

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Scoffing At Sin

Fools make a mock at sin: but among the righteous there is favor" (Prov. 14:9).

Four important lessons are now pointed out, all of them suggested in this text.

Sin A Reality

The Bible depicts sin as a reality, not a myth; it exists in actuality and is not a mere figment of the imagination.

Sin separates people from God (Isa. 59:1,2). Sin is found among Jews and Gentiles alike (Rom. 3:23). Sin is deceitful (Heb. 3:13). Sin leads to death - eternal separation from God (Rom. 6:23). To deny that sin is a reality and that one's own life has been touched by it is to make God a liar (1 Jn. 1:8-10). Christ is the Lamb provided by God to take away sin (Jn. 1:29).

Some Mock Sin

To "mock" is to scoff, scorn, or deride. Many people scoff at sin.

(1) Sin is the subject of much testing. A lot of folks, some young and some old, laugh about sin. Instead of mourning, they make jokes about vile and vulgar acts; instead of sorrowing for wickedness, they laughingly indulge in evil; instead of showing remorse and regret for sin, they amuse themselves in violations of divine law; instead of repenting and being ashamed of iniquity, they see sin as something funny. "Against whom do ye sport yourselves? Against whom make ye a wide mouth, and draw out the tongue?" (Isa. 57:4) Those who jest about sin and wallow in wickedness are in effect ridiculing God who views sin as offensive.

Sin is tolerated rather than opposed. Some have become so lenient toward evil that it no longer bothers them. Nothing makes them blush. Some in Jeremiah's day were like that.

"Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? Nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the Lord" (Jer. 6:15). In the words of Alexander Pope there is a warning:

Vice is a monster of such deadly mein,
That to be hated, needs but to be seen;
But seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

(3) Sin hardens hearts beyond repentance. There are people who first mocked at sin to conceal their guilt. Outwardly, they were laughing and jesting while inwardly miserable. But their seared consciences are now pretty much deadened. The words of Isaiah the prophet accurately described them: "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isa. 5:20).

The mockery of sin does not change its reality. Jestng about sin makes it no less damaging and deadly. Laughter over wickedness does not cover transgressions as they are viewed by the Lord. The hardening of the heart through continued making sport of sin only makes the sinner incorrigible.

Perhaps some think it is smart to jest and mock at sin, "But he that makes a sport of sinning, will find it no sport to suffer the vengeance of an eternal fire" (A. Clarke). ". . . Weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you" (Jas. 5:1).

Scoffers Are Fools

"Fools make a mock at sin." How great a fool is the person who belittles the reality of sin, plunges deeper and deeper into iniquity, and rejects all efforts to turn him to a pure and noble life.

To mock at sin is to cast aside both reason and revelation, making oneself void of understanding.

Just as one who denies God is a fool (Psa. 14:1), and one who despises wisdom and instruction is a fool (Prov. 1:7), and one who trusts in riches is a fool (Lk. 12:15-20), so one who scoffs at sin is a fool!

The Righteous Find Favors

While fools make mockery of sin, "among the righteous there is favor." "The contrast here is between fools who carelessly engage in sin while good people find acceptance with God by responsible living" (Robert L. Alden).

To find favor with God one must turn from sin and do right. "A good man obtaineth favor of the Lord: but a man of wicked devices will he condemn" (Prov. 12:2). "For thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous; with favor wilt thou compass him as with a shield" (Psa. 5:12).

Finding favor with God demands that we fear him and work righteousness (Acts 10:35). The purpose of the gospel is to inform of God's plan of righteousness. When one learns what he is required to do, to be saved from his sins, he must believe and obey. In humble submission to God's will we are brought into divine favor.

- Irvin Himmel, via Guardian of Truth, XXXIII: 13, p. 403, July 6, 1989

Bitter Brethren

Recently a small struggling church in Texas divided because of a misunderstanding between brethren. More recently, a good church in East Texas suffered a similar fate. A young and growing church in California had nearly a third of its members to leave last year because of internal strife. Many other churches are threatened with the possibility of division. Some are, for all practical purposes, already divided but still meeting together — often times in an atmosphere scarcely conducive to worshipping the Lord. Regardless of what has caused the conflict, its consequences are always hurtful.

For instance, weak Christians are often disillusioned and discouraged to the point of giving up when they witness such controversy and the conduct usually associated with it. They are encouraged to take sides without really understanding why. Such conflicts are often characterized by hard feelings and bitterness between brethren. All still claim to love each other, but their claim is often contradicted by their words, attitudes and conduct. James says plainly, "Speak not one against another, brethren" (4:11). It's amazing how many reasons bitter brethren can find to justify doing what James says not to do! Even when we feel that we're in the right (and we always do!), could we justify our violating a dozen truths in order to uphold one? Spiritual truth always suffers when defended by carnal means. Conflicts have a way of impairing our vision. In B.C. days (before conflict) we saw no evil in these brethren; now we see no good. Back then, we never impugned their motives; now we find ourselves suspicious of their every activity. We see our good

friends and brethren of past years transformed into some kind of enemy. It appears that Satan has blinded the minds of some believers too (2 Cor. 4:4; 11:3).

Brethren, may God help each of us to swallow our pride and to sincerely "follow after the things which make for peace" (Rom. 14:19). God's people are to be peacemakers, not peace breakers (Matt. 5:9). That means we must aggressively seek to make things right, regardless of who made things wrong. We must have such humility as to recognize the remote possibility that we (I) may have contributed something to the misunderstanding; perhaps I may have spoken harshly or manifested a poor attitude. There is the possibility that I have not been longsuffering, kind, and considerate as a Christian should be (1 Cor. 13). Is there a chance that I have not treated my brethren as I would like to be treated? (Matt. 7:12) Have I prayed for them? And, do I really want things to be made right between us? Am I willing to cease seeking some justification for being divided and work for unity? Am I willing to even take the wrong if need be? (1 Cor. 6:7) Can I forgive? Will I?

Finally, we must ask ourselves if we have such lowliness of mind so as to count others better than self; whether we are looking to our own things or to the things of others, and whether we are truly Christ-minded? (Phil. 2:2-5) God offers the remedy for these problems. Will YOU be a doer of His word?

- Dan S. Shipley, via *Plain Talk*, April, 1982

You Broke it, Now Fix It!

"You broke it, now go out and fix it," was a challenge Drew Brees, New Orleans Saints' quarterback, was given after a potential career ending injury. It causes one to pause and consider, what have I broken and how can I fix it? The stories of several men and women from the Bible came to mind as examples. Let's consider a few.

Joseph, with a little help from his father, caused jealousy with his brothers. Bragging about his dreams, which placed him over his older brothers, caused the brothers to sell him to Egypt as a slave. Joseph broke the relationship with his brothers. So, how did he fix it? During a time when his family needed him most, he did not bring up the past or hold a grudge. With the power he possessed he could have gotten even however; he did not choose that either. He forgave them and provided a home for his family and their families (Genesis 37, 42 - 45).

Moses resisted God's call to lead the Israelite people out of Egypt. He offered God, the creator of all, five excuses for not following His command (Genesis 3). Moses broke faith in God that He could accomplish great things through him. Did he fix it? Yes, and how! He faced Pharaoh 10 times making demands on God's behalf. He led, judged, guided,

taught, chastised, and encouraged his people – all in the name of the One and Only God (Exodus).

What about David? He broke his relationship with God by sinning, broke a marriage with adultery, broke a man's future by having him killed, and broke his wife's heart with the death of his son as a result of punishment (II Samuel 11). How did he fix it? He began by listening to Nathan as he brought the sin to light (II Samuel 12). Then he acknowledged his sin, took ownership, repented and moved forward to make things right. His deep love and strong faith are recorded in many Psalms which serve as inspiration for Christians of today.

Peter did a masterful job of "breaking it." He broke his friendship and loyalty with Christ with simple yet hurtful words, "I don't know him," (Luke 22:54-62). Christ predicted it and then had to witness His friend denying Him at one of His lowest moments while on Earth. Betrayal, so painful and hurtful, words that can't be recalled. Could Peter fix it? He began with his run to the open tomb to meet Christ again. His life was dedicated to the Lord's service, beginning with the first sermon on Pentecost. He taught the Gentiles, suffered persecution and preached in many parts of his world.

You may think of Mary Magdalen, from sinner to follower of Christ, or Jacob's deception with Esau to making a peace offering or Saul's persecution of Christians to being persecuted as a Christian.

If you have ever broken friendships, opportunities to serve, wedding vows, sobriety, or dedication to God then it is in your power to fix it. May God bless you in your efforts.

- Unknown

Proverbs 17:10 - A rebuke goes deeper into one who has understanding Than a hundred blows into a fool.

> "Ask your preacher where the Bible says man is saved by "faith only". Compare his answer with James 2:24!"

> "Spoiled children are given what they want; wise parents give them what they need!"

> "God is never inconvenienced by our prayers!"

> "No one ever grows fat on excuses, but everybody gets fed up with them!"

> "If a sermon pricks the conscience, it has some good points!"

THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: "*Peace!*" (Text: Luke 1:78-79); Sunday evening: Why Believe the Bible? *God's Evidence (part 2)*, p. 59.

What Must I Do To Be Saved?

HEAR THE GOSPEL

(Romans 10:14-17; John 20:30-31; Romans 1:15-17)

BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST

(Acts 8:37; John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6)

REPENT OF PAST SINS

(Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30)

CONFESS CHRIST

(Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37)

BE BAPTIZED

(Romans 6:3-4; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-39; 1 Peter 3:21)

LIVE A FAITHFUL LIFE

(Revelation 2:10; 2 Peter 1:5-11; John 15:1-8; Hebrews 10:23-25)