

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Ready to Listen

“Therefore Eli said to Samuel, ‘Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls you, that you must say, ‘Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears.’ So Samuel went and lay down in his place. Now the Lord came and stood and called as at other times, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ And Samuel answered, ‘Speak, for Your servant hears.’” (1 Sam 3:9-10).

As we seek God, we must keep ourselves open to His word. Like rich, fertile soil ready to receive the sower’s seed, our hearts must be receptive to the word which God intends to plant there. Although marvelous good things can come from God’s word in our hearts, this word can’t even take root in our hearts if they’re hard or unhearing. We must be ready to listen.

To be ready to listen means that we are ready to receive whatever God wishes to say. Yet our hearing is often hindered by presupposition and prejudice. We already have fixed ideas about what God “must” say, and there are limits to what we’ll listen to, even from God. But if we limit ourselves to what we want to hear, not many of us will hear what we need to hear. It is critically important that we move past our personal preferences and allow God to say to us whatever He wills. After all, a servant is in no position to dictate to his master what instructions the master is allowed to give. As those who would serve God, we have not been asked to serve in “an advisory capacity.” It is our role (and our high privilege) to wait upon His word and do His bidding, whatever that might be. “Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears.”

The gift of language has been vouchsafed to us by God. But the gift was not given just so that we might speak; it was given that we might hear when our God speaks to us. Great issues hinge upon our choice in this matter. Readiness to listen is no accident of personality, randomly possessed by some people and not by others. It is a deliberate decision we make to open ourselves to God’s word. James encouraged us to do this: “Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:21-22). If we

can honestly say what Samuel said, "Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears," then we have a maturity that can take us toward an even greater maturity in the things of God.

"One of the highest and noblest functions of man's mind is to listen to God's Word, and so to read His mind and think His thoughts after Him" (John R. W. Stott).

- Gary Henry

CONTEMPLATING: THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS (Part 6)

In our previous article we directed attention to passages of scripture which teach the necessity of repentance as a condition demanded of God in order to receive forgiveness. We showed from Acts 2 that those who had faith in Jesus as the Son of God (believers) were commanded by the inspired apostles to REPENT (a change of mind or purpose which leads to a reformation of life). Remember that we have shown from the Bible that God will forgive those that meet the conditions set forth in His word, ALL of the conditions. The requirements we have studied thus far (hearing the gospel, believing it, and repenting) are by no means the only commands. The Bible reveals other obligations that must be met BEFORE one may be forgiven. One such condition is confession. Since many do not know what the Bible confession is nor its importance, we shall give time to a study of these matters.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CONFESSION. The Bible very clearly points to the significance of the confession as well as its connection with salvation. We make the confession because Jesus said, "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven." (Matt. 10:32-33). The number Jesus will confess before God in heaven is limited to the number that confess him before men on earth. Can we conclude then that making confession of Christ is unimportant? Paul said, "for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation." (Rom. 10:10). Confession is UNTO - in the direction of, in order to bring about - salvation. Clearly, confession is a condition of salvation, and therefore precedes remission of sins. We MUST recognize this as an important command and obey it.

THE BIBLE CONFESSION. Having before us the importance of the confession, we should further search the scriptures for the confession that is approved by God, and make ONLY that confession. Paul states in Romans 10:9-10, "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you

will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation." What are we to confess according to verse 9? JESUS AS LORD! Would this be acceptable to God? Consider Simon Peter's answer to the question Jesus asked: "But who do you say that I am?" (Matt. 16:15-18) "Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.'" Peter confessed that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God." That confession was, without a doubt, acceptable to the Lord. Jesus went on to say, "upon this rock I will build My church." He was not saying that His church would be built upon Simon Peter, but rather that it would be built upon the divine truth uttered by Peter: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." By making this confession one places himself under the strongest possible obligations to observe every command of Christ.

To further depict the scriptural confession that must be made "resulting in salvation," consider the account of the Ethiopian eunuch's conversion in Acts 8. We are told in verse 35 that Philip "preached Jesus to him." Beginning in verse 36: "As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?' [And Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'] And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him." (Acts 8:36-38). There are several observations we can make from this account of conversion. (a) Was this confession acceptable? Was it the proper confession for one to make? Because Philip proceeded at once to baptize the eunuch following his confession, plus the fact that no divine disapproval is indicated, we must conclude that this confession is fully satisfactory and acceptable to God. (b) The confession was made after the eunuch came to believe in Christ (otherwise it would have been a false statement for the eunuch to make) and before he was baptized (this confession was demanded of the eunuch prior to his baptism). (c) Revealed again for all to see is what is to be confessed: JESUS CHRIST IS THE SON OF GOD. The idea expressed in the confession is two-fold: (1) Jesus IS who he claimed to be, the very Son of God; and, (2) Jesus the Christ IS Lord of all. Our practice, even today, must conform to it in order to have divine approval.

There are other passages that reveal important truths about this confession. Philippians 2:11 says, "and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." We learn from this that the confession is made with the tongue (or "mouth" in Rom. 10:10) as opposed to a mere nod of the head, and that it gives glory and honor to God. God has determined that "every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is

Lord." In view of the honor that we have for God's authority, this confession must not be dispensed with or ignored. Furthermore, in 1 Timothy 6:12, Paul states, "Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." From this statement we learn that Timothy's confession was made before "many witnesses." Our confession must also be "in the presence of many witnesses," or as Jesus stated, "before men" (Matt. 10:32).

From these passages we can see that the divinely authorized confession that is to be made, "resulting in salvation," is: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." (Acts 8:37). This being the confession that stands approved for all time in the Bible, we should not desire to ignore it, change it, or otherwise diminish its importance. Who is it that is authorized to demand anything else today? How can anyone improve the confession that was authorized by Jesus Christ and required by his chosen apostles and first century Christians? All people, however, have not that respect for the revelation of God. Many maintain that man has the liberty to change it according to his liking. The examples that follow will illustrate what I mean.

Some religious bodies require one to confess: "I believe that God for Christ's sake hath pardoned my sins." When one makes such a confession, is he not presuming that God will accept a confession different from the one recorded in the Bible? Furthermore, this confession reveals that the individual has been misled into believing that his sins have been pardoned before he is baptized, which is quite different from Peter's command in Acts 2 to repent and be baptized in order to receive remission. The one who confesses this statement says his sins are forgiven before baptism. The inspired apostle says remission of sins follows baptism. Which one is true?

The above example is not the only departure from Bible teaching. The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches says: "The churches therefore have candidates come before them, make their statement, give their 'experience,' and then their reception is decided by a vote of the members. And while they cannot become members without baptism, yet it is the vote of the body which admits them to its fellowship on receiving baptism." Hence, the admission of not following the New Testament practice. They have the candidates give an "experience" and "take a vote" to decide on receiving them. Did Philip call the church together to hear the eunuch's "experience" and "take a vote" to decide if he should be baptized? A simple confession of faith in Christ was all that the Lord required. Can we improve on heaven's plan? If so, why could we not devise a system of salvation without making appeal to heaven's wisdom? If we may introduce these additions, where will the making of such additions stop? Let's be satisfied with the perfect way: GOD'S WAY!

- Gary Smalley

- > “We can't make Jesus mean anything to others until He means everything to us!”
 - > “There is no sin so little as not to kindle an eternal fire!”
 - > “Your daily life is the only true testimony of your religion!”
 - > “When you get to your wit's end, you'll find that God lives there!”
 - > “God grades on the cross, not the curve!”
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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)