

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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January 26, 2020

Volume 40, # 04

God's Commands Are Tests

The church at Corinth included a brother who was having an ongoing sexual relationship with his father's wife. For whatever reason, the rest of the brethren did nothing about it. When the Apostle Paul heard of the situation, he ordered bold action: "Remove the wicked man from among yourselves" (1 Corinthians 5:13).

Withdrawing from the ungodly brother was essential, both for his benefit and theirs. Hopefully it would impress upon him the seriousness of his wrong and lead him to repentance (v. 5). Regardless, it would check the spreading influence of sin within the congregation (vv. 6-8).

In 2 Corinthians 2, Paul spoke of a brother whom the church had punished. Evidently this refers to the same case. If so, the disassociation had produced its desired result. The brother was now seeking forgiveness. Paul advised, "... forgive and comfort him, lest somehow such a one be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Wherefore, I urge you to reaffirm your love for him" (2:7-8). Then he added, "For to this end also I wrote that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things" (2 Corinthians 2:9).

How did the instruction to cut off association from this brother test the Corinthians' obedience? Perhaps in several ways:

- Since taking such action is anything but enjoyable, it was a test of whether they would obey commands of God that are unpleasant.
- Some in our day question whether withdrawing is an effective way of dealing with brethren in sin. If any of the Corinthians felt the same way, it was a test of whether they would obey a divine command in which they saw little wisdom.
- This brother may have been popular or influential. If so, it was a test of whether they would put God's will above personal relationships.

You may not often think of it this way, but every command God gives "puts you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things." Anyone will obey requirements that are

pleasant, seem wise, and demand no hard choices. That says nothing about us. The real test of our obedience, and therefore the real test of our faith, comes when God's commands are otherwise. How well do you score on this exam?

- Frank Himmel

Faith: Made Strong, Then Tested

Judges 6 begins this way in verse 1: "Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD gave them into the hands of Midian seven years." Israel had formerly subdued and all but destroyed these Midianites (Numbers 31:7-11), but by this time they regained enough power to be a scourge to Israel as the Lord's punishment for Israel's sins. "So Israel was brought very low because of Midian, and the sons of Israel cried to the LORD." (Judges 6:6). Israel was brought very low and cried to the only help available to them. The Lord sent a prophet to make clear the reason for their troubles: disobedience to the Lord (vss. 8-10). An angel of the Lord then appeared to a man named Gideon and informed him that God had selected him to deliver Israel from the Midianite oppressors (vss. 11-12, 14). Gideon reluctantly responded: "O Lord, how shall I deliver Israel? Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house." (v. 15).

Faith Strengthened

Gideon was a valiant warrior (Judges 6:12), but his faith in the Lord was weak and needed strengthening. The Lord assured him: "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat Midian as one man." (v. 16). The Lord was fully able to meet Gideon's need, as shown by what followed: Gideon brought unleavened bread and goat meat with the broth and presented it as a sacrifice to the angel of the Lord. It was accepted, thus showing God's favor upon Gideon. Certainly, this served to strengthen his faith.

Following this, God allowed Gideon to devise a sign which would indicate to him that God indeed would deliver Israel through him. Gideon placed a fleece of wool on the threshing floor, requesting that God produce "dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground (v. 37). The following morning, Gideon squeezed a bowl full of water from the fleece, and yet the ground was dry. That night, as Gideon had requested, the fleece remained dry and dew was on all the ground (vss. 36-40).

Faith Tested

Now that Gideon's faith has been strengthened, it will now be tested. God had provided evidence for faith by His promises and His signs. It is now time for Gideon to act out of his strengthened faith. The Israelite army numbered 32,000 men (Judges 7:3). By the word of the Lord, those afraid and trembling were allowed to return to their homes; 22,000 people departed from the army. Of the 10,000 remaining, the Lord gave Gideon the means to trim that number to a mere 300 fighting men! "The LORD said to Gideon, 'I will deliver you with the 300 men ... and will give the Midianites into your hands; ...'" (v. 7). Judges 7 and 8 record the defeat of the powerful Midianites (135,000 men, 8:10) by this very small army of God, armed with powerful faith!

The Bible is God's complete revelation to sinful man, providing him with all that he needs to produce faith in his heart (Rom. 10:17; 15:4; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3; John 20:31). It is man's responsibility to receive God's word, allowing it to produce and strengthen his faith (1 Pet. 5:10). Then comes the testing (2 Cor. 13:5). Does a man have faith, and is it strong enough to endure testing to prove it genuine? God's desire for man is that he "walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). Do you have faith? Will you act upon your faith in obeying the gospel of Christ (2 Thess. 1:8)? If in the past you have obeyed, but you have fallen away (Heb. 4:11; 2 Pet. 3:17), will you now, in faith, repent and pray to God for forgiveness (Acts 8:22)? We would certainly be happy to assist you!

- Gary Smalley

Religion and War

"If religion is so great, why are religions responsible for so much war?"

First, this type of statement assumes that all religions are essentially the same. They aren't. Some religions actively teach peace. Biblical Christianity (not the perverted forms) is one of them.

Second, this assumes that everyone claiming a religion is practicing it carefully and accurately. They aren't. It is this same mentality that assumes that Christianity was responsible for the Crusades. It is true that those who claimed to be Christians were responsible for much bloodshed, but this does not mean they were really Christians or that they were really following Christ's mandates. No one can read the New Testament, see the teachings of Jesus, and believe that true Christianity will ever be responsible for such wars.

Third, the statement is a case of special pleading (ignoring other evidence). Are we to ignore all the bloodshed caused by communistic, atheistic regimes? Shall we ignore that Hitler was a proponent of Darwinism? Are we to ignore the great number of atheists (and others) who also actively promote killing the innocent in the womb of a mother? It is not just religious people who start wars and shed innocent blood. People from all worldview spectrums have done it.

The fact is that people will fight over what they are passionate about, whether considered religious or not. They will fight over their worldviews, and everyone has a worldview. It's not about religion in and of itself. It's about passion. It's about power. It will always be about some form of selfishness. It doesn't matter what label, religious or not, that proponents put on their reasons.

And this brings us back to the teachings of Christ. Those who are truly passionate about the teachings of Jesus will do everything they can to live out those teachings. And those teachings are adamantly against hurting or killing people for the sake of Christ. We are to pray for our enemies. We are to teach our enemies. We are to be good neighbors. We are to, as much as it depends upon us, be at peace with all men. No one who promotes war for the sake of Jesus is representing Christ. Just read His teachings and see.

Wars do exist for other reasons. Sometimes they exist to promote freedom. Sometimes they exist to bring judgment upon wicked nations, as is the case in Old Testament battles commanded by God. This is a difficult issue, to be sure. But if we bear in mind that God, who is most definitely not man, has the power of life and death to begin with, and carries the authority to execute true and final justice in its most perfect sense, then we can at least have a framework for understanding the Old Testament issue better. However, there can be no doubt, biblically, that Christ ushered in a change in how nations are to be seen. Christians, who are the special nation of God, are not bound by the lines of national boundaries, for they exist in all nations. There is no New Testament mandate to destroy the nations physically. It's just the opposite. The nations are crushed, not by Christians bearing physical swords, but by the spread of the gospel of God's kingdom. Christians are to promote peace and tranquility, both physically and spiritually. They are to promote Christ and His salvation.

Are religions responsible for war? Some are, but true Christianity will never be responsible for it.

- Doy Moyer

- > Ask your preacher where the Bible says, a Christian cannot fall from grace. Compare his answer with Galatians 5:4!
 - > “Before you flare up at anyone’s faults, take time to count ten – ten of your own faults!”
 - > “One thing some children learn at their mother’s knee is how to dodge hot cigarette ashes!”
 - > “Criticism is something one can avoid by saying nothing, doing nothing and BELIEVING NOTHING!”
 - > “Following the line of least resistance is what makes rivers and men crooked!”
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THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *“What Is Godly Sorrow?”* (Text: 2 Cor. 7:8-12); Sunday evening: *Why Believe the Bible? The Problem of Evil, p. 63.*

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)