

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Some Good Advice From An Undertaker

There's a funeral director in a small Michigan town who has overseen some 5,000 burials over a period of 25 years. He was asked by a local reporter how his experience had shaped his thinking in resolving conflicts with others. He responded, "It tends to make me want to resolve conflicts a little quicker, because I've seen people go off to work who didn't come home."

Folks, that's good advice from an undertaker.

How many times have we huffed out of the house in the morning or turned out the light at night with anger smoldering in our hearts? We tell ourselves, "Yes, I intend to resolve the conflict eventually, but not right now." We think — "let the other person suffer awhile in silence." But if we dealt with heartbroken survivors as often as the above undertaker, it would change the way we think and act toward others.

The inspired writer Paul exhorts us to, "Do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil (Ephesians 4:26-27). "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32). The issue is not what others have done to us, but what Christ has done for us (John 15:12-15; Romans 5:6-10).

There's no better time than the present to apologize or offer forgiveness, and to restore a priceless relationship. Let's be slow to anger and quick to repent (Proverbs 16:32; Jonah 3:5; cf. Luke 11:32).

- Mike Riley

ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NOT GOLD

Many years ago, my brothers and I went to New York City. We arrived very early in the morning. We could not wait to get our bags into our room and get our first look at Times Square. I shan't soon forget the sight. It was as if we were immersed in a sea of lights. There were lights that cascaded like water falls, lights that sparkled like Christmas, lights that wrote messages, lights that twinkled.

There were pulsating lights, performing lights, lights that made little paths around huge pictures of people. The scene seemed to take you along with it, whether you wanted to go or not. It was as if you were in a current the strength of which was so overpowering you had no resistance.

Society is like those lights. It has a strong attraction. It pulls people with great subtlety. You're caught up in the flow of it before you know it; and when you're in the flow, it takes great power – more than most of us have – to dislodge yourself.

With its various methods of seduction, society invites us into the slime pit of sin. It accomplishes this by making sin attractive. If sin were left to its own, nobody would get involved in it. It promises things; it holds out a certain satisfaction. Sin is never presented to you in its bare form. It's always dressed up in something. And the trappings are well thought out. The Devil is a master of disguises. He conjures up all manner of packages in which to place this most deadly enemy of mankind. When he has it just right he presents it with deadly skill. You can be in it before you know it.

How do we fight this kind of attraction? What can we do?

Get to know yourself. Each of us is different. Each has his own vulnerabilities, his own weaknesses. Only when you get to know yourself can you prevent the hypnotic spell. Paul said, "Examine yourself..." (1 Cor. 13:5). Such an introspection is private; no one can do it for you. It takes an amount of courage, a sort of "push yourself" attitude. The Devil would like you to just "go with the flow," and "not fight against the feeling." But when you know yourself, you're able to guard against getting into trouble before you know it.

Decide what's important. The Devil wins lots of folks simply because he convinces them, ever so subtly, that it's OK to major in minors. How often we dedicate ourselves to that which is of so little value. How does he do that? Well, he just dresses it up so that you can't see it for what it really is. How many people have been deluded into thinking that life consists of the abundance of the things possessed? (cf. Lk. 12:15). How many times have fame and material things blinded the vision of some unsuspecting person?

After all, success is important isn't it? Sure it is; but only if it's real success – the kind that relates to the eternal.

Store up the message. The word of God is the key to overcoming the Devil. Jesus proved that when He was tempted by Satan (Matt. 4). His answer still works today. But if you've not stored up the information, you can't use it when the moment of disaster is near. "It is written" cannot be used by him who doesn't know that it's written. Store up the information and be ready. It's a war, folks. And we can't fight it without the armaments necessary for the conflict (Eph. 6:11-ff).

Take control of your own life. It's amazing how easy it is to surrender yourself. Almost without thinking you can surrender yourself to some hobby, to some project, to some dominant personality, to some movement of some sort. That's how the Devil's process works. It's like those lights – you're mesmerized before you know it. Paul told the Romans, "Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are whom ye obey?" (Rom. 6:17). It's your choice. You don't have to surrender to anybody. You choose the one you serve. Be careful.

Follow through. Follow-through is important whether it's a good tennis stroke, a good golf swing, or a disciple's obedience. Intention without follow-through is a most sagacious ploy. He doesn't have to get you to decide not to do what's right if he can just get you to put it off. Oh, you intend to, you just haven't gotten around to it. And intention: isn't that something which is commendable, something good? Sure it is. But only if you follow through. James said, "to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).

After we had seen the lights in the black of night we went back to the hotel with visions of brightness still burning in our minds. The next morning, we went to the same area and saw Times Square in God's light. What a difference! Litter, last night's confetti, drunks in the doorways, alleys filled with filth.

Things aren't always what they seem.

- Dee Bowman

The Power of Love

"And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

Reading this reminds me once again of the most important thing. We strive for accomplishment. We strive for recognition. We strive for education. But none of these mean anything if we do not have love.

Love is not milk-toast. It is demanding. It requires selflessness. Love demands long-suffering and proper behavior toward others. Love does not abide evil surmising. Love expects us to endure, believe all things, and hope all things. Love stands for right and hates what is wrong. Bottom line is, love never fails.

The one attribute of character that changed the world is love. It is not hate. It is not criticism. It is not getting the other told. It is not even getting even. Love is not mushy, gooeey, or sticky. It is a reasoned choice that says, "I chose to love you." I chose to give what is not deserved. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." I did not deserve that from Him. He chose to love me.

Notice God's love was proven by action and measured by sacrifice. Look at it — proven by action, that is, "He gave." He gave that which was dearest to Him and cost Him the most. He chose to. His love, further, is measured by sacrifice. Look again – He gave "His only begotten Son." He gave Him for who? Sinners, those who were estranged from Him and who were His enemies. (Rom. 5:8). We are most like God when we love like He did.

Loving like God may require some action on my part toward someone I would rather not be kind to. But because I want to be like Him, I will speak well of that person. I will do that one good. I will pray for that one. Loving like God may require sacrifice on my part, too. I may be asked to give something that is costly to me. I may be asked to give of myself to someone I might rather not like a whole lot. Maybe even to someone who has done me harm.

Maybe I'm living in a dream land. I wonder how our world would change if we had leaders who demonstrated this kind of love for the people of this great nation? If for once they would just set aside partisanship? If both and all sides out of love for the nation sacrifice something that would benefit the nation? Again, what if leaders in the church would lead out of love? Lead by giving themselves and sacrificing pride for the good of the church? What if husbands really did love their wives as Christ loved the church? Would we have the abuse, vitriol in speech that often occurs in marriages by husbands toward their wives? What if brethren, even in disagreements, really sacrificed for the good of the other? Most disagreements are not about truth but about me and what I like or don't like.

I think I have figured something out. Love makes us like God. Love will heal all. Let love be in abundance.

- Rickie Jenkins

- > "Two telltale marks of a Christian are giving and forgiving, for the world knows little about either!"
 - > "Plastic surgeons nowadays can do almost anything with the human nose, except keep it out of other people's business!"
 - > "SIN *adds* to your troubles, *subtracts* from your energy, *multiplies* your difficulties, *divides* your interest in your work, and *pays wages*: death!"
 - > "Those who absent themselves from worship because of bad weather soon learn to stay away in fair weather!"
 - > "Wisdom enables one to be thrifty without being stingy and generous without being wasteful!"
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THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: "*You Are The Man!*" (2 Sam. 12:1-15);
Sunday evening: "*You Are The Man!*" (Part 2).