

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Choosing Friends

From time to time, we all give thought to those who have fallen away from the Lord. Most of them seem to be unreachable, and when we consider their conditions before God, it can be very depressing. Peter writes (in 2 Peter 2:21-22) that "it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them." Then, he compares them to dogs returning to their vomit or hogs to the mire. We must take every opportunity to encourage their return to the Lord, but they must choose.

However, we can learn from the sad condition of the fallen away a valuable lesson that will help us to stay on the right path. As we consider the lives of those who discontinue their service to God, we notice a common factor among them as they fall away. The type of friends they most closely associate with shifts from Christians to non-Christians. Many times, as we observe their slow departure, we can see a progressive disinterest in the church as they solidify close relationships with those of the world. Finally, they are pulled so far from God's will that they leave the church to relieve themselves of their own hypocrisy. The lesson we can learn is that it is important to choose our closest friends from the members of God's family. Not that we can't have friends outside the church, but socializing and associating almost exclusively with non-Christians has proven to be a big step in the wrong direction. Paul makes this point in 1 Corinthians 15:33, "evil companionships corrupt good morals." Also, in Galatians 6:8, Paul says "For he who sows to the flesh will of the flesh reap corruption but he who sows to the spirit will of the spirit reap everlasting life." The wrong friends can corrupt our hearts and rob us of eternal life in heaven.

The New Testament describes and promotes the strong family relationship we are to have as members of the body of Christ. In 1 John 1:7, we read: "if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another." In 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Paul says "therefore comfort each other and edify one another." We are also to be "hospitable to one another." (1 Peter 4:9) Paul's Galatian letter tells us to "bear one another's burdens." (Galatians 6:2) Again, in Philippians 2:4 Paul says, "let each of you

look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others." To fulfill these passages, we certainly must have close associations with our brethren. But the relationship among Christians is to be even deeper than this. Consider 1 Peter 4:8 where we are told "And above all things have a fervent love for one another." We can also "confess our faults one to another." (James 5:16)

These are just a few passages that discuss our relationships as brethren. Our closest friends ought to be those who can help us go to heaven, not those who will hinder us! Close communication with fellow Christians can keep us from "conforming to the world." We need to be around non-Christians to influence them to obey the gospel. But when we "fervently love" them more than we love our brethren, who is influencing whom?

We should also promote this same conduct in our children. Children are easily influenced, and we need to be concerned with who our children's closest friends are. When they reach adulthood, we no longer have influence over their choices of friends. While they are at home, we can create an environment that enables them to have frequent contact with other Christian families. Do you provide opportunities for your children to develop friendships within the kingdom? Do we have other Christians in our homes for social gatherings, singings, or Bible studies? Do they understand the importance of these friendships as a special part of God's plan for us? "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another." John 13:35.

- Kerry Blackaby

Leave No Unguarded Place

In 1453 the city of Constantinople (modern Istanbul, Turkey) was besieged by Muslim Turks. The mighty Byzantine capitol had resisted invasion for nearly a thousand years; and like the armies before them, the Turks could not break through the city's defenses. Then one day some soldiers found a tiny entryway in the city wall that had been left unlocked and unguarded. Quickly the Turks poured through the opening and stormed the town. The last stronghold of a great empire fell, and the Muslims were in position to sweep across Europe – all because somebody left a door open.

I've often wondered about the fellow who was supposed to lock that door. Maybe he just forgot. Maybe he thought it was someone else's turn. Maybe he was lazy and figured the Turks would never find that door anyway. Maybe he lost the key. In any case, his single careless act altered the course of history.

One verse of a popular hymn says, "Leave no unguarded place, no weakness of the soul." Perhaps the writer had in mind Paul's admonition in Ephesians 6:11: "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." Perhaps the words were inspired by Romans 13:14: "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts." The thought is of utmost importance for every Christian: Don't leave Satan any opportunity to snare your soul. Remember, one open door is all he needs.

1 Corinthians 10:12 says, "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." The citizens of Constantinople probably thought their city would never fall. That may have led to the very negligence that allowed it to be taken. Don't ever forget that Satan is a crafty and powerful enemy (Ephesians 6:11-12) who has made it his mission to destroy our souls. We cannot afford to become self-righteous and overconfident; if we do, we set ourselves up to fall into the devil's hands.

The poor fellow who left that door open at Constantinople probably paid with his life. And if we leave a door open for Satan, it can cost us our souls.

- Jeff Himmel

Look Into the Mirror

James 1:23-25, "For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does."

Grandpa and his precious, tiny granddaughter were sitting together talking when she asked, "Did God make you, Grandpa?" "Yes, God made me," the grandfather answered. After a significant pause, the little girl asked him, "Did God make me too?" "Yes, He did," the old man responded. For a few minutes the little girl seemed to be studying her grandpa, as well as her own reflection in a nearby mirror. The grandfather wondered what thoughts were running through her innocent, inquisitive mind. At last she broke the silence: "You know what, Grandpa," she said in child-like candor, "God's been doing a lot better job lately."

I love that story. But it hurts a little. A well-made mirror does not lie. We may not like mirrors, but we need them to determine whether we are presentable.

To determine whether we are acceptable to God, we need to look continually into the mirror of His Word. As we see our reflection in view of what He requires of us, we can make adjustments by bringing our lives into compliance with His will. Thus, according to James' inspired words, one will "be blessed in what he does."

Our Bible classes provide a great opportunity for us to look into God's Word and take stock of where we are in our spiritual lives. If you already attend and actively participate in the studies, you already know the blessings produced in your own lives. Keep it up. If you do not regularly attend any of our Bible class offerings, please give them a try. I think you will discover blessings in your life resulting from consistently looking into the mirror of God's Word.

- Johnny Hester

"If possible ..."

"If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." (Romans 12:18).

Christians are to be known as "peacemakers" (Matthew 5:9). It is not always possible to be at peace with all men, but we must take care to preserve the peace and mend the breaches that destroy peace in situations where our personal preferences and personal rights are concerned. Personal opinions are never to be allowed to stir up trouble and destroy peace! And we must be at peace with ALL men. This includes our friends as well as those who oppose us and try to hurt us. Christians especially should be at peace among themselves.

There may be times when peace with others is not possible. If we preach the truth, reproving and correcting (2 Timothy 3:16), "holding fast the faithful word" in exhorting with sound doctrine and refuting those who contradict (Titus 1:9), somebody will not like it. Sometimes the way to peace with some people is through renouncing the truth, compromising the truth or voiding personal integrity. That is too high a price to pay. Peace under those conditions is impossible. We maintain the responsibility to "contend earnestly for the faith" (Jude 3) and "fight the good fight of faith" (1 Timothy 6:12). Never must we sacrifice truth and duty to Christ. The Apostles of Christ could not be at peace with the enemies of the cross (Philippians 3:18).

There are times when we are promoting peace, but the other person is set against peace with us. Because we cannot govern what another person does or how he will react, we are only responsible for our half of the relationship.

"Peace at any price" is a dangerous principle that is not found in God's book. If we love God, we will heed His directive to do all within our power to be at peace with all men. We will be sons of God when we do (Matthew 5:9)!

- Gary Smalley

* "We stretch out the empty hand of servant faith, and the merciful God graciously puts into it the gift of eternal life!"

* "Don't be afraid to swallow your pride. It's non-fattening!"

* "Every lump of clay needs "The Potter" to be molded for eternity!"

* "Fight truth decay—study the Bible daily!"

* "Earth is a testing ground-- how's your score?"

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)