

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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WHAT ABOUT "JOHN"

Peter therefore seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me. (John 21:21, 22)

Without impugning Peter's motives in asking this question and without exploring all the implications of the Lord's answer, there is yet an important, if simple, lesson to be gleaned from these passages. Essentially, Peter is asking, "What about John?" The mild rebuke of Jesus reminds him that this matter is really none of his business. Your business is to follow me, as one version puts it. The Lord's advice to Peter is good advice to all who would allow the affairs of others to deter them from the serious business of following Christ.

Further, it is timeless advice, because in different ways and for different reasons many have continued to ask Peter's question. The non-Christian, for instance, when informed that the gospel plan of salvation involves faith, repentance, confession, and baptism, may ask, "But what about the thief on the cross?" or, "What about my parents who died without doing that?" or, "What about the jungle natives who never hear the gospel?" — in other words, "What about John?" Perhaps not all who ask such questions would appreciate a kindly paraphrased reply like, "What is that to you? You follow Christ!" — but it would be appropriate since every man who seeks salvation must follow Him, regardless of all other persons, circumstances or consequences.

To some, the what-about-John issue with respect to baptism may be a sincere inquiry in the search of truth — but to the less-noble it may be nothing more than a diversion to avoid the demands of truth. Regrettably, some who like to be known as Christians manufacture excuses and self-justification out of the same machinery. More often than not, when erring brethren are confronted with their sins or unfaithfulness, they respond with some form of "What about John?" With them, John and his real or imagined shortcomings are not so much objects of concern as crutches for their own sins. The implication is that since John is allowed to get by with it, their guilt is somehow diminished

— or at least ought to be overlooked. Such reasoning, fallacious as it may be, is much more prevalent and influential than generally recognized — simply because it is not often expressed **until the sinner is faced** with his sins (an unpopular and infrequent type of confrontation practiced by early Christians such as Paul, Gal. 2:11). Then you hear about John! Then John's sins suddenly become important — but only for the purpose of being exploited, not corrected.

What about John? He may be wrong as accused. If so, he needs to be dealt with the same as his accuser — and his accuser should remember that he himself may well be the John used as an excuse by yet other sinners. He, and all, would better ask, **WHAT ABOUT ME?** Settling this question fits all for following Christ — and helping John to do likewise.

- Dan S. Shipley, via *Plain Talk*, March, 1973

Culture and the Christian

I've had recent opportunity to think about our culture and how it affects the Christian. There are lots of Christians who think that local culture is adequate to shape our beliefs about certain sins, such as modesty and drinking. I remember as a young preacher an issue of a periodical where preachers from California discussed modesty. I thought the whole idea was silly - and so did they. Their point was that they still preach what God says, even though they lived in an immodest local culture.

When you really think about it, there's a lot of questions about local culture that need an answer. Consider a few. If I lived in Las Vegas, could I gamble in every form? If I lived in Napa Valley, could I drink wine? Most pornographic videos are filmed in Los Angeles. Could I watch them if I lived there? Most crystal meth arrests are made in Michigan. Since it's apparently so popular, could I smoke it if I lived there? If I lived in Kentucky, could I chew the tobacco grown there? If I lived in Galveston, could I encourage my wife and daughter to wear a bikini at their beautiful beaches? Most marijuana arrests occur in Texas. Since it's so well-liked, here, could I smoke it?

These questions are interesting, aren't they? Everything I do must have positive, divine authority. That's what Paul meant when he wrote, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Colossians 3:17). Can local culture change the word of God? No! It is shocking to see Christians trying to make the cultural argument for the acceptance of moral sins.

In a wicked and permissive society, Paul not only commended people coming out of their wickedness, but he also told them that their bodies were temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:9-20). What made the Corinthians turn the Lord's Supper into a common meal? Was it the pagan festivals they were accustomed to seeing? If it was, then Paul told them to stop it (1 Corinthians 11:17-34, esp. vv. 22, 34). Sins were not modified or excused by local culture. When the gospel confronted various sins, the command was always to repent.

- Kyle Campbell, via *The Gospel Teacher*, 7/21/19

Here's Your Warning

There are warnings, and then there are divine warnings (Matthew 2:12; Hebrews 11:7). See if any of these apply to you. If you do a lot of good; help a lot of people, but only do it to impress others, here's your divine warning: "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:1).

If you love the praise of men more than the praise of God, here's your divine warning: "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets" (Luke 6:26).

If you blindly follow everything you hear from religious teachers, here's your divine warning: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves" (Matthew 7:15).

If you're doing, saying, maybe even wearing something that causes others to sin, here's your divine warning: "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6).

If you somehow think that sincerity is all that matters, that it doesn't matter what you believe, here's your divine warning: "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God" (2 John 1:9). And another: "There is a way that seems right to man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12).

If you've become overconfident in your ability to handle temptation, here's your divine warning: "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41).

If you've decided that you just can't be content with the things you've got now, here's your divine warning: "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses" (Luke 12:15). And another: "Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire" (Ecclesiastes 6:9).

If you've become too harsh and overbearing with your children, here's your divine warning: "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged" (Colossians 3:21).

If you've become the church malcontent, the one who constantly grumbles against his brethren, here's your divine warning: "Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!" (James 5:9).

If you believe like so many that you cannot fall from grace, here's your divine warning: "Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away" (Hebrews 2:1). And another: "Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience" (Hebrews 4:11).

Who Really Gets It?

"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him SHOW by good CONDUCT that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom" (James 3:13).

The one who really "gets it" is the one who understands how to apply it.

- Bryan Gibson

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- > "A thankful heart doubles our blessings, causing us to enjoy them twice -- when we receive them and when we remember them!"
 - > "If we pause to think, we'll have cause to thank!"
 - > "If you will learn to appreciate the good things you have, you won't miss the good things you don't have!"
 - > "We can be thankful in a topsy-turvy world if our lives are right side up!"
 - > "Giving thanks means little unless you are living thanks!"
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THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *“Elijah, ‘Troubler of Israel!’”* (Text: 1 Kings 18:17-18); Sunday evening: *“Following Jesus!”* (John 21:15-25).