

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Your Conscience: Dead or Alive?

Hardly anyone speaks of the conscience anymore. As a society, our "conscience" hardly even "bothers" us any longer. We have become so accustomed to all kinds of wrong and all types of filthiness that we don't even know how to blush. A Christian, however, is one who lives by a properly ordered, well trained conscience. In fact, violation of one's conscience is sinful (Romans 14:23) even if there is no inherent wrong involved. Meat-eating was not sinful per se, but if a person had scruples against it, Paul said he should not eat meat (see also 1 Corinthians 8). The lesson: Don't violate your conscience. If careful study of God's word and earnest prayer causes you to change your scruples and allows you to begin eating meat, then that is perfectly fine. But if your conscience cries out in anguish at the very slight of hamburger - then leave it alone. It would be sinful for you to go contrary to this inner sense of right and wrong.

Why is Scripture so insistent that the conscience not be violated? Paul, in fact, always worked "to have a conscience without offense toward God and men" (Acts 24:16). He paid attention to his conscience, made certain that he did not abuse it, and determined not to violate it. In order to secure a clean conscience, the blood of Jesus redeemed us (Hebrews 9:12-14).

Baptism is an "answer of a good conscience toward God" (1 Peter 3:21). Concerning deacons, 1 Timothy 3:9 says they must "hold the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience." The conscience, therefore, is a vessel - a container in which is held the mystery of our faith. This being so, we can understand the necessity of an unbroken, intact and clean conscience. Deliberate violations of conscience rupture the container in which our faith is held! If we persist in violating our conscience, our faith will leak away like water from a cracked drinking glass.

When you do what you know is wrong, you cannot have a pure conscience. Without an intact conscience sensitive to the will of God (cf. 1 Timothy 4:2) we are destroying the very thing that will keep us in the faith. 1 John 3:21-22 says "If our heart does not condemn

us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things pleasing in His sight."

- Mark W. White

On A Daily Basis

A man, asked recently to describe memories of his college days twenty-five years ago, replied, "A few big moments; many goofs, but, overall, pleasant memories."

Would these words not describe our memories of life generally? As we recall our years, there are always the "big" moments, the emotional "highs," that we love to relish. Then there are the "goofs," the embarrassing occasions that just keep coming back to haunt us. But, through it all, the pleasant memories sufficiently prevail to enable us to feel generally good about life.

But, in reality, success or failure in life is not determined by the "big moments" or "the goofs." We will not be eternally saved on the basis of a few great spiritual achievements or eternally lost on the basis of a few gross mistakes (assuming they have been repented of). Life consists of everyday actions and decisions, and it is these that bring ultimate success or failure, eternal happiness or eternal damnation. "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23).

It is one thing to express concern for our children as we talk of their future spirituality and faithfulness. It is quite another to provide on a daily basis a spiritual atmosphere in the home, a good example of godliness and faithfulness, consistent and loving discipline and a love for God and respect for fellowman that are so essential to the training of our children. It's the little impressions that are made day by day that prove to be so decisive.

It is one thing to dream of someday being appointed an elder in the church. It is quite another thing to put forth the effort on a daily basis to learn the scriptures, to develop leadership ability, to grow spiritually, and to live as to gain the confidence of a discerning congregation. One does not qualify for the eldership in one big leap. It comes through daily development.

It is one thing to talk a "good line" on priorities. It is quite another thing to put God first on a daily basis. The devil knows so many ways to test our resolve in these realms. Our intentions are good, but, through his subtlety, he has us selling our souls for a mess of pottage or thirty pieces of silver.

It is one thing to think that we would die for the Lord if our faith were so tested. It is quite another thing truly to live for Him on a daily basis. Egos may be fed on the "big moments," but true spirituality develops through daily prayer, study and meditation.

Our lesson is this. Set your goals for the future and set them high. But recognize that it's the little, day-by-day moments, the often-forgotten moments, accumulated through the years, that truly shape our destiny. Tomorrow's success depends upon the choices and decisions that are made today. Make them with care.

- Bill Hall

Jailer Bound, Prisoners Free

The jailer had received strict orders to keep certain prisoners safely. He bound them in stocks, in the inner prison; but at midnight a great earthquake loosed their bonds. Thinking his prisoners had escaped, the jailer was about to kill himself, when one of the prisoners said, "Do thyself no harm: for we are all here".

Small wonder the keeper began to think that these men, jailed because of religious practices, might have information he sorely needed. Bringing them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:23-ff).

The answer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ -- " is a broad, all-inclusive reply. It says, "sir, to be saved, you need a Savior;" for mark it well -- salvation is no more purchased by "faith" than it is by "baptism." The jailer must "believe" in -- put his trust in -- Jesus. Here is the one on whom he must depend; the one who had died for the sins of the world; the one who had divine authority to tell him "what to do."

Respecting the authority of Christ, the prisoners then "spake unto him the word of the Lord." They gave the jailer the message Christ had sent them forth to proclaim. I see no objection to calling it the plan of salvation as long as we remember that this simply means the instructions we receive from the Savior, in whom we trust. We "rest our case" upon Christ when we are humbly submissive to His will; (John 14:23) which obviously means we must know His will, and do it. In a sense, Paul and Silas were telling the jailer what it really means to "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" when they "spake unto him the word of the Lord." Jesus had said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved ..." and "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Mark 16:16; Matt. 28:19). Through Peter He had said, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission

of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). This is the "word of the Lord."

And so, the jailer "Took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway." This was his way -- and the proper way -- of "believing in God with all his house" (Why not read the whole record for yourself? – Acts 16:23-34).

The prisoners, Paul and Silas, were "tied" to the stocks, but in a far more disastrous way, the jailer was "bound" in his own sins. His was a binding that could damn his soul, while their's meant only physical discomfort, and that was apparently forgotten in their rejoicing that they could suffer for the cause of Christ. They "prayed, and sang praises unto God" while in this condition.

Please note -- the jailer did not "rejoice" (Acts 16:34) until after he had been loosed from his bonds of sin.

Dear Reader, there is a vital message in this for you. Have you really and truly "believed in Jesus Christ?"

- Robert F. Turner, via *Plain Talk*, June, 1965

Jonathan Edwards once wrote:

"Tis by this [pride] that the mind defends itself in other errors, and guards itself against light by which it might be corrected and reclaimed. The spiritually proud man is full of light already; he does not need instruction, and is ready to despise the offer of it. . . . He that thinks a clear light shines around him is not suspicious of an enemy lurking near him, unseen: and then being proud of their humility, that makes him least of all [aware] of himself in that particular being under the prevalence of pride."

[from: *Some Thoughts Concerning Revival*]

- > "When the Bible is silent about a matter, I too had better be silent, unless I recognize the possibility of coming back to confess that I was mistaken!"
- > "Failure does not mean you will never make it. It does mean you have to do it differently!"
- > "Blaming your faults on your nature does not change the nature of your faults!"

- > "The world has forgotten, in its concern with "Left" and "Right," that there is an "Above" and "Below!"

 - > "Beware of the 'half-truth.' You may have gotten hold of the wrong half!"
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THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: "*How To Live Through A Crisis!*" (Text: 2 Sam. 15:13-37); Sunday evening: "*My Father And Your Father!*" (John 8:38-47).