

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Attitude Adjustment

Someone once said, “We can complain because rose bushes have thorns, or rejoice because thorn bushes have roses.” Attitude is everything. It is, “a manner of thinking, feeling, or behaving that reflects a state of mind or disposition” (American Heritage Dictionary). No doubt, our manner of thinking affects the way we react to situations and live our lives. But sometimes it’ll affect others as well and have grave consequences.

When 12 spies are sent into the land of Canaan, they’re sent with specific instructions on how to observe the land. Notice the neutrality of Moses’ commands: “and see what the land is, and whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many” (Numbers 13:18). Moses doesn’t instruct them to be all doom and gloom nor all milk and honey in their report; instead, he seeks an unbiased observation. Alas, upon their return, 10 out of the 12 spies give a bad report and, “all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night” (Numbers 14:1). Seeing how the spies each were “a chief among them,” it is easy to see how their attitude warps the rest of the congregation into fear and doubt.

Why don’t 10 spies remain neutral? How could all the spies see the exact same thing and return with completely different reports? The answer is attitude. Some see roses among thorns while others see only thorns. We need to remember that our outlook and demeanor are often contagious. A sickly person can easily make an entire roomful of healthy people sick, and so it is with our attitude. Also, if we aren’t careful to see the good that God shows us in His promises, we, too, will betray God crying, “Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt” (Numbers 14:4). It is because of the Israelites’ disposition against God and the lack of faith in Him that He commands them to wander the wilderness until the rebellious generation dies. The people have a terrible price to pay for their attitude.

The most pressing thought from this story is that there will come a time when it’s too late to change and that we need an attitude of urgency. In one of the most tragic and heart-wrenching scenes in the Bible, the Israelites try to undo their mistake after God’s

judgment. Moses records, “And they rose early in the morning and went up to the heights of the hill country, saying, ‘Here we are. We will go up to the place that the LORD has promised, for we have sinned’” (Numbers 14:40). Now a repenting people are ready to fight just as God wanted them to — their strength and hope mustered up, the Promised Land ripe before them.

But, “Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and defeated them and pursued them, even to Hormah” (Numbers 14:45). The people know, “neither the ark of the covenant of the LORD nor Moses departed out of the camp,” so why would they fight? (Numbers 14:44). The people desperately want to change God’s mind and show how they are ready to take the land. God answers them with their defeat. Though the words aren’t uttered, we clearly see that it is too late for Israel.

This humbling moment in Israel’s history should humble us all. If we’re presumptuous enough to think God will always wait for us or we’ll change whenever we feel like it, we’ll die here in the wilderness and never enter the Promised Land. Even after they acknowledge their sin, Israel is unable to go into Canaan, and the same is for us, if we don’t have the right attitude.

To be called a child of God, we must believe in God and trust that His promises will irresistibly come to fruition. We’ll have an attitude of urgency and heed the apostle Paul’s warning, “Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4). Repentance here means to “change one’s mind,” so shall we change our attitude to trust and obey God before it’s too late.

In our narrative, 40 years have passed, and Israel’s conquest continues in Joshua 6. Once again, the people of Israel stand before the Promised Land, now even stronger and more courageous, and there’s something else to be noted. As far as we know, nothing about the land changes during Israel’s wandering. Nothing about the inhabitants changes: Not their fortified cities or their ability to fight. God doesn’t change, either; He is still with His people as before.

The only notable difference is in the people of Israel. Indeed, it is more than having a new generation or a new leader; it is about the change in attitude. The people’s attitude toward God and their faith in Him is the only change necessary, even toward their salvation.

The same is for us. As we sojourn in this wilderness, we’re likely to be faced with many thorn and rose bushes. Sometimes the only difference between the two is how we choose to see them. Sometimes the only change necessary is in ourselves. As with Israel, with a

better attitude, we'll be more prepared and useful to God. May we strive to think and live in a way that exemplifies our faith in God and one day be ready to enter the Promised Land.

- Chris Webb

Dealing with a Wayward Child

The apostle John writes, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 4). For the godly parent, the converse is equally accurate; there is no greater sorrow than having a child that walks in error. Our Creator has given every soul a free will, and there will be some bent on exercising their free wills to their own harm and their parents' grief.

Parents have perhaps the greatest influence on the choices a child makes regarding following the Lord. Their godly example and wholesome instruction through the early years of childhood provide the very best foundation for faithfulness in their children (Prov. 22:6). Consistent daily teaching (Deut. 6:6-9) and loving, corrective discipline (Prov. 13:24; 19:18) help to shape a child's will to walk in the way of truth.

Sadly, even the most diligent parents may have to deal with an older child expressing his free will in rebellion to their godly training (e.g., Eli, Samuel, David, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah, etc.). When this is the case, the distress of this beloved soul being lost evokes within a parent's heart every conceivable emotion: anger at all the tools and devices Satan has used to pry this child from the Lord; helplessness in realizing one cannot "make" another turn and do right; despair that all the labor invested may have been for naught; guilt for every mistake made in the past; fear of making a wrong move and driving the child further away or destroying what little relationship may be left. These often leave a parent feeling paralyzed. However, there are actions that, if consistently carried out, provide the *best* prospect for a wayward child to return to the Lord.

Hold the Erring Accountable

It is tempting to try to minimize or even hide the sin of our children. But this does nothing in helping them turn from their error. Under the Law of Moses, it was the parents' responsibility to bring a rebellious son to the elders for discipline (Deut. 21:18-21). We do not live under the Law of Moses, but the principle of holding our children accountable for their waywardness is still vitally important in helping them to return to the Lord. Sin should be called sin and never tolerated or excused.

Refuse To be an Enabler

The godly priest Eli expressed to his sons his disapproval for their unfaithfulness, but he enabled them to continue in such sin by allowing them to remain in their positions as priests (1 Sam. 2:22-25). He did not use the pull he had to restrain them. If parents truly desire to help their child turn from sin, they must not provide means to continue in sin. Even if one has a legal obligation to financially support (such as with a child who is still a minor), it would not be wise to furnish such things that would facilitate their sin (i.e, vehicle, cell phone, internet, etc.). Aiding (financially or otherwise) a wayward adult child does nothing to help him see the error in his life. Often it is only when "the prodigal" hits "rock bottom" that he is forced to reevaluate his choices (Luke 15:11-24). The time to show support is when he has come to himself and has repented.

Honor Truth over Family Ties

Eli made the mistake of honoring his sons more than God (1 Sam. 2:29). Family ties took precedent over truth and it cost him his children and his own standing before the Lord. When a child turns away from the truth taught them, it is more important than ever for parents to show their devotion is firmly to the Lord. This is not the time to give up, give in, or back down regarding truth. More than any other time in his life, the child needs his parent to stand strong in what is right. Compromising biblical values at this critical time often seals the deal. The wayward child needs to know that unfaithfulness to the Lord fundamentally changes relationships, both with Christ (1 John 1:6) and with those that follow Christ (2 Thess. 3:14). He must know you will follow Christ. If parents desire their child to honor God above himself, then parents must honor God above their child.

These actions are unpleasant for all involved and may even seem harsh in our society. However, much is at stake, and these actions give the most incentive and support for true repentance and future faithfulness. For the heartbroken parent of the wayward child, these must be lovingly practiced in hope that they will soon be able to say, "Rejoice with me, for my son which was lost has been found."

- Lonnie Oldag, via *Biblical Insights*, Aug., 2015, p. 9.

- > "Footprints in the sands of time are never made by sitting down!"
- > "An optimist is one who makes the best of it when he gets the worst of it!"
- > "Careful construction is due our children: shape the will without breaking the spirit!"

- > "The commandments of Christ are not multiple choice!"
 - > "Nothing shows more accurately what we are than the way we meet trials and difficulties!"
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THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *"The Rule That Is Golden!"* (Text: Matt. 7:12); Sunday evening: *Bi-monthly Singing!*