

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Wanted: Men and Women of Conviction!

It is human to stand with the crowd; divine to stand alone. It is man-like to follow the people, to drift with the tide; God-like to follow a principle, to stem the tide. It is natural to compromise conscience and follow social and religious fashions for the sake of gain or pleasure; divine to defy fashion and sacrifice both gain and pleasure - worldly glory, too - on the altar of truth and duty.

"No man stood with me, but all men forsook me," wrote the battle-scarred apostle Paul describing his first appearance before Nero to answer for his life for believing and teaching contrary to the Roman world. Loyalty and truth have been out of fashion since man changed his robe of fadeless light for a garment of faded leaves.

Noah built and voyaged alone. His neighbors laughed, doubtless, at his strangeness and perished in style. Abraham wandered and worshiped alone. Sodomites smiled at the simple shepherd, followed the fashion and fed the flames. Daniel dined and prayed alone. Elijah sacrificed and witnessed alone. Jeremiah prophesied and wept alone. Jesus loved and died alone.

Of the lonely way His disciples should walk He said, "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Of their treatment by the many who walk in the broad way, He said, "If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, therefore the world hateth you."

The church in the wilderness praised Abraham and persecuted Moses. The church of the Kings praised Moses and persecuted the prophets. Caiaphas praised the prophets and persecuted the Christ. The church of the popes praised the Savior and persecuted the saints. And multitudes now, both in the church and in the world, applaud the courage of the patriarchs and prophets, the apostles and martyrs; but condemn, as stubbornness, ignorance or foolishness, like faithfulness to truth and duty today.

Wanted, today: Men and women, young and old, who will obey their convictions of truth and duty at the cost of fame, fortune, friends and life itself.

- Author Unknown

DISAGREEMENTS

A pronounced memory from my kindergarten days presents itself as I contemplate the concept of disagreements with others. My hand was flat on the table as students were drawing and coloring. The boy sitting next to me disagreed with my freedom to place my hand there, so with his freshly sharpened pencil, he jabbed the point into the middle of my left hand. Maybe this is such a vivid memory because I still carry the small gray dot of discoloration on my hand these many years later, although now it is beginning to fade. No surprise at all that so very early in life we learn that we will rarely agree with others about most everything, and they will rarely agree with us. Life is filled with disagreements.

Key to the development of good character is learning how to righteously navigate the world of disagreements that become our experiences. As a six-year-old struggling to hold my weight in a home with two older brothers (one of which I was convinced was only there to make my life difficult), the unstated law of payback was very much alive (my fellow kindergarten student has a small gray dot of discoloration on *his* right hand). Many years later after growing more mature and opening my heart to the reception of the gospel of Jesus Christ, I learned that the true source of wisdom resides in the Holy Scriptures, and that the immature law of payback, based upon might makes right, amounts to retaliation out of a spirit of revenge. Now I strive for living the highest ideal of righteous character: "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:17-21). My survival-of-the-fittest childhood background makes this teaching difficult to follow at times, but I know it is best, and it is right because I know the source of it.

Publicized by the media today upon the death of one of our Supreme Court Justices is the fact that, in spite of the diametrically opposing views with regard to law, politics, and religion, Judge Antonin Scalia and Judge Ruth Bader Ginsburg were friends who regarded each other with great respect. The statesmanship of these two defenders of the Constitution should serve as a righteous example to those who handle disagreement by viciously crafting chaos and bellowing the angry fury of wrath. But in our current political

climate where most of the time many attempt to conceal hatred with less vitriolic words, true peace, harmony, and friendship are scarce. Such is the world, controlled by the "ruler of this world" (John 12:31). And walking according to this prince is walking "according to the course of this world" and according to "the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience." The apostle Paul says that when anyone does this, he is "dead in ... trespasses and sins." (Ephesians 2:1-2). The right way is to avoid allowing your disagreements with others to multiply *your* trespasses and sins.

Our expectations of correcting this unholy attitude among the majority of people in this country are very low. Only as we are able to persuade a few souls to obey the teaching of Christ will incremental improvements be made. We may have some measure of success by pointing others to Christ and His fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). These virtues still appeal to a great many people. We expect to find these characteristics among all those claiming to be Christians: "Faith, moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love." (2 Peter 1:5-7). By these, Christians have escaped the corruption that is in the world, embracing the excellence of divine nature.

In the midst of disagreements, the contrast of attitudes that are found in the world ("corruption"), currently represented by burning cars and buildings on the evening news, and the attitudes that characterize God's true people ("divine nature"), as noted by the fruit of the Spirit in the previous paragraph, is very sharp. On the one hand, Satan has taken advantage of disagreements between people to entice and manipulate irresponsible citizens to act out of hatred in causing harm to others. On the other hand, in a case of people trying to live as Christians, Paul admonished them to settle problems and disagreements among themselves with love and forgiveness "that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes." (2 Corinthians 2:8-11). Paul called this goal of reaffirmation of love between them a "test, whether you are obedient in all things."

Unfortunately, there are some in the body of Christ who have failed this test. When at the point of disagreement with another brother, little or no effort is made to resolve the difference, which most of the time is a mere disagreement over a matter of personal judgment as opposed to doctrine. Resulting from this attitude of refusal, brotherly love is absent, indicating failure to pass another test established by the Lord (1 John 4:20; 3:14; 4:7-8). Those who have failed these tests ("They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him," Titus 1:16) have given themselves over to the schemes of Satan, and depending upon the degree, they may very well be blind to it. (When Christians cease to be conscious of the false part they are playing then the devil has his hold upon them.)

The result makes it noticeable by others in the body because it evolves into such horrible things as dissention, contention, feuds, bitterness, discord, malice, and hatred, all unleashed as a result of their defection from Christ made obvious by their refusal to work it out with a brother. The works of the flesh flourish in proud, self-righteous hearts.

These, like other people, have a propensity for denying guilt and blaming someone else. In their self-seeking recklessness they foment harm upon the body of Christ. They “have pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thess. 2:12), and have deluded themselves (verse 11). The Holy Spirit identifies them in this way: “a depraved mind,” Romans 1:28, “disqualified,” 1 Cor. 9:27, “men of depraved mind, rejected in regard to the faith,” 2 Tim. 3:8. Hence the instruction for self-examination: “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test? But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test. Now we pray to God that you do no wrong; not that we ourselves may appear approved, but that you may do what is right, even though we may appear unapproved.” (2 Cor. 13:5-7). If the depraved reject wants to be in the faith, he should “do what is right.”

How is it that we may reach these souls and persuade them to live righteously before God? Genuine Christians feel the pain that the Lord felt: “In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, ‘You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; You will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; For the heart of this people has become dull, With their ears they scarcely hear, And they have closed their eyes, Otherwise they would see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, And understand with their heart and return, And I would heal them.’” (Matthew 13:14-15).

Heart problems can only be fixed when man turns to the Lord and seeks His help (Psalm 51:10; cf. Ezek. 36:26). It is our prayer that the guilty will do so. What mere disagreement is worth handing Satan the victory and losing souls in the body of Christ?

- Gary Smalley

* “Backsliding begins when knee-bending stops!”

* “Collapse in the Christian life is seldom a blowout. It is usually a slow leak!”

* “No one is so empty as the man who has stopped walking with God and doesn’t know it!”

* “The captain gives earnest heed to the charts lest he drift unconsciously shoreward!”

* “The harbor of salvation is absolutely secure! The Word will never drift from us. The danger is our drifting from it”

THIS WEEK’S LESSON: The sermon for Sunday morning is: “*The Creation Report!*” (Text: Genesis 1:1).

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)