

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

841 Old Hickory Blvd.

Jackson, TN 38305

oldhickorycofc.com

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Deceit

Upon his return from the Scopes trial in 1925, H. L. Mencken told a story of one of the leading citizens of Dayton who was a staunch prohibitionist but also spent much of his time half stewed. This citizen went home one evening after drinking a bit too much and told his wife he was sick and that she would have to do the evening praying alone. He went to bed but he could hear his wife on her knees in the next room. She began: "Oh, Lord, throw the mantle of Thy mercy around my drunken husband." He bolted up in bed and shouted to his wife, "Gracious, woman, don't tell Him I'm drunk; say I'm sick."

No one believes such nonsense. But millions act like they do. The recent public spectacle of a famous television preacher trapped by immorality is not new, nor is the use of deceit to try to escape the consequences of sin. It is difficult for the mighty to humble themselves and say, "I have sinned." But it is not only difficult for the mighty; it is onerous for all of us. Fortunate is the man who has never been entangled in the treacherous descent from immorality, to lying, to a life of deceit, fleeing the public price of sin.

One pays a terrible cost for hypocrisy. We sacrifice the cleansing grace of a penitent heart, brought low by the chastisement of conscience (2 Cor. 7:10). We lose our ability to identify with others, to comfort and instruct those who carry such burdens in their own lives (Gal. 6:1-5). And, above all, we forfeit our honor and self-respect (2 Pet. 1:9). Somewhere, deep in my heart, I know that I lie to myself as well as to others. So it is that one sin unacknowledged leads me deeper and deeper into the throes of deceit. Without self-respect, without the answer of a good conscience, the will to do right has perished.

Public wrong can rarely be hidden successfully; its public acknowledgement is the road to God's forgiveness and our own reformation. But even more dangerous is the private deceit which threatens the integrity of my conscience. There is much about me that you do not know, and you will never know. But I know, and God knows. It is between me and Him that deceit becomes most deceitful. I have never believed that public recitals of

private sins served either God or man. But the soul searching, closet prayer of a penitent heart is the biblical road to forgiveness and personal reconstruction.

The most curious facet of the story of the Tennessee drunk is the image of God that it presents. Can we hide from God? Such thinking, callously pursued, denigrates God; it obscures His eternal presence and majesty; it contributes to the frivolous modern concept of powerless divinity.

I confess that I guard my behavior for many different reasons. I value my family and loved ones; I am humbled by the esteem of others; I would not want to risk my job and the stability of my life. But, for all of that, I know that I can, if I will, run and hide. It may be risky, but I can sin and deceive. The gyroscope of my life must be a God consciousness. I live in His presence. He is with me everywhere I go -- for good or evil. He watches, along with heavenly hosts, the adulterer and the liar. Will you do such dark and repulsive things in His presence? It is chilling to think such thoughts.

Of course, I do sin in His presence. And when I do, as I should, I fall remorsefully on my face and pray that He will do what I cannot do -- remember it no more. It is a grand and awesome truth that I cannot forget my sins; they are painfully etched on my conscience for a lifetime. But He who knows all, has chosen to know no more. The majestic truth can be thus stated: if you deceive yourself and pretend that He does not know -- He knows. If you humble yourself and pray forgiveness for what He knows -- He no longer knows.

- Ed Harrell

Identifying the Antichrist

In a book entitled *World War III*, J. W. White wrote: "The prime mover in the events that will march man into World War III will be the Anti-Christ ... a terrible personification of evil who will work more wholesale havoc than any other human being in the history of the world."

J.W. White, Hal Lindsey (author of *The Late Great Planet Earth*, *There's a New World Coming*, et al.) and other dispensational premillennialists have done their work well in convincing a religious, but biblically illiterate, "Christian" community that such a person as described above will indeed torment the world and hasten the start of the much-feared Battle of Armageddon. Let us examine these claims under the perfect light of God's word.

Following is every occurrence of "antichrist" in the Bible:

- "Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour" (1 John 2:18).
- "Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son" (1 John 2:22).
- "And every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world" (1 John 4:3).
- "For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist" (2 John 7).

When most people discuss the antichrist they confine their discussions to wild misunderstandings of the imagery in the book of Revelation -- a book that never uses the term! It is also interesting to note the glaring differences between the premillennialist's description of the antichrist and the Bible's description.

- (1) According to the Bible there were many antichrists, not just one.
- (2) Those antichrists already existed in John's day, as opposed to being yet future to us.
- (3) These antichrists were false teachers in the church, not political dictators.
- (4) Anyone that denies that Jesus is the Christ, that He is the son of God, and/or that he came in the flesh can rightly be called "antichrist".

The antichrist is not a political dictator that starts World War III. When John wrote of the antichrist, he was addressing something that his readers could and would recognize -- something that was a threat to them.

Anyone who denies that Jesus is God's Son, or the Messiah, or that he came in the flesh could rightly be called an antichrist. Let us not be swayed or frightened by false teachers who "draw away disciples after themselves" (Acts 20:30) by "wresting the scriptures to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16).

- Eddie Parrish [edited]

Don't Push Me!

One time I was urging a teenager to obey the gospel of Christ, and she said, "DON'T PUSH, ME!" A parent told me recently that every time she talked about religion to her daughter, she said, "DON'T PUSH ME!" Sadly, many people have this attitude about becoming a Christian. The next time someone says to me "DON'T PUSH ME!" I will ask

them pointedly if they intend to allow the devil to push them into eternal hell – that is exactly what they are doing by rejecting Christ.

- Aude McKee

Choosing Friends

Someone once observed: "Fate made your relatives; choice makes your friends." Those whom you choose to be your closest friends indicate what your attitude is toward spiritual things. It is a psychological fact that we are drawn to those who share our interests.

Devoted Christians will want to associate with the spiritual and godly; those who are not interested in spiritual matters will select the ungodly as their friends. Beware when your best friends are those who are not interested in the Lord's church (your associates tell on you). Further, "Evil companionships corrupt good morals" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

- James E. Cooper

Who Is Robbed in Unfaithfulness?

An interesting fable is told of a rich man who wanted to help a poor man. The rich man hired the poor man to build a house on the hillside and went away on a long journey. The carpenter said to himself, "My boss is away and I can use cheap materials for the parts of the house which will not show. The house will be weak and undesirable but nobody will know except me."

But when the rich man returned he said, "The house isn't for me - it's for you!"

The carpenter accepted the key in astonishment. Instead of a first-class home he now had a fourth-class home.

God gives us a job, a life to build. We have to live in the house we build. If we do a shoddy job, we cheat one person, yourself.

- Unknown

> "Self-conceit always grows on a thin soil!"

- > "Many of us have the right aim in life, we just never get around to pulling the trigger!"
 - > "Idle gossip keeps some people very busy!"
 - > "The trouble with the future is that it usually arrives before we are ready for it!"
 - > "To educate a man in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society!" - Theodore Roosevelt
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THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: "*The Single Eye!*" (Text: Matt. 6:22-23);
Sunday evening: "*When A Little Becomes A Lot!*" Part 1 (John 6:1-15).