May we suggest some things that may have contributed to the preparation of Ezra's heart?

(1) The influence of godly parents. Ezra's: father was a priest and possibly one who taught the law. The influence of such a man could tend to lead his children to God. Blessed are the children of the righteous.

(2) Seeing the consequences of disobedience. Ezra had been in captivity and saw firsthand the results of disobedience. This could well have had a part in helping him to see how much better it is to please God.

(3) Moral uprightness. Consider what it did for Joseph, David, and Esther. "Remember thy creator in . . . thy youth" (Eccl. 12:1).

(4) Purity of mind. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23).

(5) Ezra's knowledge of the law, Israel's history, and the promises made to Abraham, Moses, and David could motivate him to please God. Also, Ezra may have known of Daniel, who would have been a good role model.

How well have we prepared our heart to seek the law of God, to do it, and teach it to others?

-- Glenn Melton

Brotherly Love

1 John 4:7-12, 19-21 -- Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.⁸ The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.⁹ By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.¹² No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.

¹⁹ We love, because He first loved us.²⁰ If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.²¹ And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

- ""Past hurts can make you bitter or better - the choice is yours.
 - ""You can only serve one master . . . and you need to decide who it's going to be."
 - "We live in a mixed up world; some politicians are opposed to war, but at the same time have no scruples about killing unborn babies by the millions!"
 - "Forbidden fruits create many jams!"
 - "If a sermon pricks the conscience, it has some good points!"
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THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *"Avoid Danger by Following the Rules!"* (Text: Prov. 4:14-15); Sunday evening: *"The Lord Is My Shepherd!"* (Psa. 23:1).

GOSPEL MEETING 2016: Our Gospel Meeting is scheduled for July 24-29, with Josh Thornhill, of Wildersville, preaching.