

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Sad Words, “I Wish I Had Another Chance”

I have before me The Book of books, The Bible. It is a record of the inspired words that Jehovah God gave to His grandest creation-mankind. In this Book of books, God, who made mankind in His own image, revealed everything one has to know and do in order to be happy, successful, and finally inherit eternal life through loving obedience to His revealed will. We suffer self-inflicted wounds throughout our lives on earth, and possibly throughout eternity! The loving Father has told us how to conduct ourselves in every realm of human activity in order to be what He wants us to be which is for our good.

Throughout the Bible, God has emphasized the importance of time and opportunities that are ours as we live out our “three-score and ten years” on the earth. All too often, we are not listening to God as we waste time and golden opportunities because we have not heeded the instructions of the inspired apostle Paul: “Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly (or carefully), not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is...Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord...Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it;...” (Eph. 5:14-16, 22, 25).

Here the Holy Spirit has revealed to us the proper attitude and dispositions that we are to have in the most intimate relationship on earth, that of husband and wife. He precedes this instruction by exhorting his readers to awake from the sleep of death, and arise and follow the light (divine instructions) of Christ, redeeming, or buying back, the wasted time of bygone days. Of course, it is impossible literally to buy back days that have passed away forever. But it seems that Paul is emphasizing the urgency of redeeming, or purchasing, the present moments which is all that we can control. It has been said that time is so precious that it is criminal to waste it. By the same reasoning, golden opportunities come to us, but we often neglect them; and once they have passed, they seldom return.

Sometimes we receive reminders of Biblical principles and warnings from strange sources. A short time ago, I was visiting my daughter and family in Danville, Kentucky. In the Advocate Messenger, the local daily newspaper, there was an interesting article addressed to Dear Abby. Sometimes these letters are very interesting and timely. They set forth the drama of life from various circumstances. But the one in the December 6th issue really carried a message. I reproduce it here: "Dear Abby: Recently, after 55 years of marriage, I lost my loving wife. I lost my sweetheart, my gourmet cook, my nurse and my best friend. In the 55 years we were married, I sent her flowers only twice. Now I put flowers on her grave twice a week. I kiss her picture every morning and tell her how much I love her. Before she went away, my morning greeting was, 'Is the coffee ready?' Somewhere I read the following: 'Carve not upon a stone the dirgeful words that mourners say at graveside, rather tell me while I live.' I wish I had another chance....A.R. IN N.Y."

Abby's reply was "Dear A.R.: No one has 'another chance,' but because you took the time to put your thoughts on paper, somewhere just one thoughtless husband may see himself and show his young wife by word and deed how much he loves her. The 'chance' you missed is still available to countless young men - and women, too. Thank you for a priceless reminder."

As I thought about the sad letter above, I remembered that for over thirty-two and one-half years, I have been emphasizing this very important fact. And, why is it that people seem to enjoy being reminded of these golden opportunities that come to us daily but are all too often neglected and permitted to slip away, never to return when death invades the family circle and our loved ones are called away forever. Think about it, my dear reader. Are you guilty of the same neglect and indifference toward your spouse as the writer of the letter above? Too late, he realized he had lost his sweetheart, his gourmet cook, his nurse, and best friend! She must have lived out those 55 years and never heard those tender words that would have been priceless to her if he had only told her while she lived. Having sent her flowers only twice in 55 years of marriage pales beside the twice a week bouquets he puts on her grave twice a week. Now, he kisses her picture every morning and tells her how much he loves her, while his morning greeting while she lived was, "Is the coffee ready?" Pictures cannot hear, but his sweetheart could hear all those mornings when he gave her no loving greeting as he came into the breakfast room only to ask such a trivial question. Yes, she must have been a good wife who tried to please her husband who never expressed gratitude to her. But now, he "wishes he had another chance." But he had his last chance in time past which cannot be redeemed as far as his best friend is concerned. I suspect she lived with her husband all those 55 years and never realized he felt that way. What a shame!

In Dear Abby's reply I was struck by this statement: "Somewhere just one thoughtless husband may see himself and show his young wife by word and deed how much he loves her. The 'chance' you missed is still available to countless young men and women, too." I would like to remind Abby that neglect and indifference toward one's spouse is not limited to the young. I am glad she thought to add "and women, too." Both sexes, young and old, are all too often guilty of these very shortcomings until they are no longer able to correct them.

A striking statement is found in the closing paragraph of the letter: "Somewhere I read the following: 'Carve not upon a stone the dirgeful words that mourners say at graveside, rather tell me while I live.' All the loving words carved upon a tombstone, all the eloquent eulogies over the remains, all the sorrowful crying and apologies are lost upon the heart of the departed one, who no longer can hear, nor rejoice, nor hurt from all the words after one has "gone away," as many surviving spouses express it. I am thankful that I have not experienced losing my sweetheart, my gourmet cook, my nurse, and my best friend. I am also grateful that I have at least a little while left to "give her the roses while she lives." And if the Lord calls her away before I go, I hope and pray that I will not have to live with such regrets as the writer of the letter did.

How about you, dear reader? "Redeem the time" while you can.

- Billy Ashworth (1919-2000)

AUTHENTIC FAITH

It is no surprise to God's people that the devil can take something good and make it into something bad. He even takes scripture and misuses it (Matthew 4:5-6) to lead people astray who may have some measure of regard for the Bible. Such is true with the concept of "faith." The devil is happy when people convince themselves that they believe in Jesus Christ and therefore will be saved as a result.

John was an inspired writer who affirmed the certainty of true faith. He described it as consisting of such things as love for God and fellow Christians (1 John 3:14; 4:20) as well as belief in Jesus (1 John 4:2) and obedience to Him (John 3:36).

What an ideal concept this is as revealed by John: a person having authentic faith loves God (his Father) and also his brothers and sisters in Christ (other "children of God," 1 John 3:1). John wrote in 1 John 5:1, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him." So John is conveying that the way a believer relates to another member of God's family ("the household of the

faith,” Galatians 6:10; “God’s household,” Ephesians 2:19) is a reliable indicator of genuine, authentic faith (1 John 3).

For further emphasis of this truth, John wrote “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” (1 John 3:14-15). When love for our brethren is not in our hearts that is sufficient proof that we abide still in death and have not passed into life. We remain outside the body of Christ, devoid of eternal life. When brotherly love is absent for all of our brethren it is a sign of evidence to other people that we abide in spiritual death, separated from God. This truth should be a sobering thought for church members who are merely acting as if they are Christians in good standing.

Are these indications of authentic faith challenging to us? If we apply the test to ourselves we authenticate our profession of faith or we find it to be fake. The revealing test is the one that originated with the Lord: “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35).

- Gary Smalley

* “A chip on the shoulder is a heavy load to carry!”

* “A Christ-centered life is like a good watch: open face, busy hands, pure gold, and full of good works!”

* “A clean conscience makes a soft pillow!”

* “A closed heart can only be opened from the inside!”

* “A day hemmed in prayer rarely unravels!”

THIS WEEK’S LESSON: The sermon for Sunday morning is: *Let Me Die the Death of the Righteous!* (Text: Numbers 23:10).

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)