

# **The Old Hickory Bulletin**

## **Old Hickory Church of Christ**

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### **Of Gnats and Other Annoyances**

During the summer of 1970, I worked for a road construction company that was rebuilding U.S. Highway 90 along the Mississippi Gulf Coast following the devastation of Hurricane Camille the previous summer. Our long work days began about daybreak. Without even the hint of a breeze at that hour, the waters of the Gulf of Mexico were as still as a sheet of glass. I would have enjoyed the freshness of those mornings, if it had not been for the gnats. Down there, anyone foolish enough to come near the sandy beach that early on certain summer mornings is going to be attacked. So small you can hardly see them, these gnats bite with a torment that is out of all proportion to their size. By mid-morning they've disappeared, but for the first few hours of the day they are enough to make a grown man cry.

I remember working one morning with Joe Bridges, a grizzled old black man who watched out for me on the job and had become a dear friend. From Tylertown, Mississippi, he had been a common laborer for many long years and had followed construction jobs all over the South. I often marveled at the patient, rhythmic way he worked in difficult conditions, and this morning was no exception. As I furiously fought the gnats and said unappreciative things about the day I was born, Joe seemed to take only slight notice of the devilish little insects.

"Man, how in the world can you stand this?" I finally screamed. "Don't these gnats bother you?"

"Well," Joe said, looking at me sideways as he adjusted his hard hat a little, "I guess they would – if I let 'em."

It was some years later that I understood: folks who have known what real hardship is don't pay much attention to gnats.

One measure of a man is the size of what it takes to annoy him. Unfortunately, most of us are far too easily irritated. Since we have so little character, it doesn't take much to

get the best of us. Consequently, our lives are dominated by relatively minor vexations, things that wisdom says we shouldn't take the time to be troubled about. We're the victim of every little unpleasantness that comes along. Rather than grow in character and rise above these petty annoyances, we spend our lives swatting "gnats." The real work we were sent here to do ends up being neglected because we spend most of our time and energy being annoyed.

The tendency to be easily annoyed is far more than a quirky little "personality" trait. I would suggest that many of the quite serious problems in life – especially in our dealings with other people – boil down to a failure of self-discipline with regard to the basic issue of irritability. If not repented of and removed from our character, annoyance is likely to cause more deadly destruction than we expect. As bad habits go, being grouchy is far from harmless.

When we find ourselves upset over "gnats" and other annoyances, our hearts are wide open to all manner of evil things. "Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls" (Proverbs 25:28). "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city" (Proverbs 16:32).

Paul wrote, "Let your gentleness be known to all men" (Philippians 4:5). The word translated here as "gentleness" (or moderation, or meekness) is defined as "strength under control." To avoid the destructive effects of annoyance in our lives, our strength must be under control. To do this, we must be not only self-disciplined, but show God's wisdom. "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy" (James 3:13-17).

Most of us would like to have "peace of mind," but we tend to see "worry" as the main hindrance to that peace. What we fail to recognize is that annoyance is just as much the enemy of "peace of mind" as anxiety. The peace of God hardly reigns in our hearts if we're in a constant state of vexation over the little irritations of life.

So what is it that really irritates you? Whether it's a big thing or a little one, do yourself a favor and try this: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).

- Gary Henry, originally published in Focus Magazine, February, 2000

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# BE A CHRISTIAN!

There is no better life! Nothing in the world can compare with the joys and satisfaction of being a Christian, in the family of God.

Troubles and problems that otherwise would be unbearable can be borne with a living hope, and, heartaches and sorrows that pain within can find ease. The Lord has not promised us freedom from trials, but strength with which to meet them, with which to triumph; not an absence of problems, but the assurance that we can stand and find the way in His word; nor an escape from troubles and hardships, but a striving example and ringing challenge of how to benefit from them.

Life itself brings its burdens and a man is foolish to refuse the help of the Lord. "Come unto me, ... take my yoke." We cannot bear successfully the yoke and burden of the world, but Christ's yoke is easy and His burden is light. Therefore, don't be discouraged by hypocrites, personal problems, opposition to the church, and the sundry trials that will come: "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might."

Comes soon the hour when our trials are over - dim fades the day of life, and swift advances the night of death. Into the hands of Him whom we have followed in our feeble but fervent way, and by Him to be judged. Beyond gossip's harm, beyond friends' help -- completely in His hands. Excuses are vanished and idle intentions voided -- our lives are opened, and we are bared before Him.

An unspeakable death or a glittering home? Oh, be a Christian, and with an aim unswerving and a hope thereby undimmed, and labor for an eternal weight in glory.

- Jere Frost

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## "All Things That Pertain To Life And Godliness"

The apostle Peter wrote, "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (2 Pet. 1:3). As Christians, we're in the habit of saying that God has given us everything essential to life and godliness. We recognize God as the giver of all good things, and we know He blesses us daily. In this letter, Peter goes farther than just saying that God has given us those things "essential" for life and godliness. He affirms that God has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness! Yes, there is a difference between things "essential" to something and things that "pertain" to something.

To illustrate: If you own an automobile, but only have the things essential to the automobile, what do you have? You'll truly have the "bare-bones" of the car! In contrast, what if you owned an automobile and had everything that pertains to the car? What would you have then? Would there be room to sit in a car that possessed everything pertaining to a car? Think about what Peter wrote - God hasn't merely given us all things that are essential to life and godliness, but He's given us all things that pertain to life and godliness! Remember the words of Christ in John 10:10!

Do we believe this? If so, are we thankful to God? If we believe the words of 2 Peter 1:3, why do we act as if everything depends on us when we know God has given all? Read 2 Peter 1:3 again and notice that God has given us all of these things through the knowledge of Christ. In other words, through the gospel of Christ. Therefore, through the gospel, God has given us "all things that pertain unto life and godliness." If there is, therefore, anything in our religion that didn't come through the gospel, then it doesn't pertain to life and godliness. Is it not time to check ourselves and see if we're following anything we can't find in the New Testament (2 Cor. 13:5; 1 Pet. 4:11)?

- Jarrod M. Jacobs

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- > "Some of the Bible's most precious treasures are discerned only with tear-filled eyes!"
  - > "The heart of a true Christian never takes delight in the faults of others!"
  - > "Sometimes, all we want is for our acquaintance to desire the Lord's help; it would be wise for us to realize that some people just don't want it!"
  - > "How much better to be honestly poor, than questionably rich!"
  - > "The Lord is never satisfied with people who are satisfied with themselves!"
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**THIS WEEK'S LESSONS:** Sunday morning: *"Identifying the Lord's Church!" #2* (Text: Matt. 16:13-19); Sunday evening: Hebrews Class: Lesson 25, p. 145: "Keep Yourself From Covetousness, 13:5-6).