

# The Old Hickory Bulletin

## Old Hickory Church of Christ

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### 2020: Are You Worried?

This recent pandemic has turned things upside down. Leaders have been caught off guard and experts have no precise idea of what to do. People of faith are not immune from the turmoil, and unfortunately, some have likewise grown angry and fearful of the future.

Time to stop and recalibrate.

In City of God (ca. 410 AD) Augustine wrote there are two cities: The earthly city that loves self and holds God in contempt, as well as the heavenly city that loves God and holds self in contempt. As Christians, we know and struggle with this conflict every day. In the earthly city (governments of men), leaders may be corrupt, laws unjust and virtue scarce, but scripture tells us these are ordained by God to secure a measure of peace (Romans 13:1-3). Certain civil liberties may be lost but the citizenry will survive.

Aristotle argued that because man could speak and morally reason, he was by nature a political animal. I suppose it is only natural that Christians are interested in the circumstances around them that affect their family's daily life, but to what extent do we defend political views or civil liberties? Jesus wasn't crucified to secure voting rights.

As disciples of the Lord, we are called to citizenship in the heavenly city (Hebrews 12:22-24). We're not lost, we know where that city is and we look forward to the day when we can walk in the fullness of our new creation before the throne of God...don't we?

Have we not commented in countless Bible classes that the first-century church was able to grow and flourish throughout the world in spite of the pagan Roman government? Could that dynamic not be replicated today? What if it were the plan of God to do so again? What pattern of behavior would we follow?

Having traveled more times than I can count the past eighteen years with my wife to the former Soviet Union, having made loving friendships with many Russian Christians, having known their stories of faith in spite of their totalitarian world, I developed a deep respect for them, and I'm not worried for my grandchildren or even great-grandchildren. Let me explain.

For 2000 years no human government has successfully stood between a believer and God...some have tried but always failed. Can you imagine all the trauma these disciples had to endure, simply to worship and honor the Lord in their own lives? I don't think I can.

I turned 69 yesterday. We (baby boomers) have had the best of the best of this country (so far), and we recoil at the thought of giving that up. But in a moment of clarity, we must admit we didn't need that prosperity to serve God. Here's my point: Our grandchildren or great-grandchildren may never know the fullest liberties this country has provided in the past, but as long as they have the New Testament story of first century Christians, which overcame pagan rulers and unjust laws to still serve the Lord and teach the gospel, our kids can make it...under any government.

"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8:38,39.

- Kenny Marrs

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## **PROGRESSIVE!**

Throughout man's history, many could describe themselves as "progressive," generally meaning that they consider themselves promoting and acting upon ideas that move them forward in some respect, advancing in some situation. The term has been used in recent history to describe those interested in moderate political change and social improvement by government action. There have been political parties through the years that labeled themselves as "progressive" (a party split off from the Republicans about 1912 known as the "Bull Moose" party, followers of Robert M. Follette's presidential campaign of 1924, or Henry A. Wallace's presidential campaign of 1948, etc.). These favored political reform of various sorts. Descriptive of the synonym "reform" places the concept of "progressive" in a positive setting: to improve something by alteration or change. Now, what sort of person would oppose the improving of a person, or the improving of conditions and situations?

Obviously, “progressive” describes many positive efforts of man to make himself and his circumstances in life better. Few would argue that the invention of the printing press, the airplane, the automobile, and procedures to insure clean drinking water did not improve the circumstances of man. They certainly did! Man’s progress in these areas is unquestionably praiseworthy.

In the context of Holy Scripture, we may find positive instances of progressive reform. Some kings of Judah come to mind such as Josiah, who took measures to rid the people of God from the abominations of idol worship (2 Kings 23:4-20). In the New Testament, the apostle Paul referred to his imprisonment for the cause of Christ as, paradoxically, resulting in “the greater progress of the gospel” (Philippians 1:12). Paul also exhorted the young preacher, Timothy, to “Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.” (1 Timothy 4:15-16). His progress would be evident by being absorbed in such things as: “constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following” (v. 6), “discipline ... for the purpose of godliness” (v. 7), “Prescribe and teach these things.” (v. 11), “in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe” (v. 12), and “give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching” (v. 13). This progress would ensure salvation both for Timothy and for those who heard the sound doctrine that he taught. These things moved people forward spiritually. How very positive!

Sometimes progressive actions bring improvement, but sometimes they do not. And labeling something as “progressive,” thus hinting at “improvement,” when in truth there is no improvement, or even worse, detriment, is certainly not a good practice! For example, the acceptance of the practice of homosexuality in religious groups claiming to be “Christian” is an innovation that is labelled as “progressive.” Other statements that these advocates make to present this abomination as an improvement is that such acceptance will keep the church relevant in our rapidly changing society, and that Jesus preached a gospel of inclusion, and that God loves all kinds of people. If a progressive-minded person wants to take the gospel to the homosexual community, that is just great. The gospel is for all people (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). But, if the progressive-minded person wants to accept into the fellowship of Christians the people who refuse to repent and persist in sin and ungodliness (1 Corinthians 5:2, 11, 13), how can it be an improvement when it is contrary to the teaching of Christ (Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10)? It cannot, no matter what you call it and how you dress it up making it sound acceptable with sweet-flavored words.

It is very dangerous to embrace the philosophies of men (Colossians 2:8), as our progressive culture does, turning minds away from the word of God (Galatians 1:6-10). Recall the words that Jude wrote to his brethren: "Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints." (Jude 3). Many progressives today advocate changing the faith that was "once for all handed down" to suit the current agendas of man. It was as Ed Morrissey wrote, "Progressivism is indeed a jealous idol, one that does not tolerate a God before it."

Notice what the Apostle John wrote about progress: "Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son." So then, whosoever becomes progressive and abides not in the teaching of Christ certainly does not have God in his fellowship! He has gone too far! Do you not agree that in many matters it is far preferable to be non-progressive, particularly in not going beyond what is written (1 Corinthians 4:6)?

The doctrine (teaching, gospel, truth) of Christ must not be changed. It never needs improvement. It never becomes irrelevant. Those faithful to Christ refuse to conform to modern society, culture, philosophies and agendas promoted by men in the name of progressivism. The wills of men must conform to the will of God! Any other behavior shows disrespect for God. Any movement which is away from the teaching of Christ (and His apostles) is progress in the wrong direction. Certainly, no Christian would abandon the all-sufficient rule of faith and practice for God's people! In His word we have "everything pertaining to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3; cf. 2 Timothy 3:16-17). How do we improve and make progress by departing from it?

G.N. Woods said, "We should regard with grave suspicion anyone who would disparage the value of the New Testament or lessen its influence in any way for our time." Certainly, many of our day have become very skillful and shrewd in putting forth changes under the banner of being progressive which only amount to progressing away from Christ. Progress is only good when it is in the direction of Christ. John William McGarvey said, "True progress is still backward - backward toward the apostles, toward the doctrine, the terms of pardon, the worship and the discipline which they instituted. Push your progress in this direction if you wish to have a hard fight for every inch of ground you gain. If you would sail smoothly on the current, let your progress be in whatever direction the popular current flows."

- Gary Smalley

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\* "Pride is to the character, like the attic to the house – the highest part, and generally the most empty!"

- \* “A proud man is seldom a grateful man, for he never thinks he gets as much as he deserves!” – H.W. Beecher
  - \* “Better to be poisoned in one’s blood, than to be poisoned in one’s principles!”
  - \* “Beware of no man more than of yourself; we carry our worst enemies within us!” - Spurgeon
  - \* “If there be a crime of deeper dye than all the guilty train of human vices, it is ingratitude!” - Brooke
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**THIS WEEK’S LESSON:** The sermon for Sunday morning is: *Prepare Thyself to Serve the Lord!* (Text: 1 Samuel 16:1-23).

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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)