

# The Old Hickory Bulletin

## Old Hickory Church of Christ

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### Acceptance

Not too long after my wife Amy passed away, a pink bow appeared on a mailbox down the street from our house; a baby girl had come into the world. The circle of life. The phrase gently drifted through my mind as I drove past.

Our lives are seldom what we planned them to be. We imagine a career, spouse, family, home, vacation now and then. Rarely do we consider what tragedies will befall us along the way. I guess that's just human nature. After all, focusing on all the potential horrible things would not be a healthy way to live.

But those bad things that happen really do the most to shape and mold us. In James 1:2-4 it says, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

Only in God's wisdom can there be joy be found in hardship. Our human minds can't equate those two things. But if you really consider it, it really does make sense. We would not understand light without darkness. We would not appreciate sunshine if it didn't rain occasionally. The loud, raucous, incredibly busy days of our lives make us long for a quiet evening at home. And we would not understand joy without having to withstand hardship.

It has been said that the only two guarantees in life are death and taxes. I get the sentiment, although a faith in God ameliorates ["to make better or more tolerable" – Webster. GFS] the death condition. But the fact remains that when we are born, we begin the journey to the end of our lives. Some journeys are long, others not. We all face the same end in judgment, then a separation of those who have been faithful to God from those who have not. 2 Peter 3:11 reminds us with a view to the inevitable end of our lives, we should conduct ourselves in a holy and godly way during our time here on earth.

There is a lot written about acceptance. Self-help books, recovery programs, idioms, etc. Mainly, acceptance means being satisfied with whatever condition you're in currently. Easy to say, hard to do. Paul speaks of this in Philippians 4:11-13, "Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Paul had come to the point in his life that he accepted whatever condition he found himself in. And he was able to do this through his faith in God through Jesus Christ. Shouldn't we do the same?

If you do a word search for "acceptance" in the Bible, it only appears a few times. One of those times is 1 Tim. 1:15, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." Now that is something truly worth all acceptance!

- Kevin Hall [slightly edited, GFS]

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## PRIDE

Very early in His personal ministry, our Lord chose twelve men from His many disciples to be especially close to Him so that they could be trained for the great task of bearing witness throughout the world of the coming of the Son of God, His good news that salvation is available to all people, and His resurrection from the dead, certifying Him as the Word of truth, giving and sustaining hope to mortals in their quest to live immortally. What would it have been like had you been one of the men selected? What sort of thoughts would have entered your mind when the Lord tapped you?

Would you have thought of your selection as some sort of justified validation of your character? Would you dare to have concluded that you were recognized as being more righteous than many others, or at least more teachable? What thoughts would you have entertained regarding your personal ambition and the recognition of your well-above-average spirituality? Would there be any thoughts in this vein? And what of these twelve men?

Would it be shocking to you if I suggested that these closest disciples of Jesus were chief offenders when it came to the sin of pride? By their own accounts, their pursuit of personal greatness and attending recognition was quite pronounced. They verbally fought among themselves presenting self-justification to the others.

As the Lord and His disciples traveled throughout Galilee, He taught them of His impending murder and resurrection. They did not understand what He was teaching them, and were afraid to ask Him about it. So when they arrived at Capernaum, "He began to question them, 'What were you discussing on the way?' But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest." (Mark 9:33-34). Luke adds, "An argument started among them as to which of them might be the greatest." (Luke 9:46). Men who were the closest to the Lord Jesus, who received teaching from Him to the most intense degree and who were eyewitnesses of His humility and servanthood were embroiled in an argument about their personal greatness, about their relative superiority to each other!

Their misconceptions concerning the kingdom of God allowed fertile ground for growing their desire to be big shots. These men literally walked with the Lord, heard His teaching and saw His wondrous works, and yet their self-interest and false sense of self-sufficiency motivated their ambitious pursuit of self-glorification. If they could fail in these ways, and for these reasons, could we?

Satan discourages us to look for pride within ourselves, because we may very certainly find it – if we can prevent our own self-deception. Pride originates in the heart of man, and it defiles the man who has it (Mark 7:22). But when it entrenches itself, it becomes terribly difficult to admit. Pride causes people to deceive themselves (Obadiah 1:3); it adversely affects the eyesight. At the same time, pride is number one on God's hate list (Proverbs 6:16-17). Does that entice you to retain it? Will you search your own heart for symptoms of hidden pride?

Pride encourages us to view our own sins as not nearly as bad as those of someone else (Matthew 7:3-5), if we will even admit them (Luke 18:11). Pride will cause us to ignore our own spiritual ugliness, speaking of ourselves in ways that are only exclusively commendable or only mildly inappropriate. Have I patted myself on the back for how well I am doing at something? Have I contemplated my achievements in terms of "the best years of my life?" Have I diminished the goodness that could easily be found in another, allowing only their faults to formulate my perception of them? Do I use the faults of others to claim something greater about myself? Do I avoid opportunities for the word of the Spirit to convict me, in favor of contriving occasions for the people who "really need to hear this?" On one occasion, Jesus spoke a parable "to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt" (Luke 18:9). How do you feel about yourself? How do you view others? Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) wrote, "Christians who are but fellow-worms ought at least to treat one another with as much humility and gentleness as Christ treats them."

Are you alarmed by any of these pointed questions? Have you been far more concerned about other people's perception of you rather than the true content of your heart, where discipline is lacking because it is not readily visible? Pride is a grievous infection that requires, not a bandage, but major surgery to remove! Those prideful people who are hungry for respect crave the attention of others, just so long as it is focused upon the right areas. Do you seek the approval that comes from men, or from God (John 12:43)?

In view of these penetrating, soul-searching questions, I must ask, "Are you still reading?" Maybe more of us struggle with pride than we thought. There is good news for the prideful! There is a way of release, a key to unlock the chains. If we can bring ourselves to fairly identify our sickness, then the first step has been identified that will lead to a cure. We can "turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God ... repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance." (Acts 26:18, 20). The Lord promised, "whoever humbles himself shall be exalted" (Matthew 23:12). God's grace is reserved only for the humble (James 4:6).

Our merciful and gentle Lord called the twelve, who were squabbling over their personal greatness, aside and "took a child and stood him by His side, and said to them, "Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me; for the one who is least among all of you, this is the one who is great." (Luke 9:47-48). Mark indicated that Jesus said, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." (Mark 9:35). At this point in their lives, these twelve men desperately needed to learn this humility.

Further on in Mark's gospel, the Lord says more: "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:42-45). They were all familiar with greatness in the world and how it was achieved. But greatness in the kingdom of heaven would be achieved by becoming a servant to others, a slave to everyone. Jesus Himself, the true example of ultimate greatness, patiently taught them these valuable principles, and then went to clearly demonstrate their meaning by what He did on man's behalf.

No wonder that the apostles who carried the gospel into the world were called men "that have turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). They certainly turned upside down all human ideas of rank and greatness. We must turn those concepts upside down also if we are to have any greatness in the kingdom of heaven. We must crucify pride!

- Gary Smalley

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- \* "Some men prefer to 'grind their ax' than to 'bury the hatchet'!"
  - \* "Be what you want other people to be – but beat them to it!"
  - \* "If a sermon pricks your conscience, it has some good points!"
  - \* "A man big enough to do the job is honest; the little man will lie and cheat to get his way!"
  - \* "Do what you can, where you are, with what you have!"
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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)