

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Contending for the Faith: Another Snake Handling Preacher Died

We take no joy in recounting the death of yet another Pentecostal preacher, Dwayne Long, who died while handling a rattlesnake during Easter Sunday church services. Said the Richmond, VA, Times-Dispatch: "Snake-handling preacher dies after bite from rattler. The pastor refused medical treatment after a venomous bite during Easter services."

"Long, whose father was also a snake-handling preacher for more than 30 years, died at his home Monday after refusing medical treatment.... 'There have been other members of that family who have died of snakebites in the past 30 to 40 years,' added...Sheriff Gary Parsons...."

"Snake-handlers defend the practice by citing Mark 16:17-18: 'And these signs shall follow them that believe: in my name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover.'"

"The movement began in the early 1900s, and a Tennessee native, George Hensley, is considered the father of modern snake-handling. According to some accounts, Hensley was preaching when someone dropped a box of snakes at his feet. Hensley picked up the snakes and continued his sermon, and soon snake-handling spread to other churches.

"According to other accounts, Hensley brought the box of snakes to the pulpit himself as he preached from the book of Mark. He died in 1955, of a snakebite."

Another report of the incident from Roanoke, VA, said, "Serpent-handlers believe that when people die of a snakebite they receive during a service, it was simply their time to go...."

"(Sheriff) Parsons said another Lee County man died about two years ago after being bitten by a rattlesnake during service at a Pentecostal church in Tennessee."

Comments: First, this is another example of the power and deceit of false doctrine (Romans 16:17; Colossians 2:8). It shows how deadly and lethal is the acceptance of error (2 Corinthians 11:3; James 5:19, 20). It reveals how thoroughly and completely the devil has blinded the minds of many (2 Corinthians 4:4). It also shows how great is the burden of those of us who know the truth. May God grant us the wisdom to reach souls who are under the spell of those "whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders" (2 Thessalonians 2:10).

Second, observe that the pastor "refused medical treatment." Why offer medical treatment? Since Mark 16:17, 18, speaks of the fact that "they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover," as well as it speaks of their taking "up serpents," why did not someone lay hands on him and save him from the effects of the "venomous bite"? Did that power fail, too? Evidently. Mr. Long is dead. "Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift is like clouds and wind without rain" (Proverbs 25:14).

Third, if it is true "that when people die of a snakebite they receive during a service, it was simply their time to go," then every Pentecostal ought to take up serpents. If it is "their time to go," they will "go" whether or not the snake bites them. If it is not "their time to go," they will not die even if the serpent bites them, so why do they not all "take up serpents"?

Fourth, Dwayne Long, unlike his Pentecostal brethren in the Trinitarian Assemblies of God and the "oneness," Jesus only, United Pentecostal Church, was consistent. Assemblies of God and United Pentecostal Churches generally want only two of the five signs promised in Mark 16: 17, 18, speaking in tongues and miraculous healing. Jesus said that those disciples would (1) "cast out devils" in his name," (2) "they shall speak with new tongues," (3) "they shall take up serpents," (4) "and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them, and" (5) "they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover." As noted, most Pentecostals claim "tongues speaking" and "healing" from that list. Mr. Long took up serpents. He was more consistent than they, but he is dead, and they are alive.

But why not all five signs? The statement of the Lord is equally emphatic concerning tongues, healing, and the taking up of serpents. The Lord did not say, "they might." He said, "They shall." If any of those signs are performed by believers today, why not all five? A Pentecostal, speaking as the Spirit gives him utterance, needs to tell us (Acts 2:4; 1 Peter 4:11). I doubt that any of them will respond. They are afraid of being snake bit.

- Larry Ray Hafley (2004)

Seeing Soberly...Reality

I just spent the night sitting with a co-worker/friend whose house had burned to the ground with everything they own still in it. My friend, his wife, and son made it out alive. However, there were 4 members of this family. Their four year old daughter did not make it out. This was truly a sobering experience.

The apostle Paul told the Roman brethren, "For I say, through the grace that was given me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but as to think soberly..." (Romans 12:3). When beginning to preach, a wise preacher by the name of Ronnie Hinds always said the word "sober[ly]" is thinking about things the "way they really are." Is that not what God is trying to impress upon us as He tells us "not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought..."? In reality, we are the created and not the creator!

Not many situations in life will provoke personal reflection more than that of watching as a family reels from the pain of losing a child. Solomon, in all of his wisdom, wrote, "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart" (Ecclesiastes 7:2). In other words, the living will "think soberly". "Examine yourselves to see whether ye be in the faith" (2 Corinthians 13:5). What is my life? What is my eternal destiny if I continue living this way?

Soberness prompts mental focus. It allows one to see clearly with unclouded vision the most important things in life and that those things that hours before, we thought so important are in reality not. We can understand when we read, "for what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). Moses exemplifies this ability to see clearly when it says of him, "considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward" (Hebrews 11:26-27). Moses was able to "see" the reward through the eyes of faith.

I read one time that "faith is looking at things through the eyes of God." What he meant was that faith is trying to see things the way God sees them; the way they really are and not the way we want them to be. There is a world of difference in those two points of view! This night has been a reflective night indeed. But, what do I see when I look at my life? Do I need to make a change? Am I right with God? This is the point to all Biblical teaching, writing and preaching! It is to cause people to "think soberly" and realize that "vanity of vanities, all is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 1:2). That is, except for being right with God.

- Scott Gilmore (09/01/2011)

ENDOWED BY NATURE WITH A DANGEROUS PROPERTY

"Gifts of form and feature, much as all admire them, and much as some covet them, are frequently a snare to their possessor. Perhaps, upon the whole, personal beauty has oftener proved a curse than a blessing. 'For the most part,' says Lord Bacon, 'it maketh a dissolute youth.' Oftener still it spoils the character. The conceit of the Platonists, that a beautiful body loves to have a beautiful soul to inhabit it, is unhappily not borne out by facts. 'A pretty woman,' it has been said, and it is often true, 'adores herself' (Eugenio de Guerin). The natural tendency of this possession is to engender pride, selfishness, conceit, ambition. A striking exterior has often cost its possessor dear. It did both Absalom and Adonijah no good. It is worthy of notice that it was David's 'goodly' sons conspired against him, and it was his 'fair' daughter Tamar was dishonoured. Adonijah's face was an important factor in his history: it contributed to his ruin. It favoured, perhaps it suggested, his pretensions to the throne. He thought, no doubt, 'the first in beauty should be first in might.' Had he been blessed with an insignificant appearance he would probably have saved his head. As it was, courted and admired, he thought the fairest woman of her time was alone a fit match for him; and pride whispered that a man of such a presence was marked out for a king, and so urged him to his ruin. Let us teach our children to covet only 'the beauty of the soul.'"

- J. Hammond, The Pulpit Commentary (1 Kings), p. 14

Hunger for Righteousness

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." (Matthew 5:6). One mark of the spiritual life (the Christian) is a craving for righteousness, a right standing before God.

Hunger and thirst are probably the strongest cravings that humans have. The one who fasted for forty days and nights could certainly testify regarding the true nature of such yearnings. The Christian must cultivate an insatiable appetite both to be and to do what the God of heaven would pronounce upon him as righteous (cf. Psalm 42:1-2; 63:1; Isaiah 55:1-2). A clear picture of this can be seen in John 4:32, 34, "But He said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' ... Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.'" This spiritual hunger was displayed by His own life. "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:4). And certainly this is more than an occasional act of goodness. It is a spiritual necessity that must permeate and fill the Christian's life. It

involves coming to the correct view of oneself, seeking the mercy of God through His prescribed forgiveness, and conforming our lives to the example of His Son by following His word.

Wonderfully, through the gospel of Christ, all are promised the complete fulfillment of the passionate desire to be righteous before God! It is for all who will believe and obey (John 3:36)! The Lord Jesus promised, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst." (John 6:35). They shall be satisfied!

Do you hunger and thirst for righteousness?

- Gary Smalley

* "It is better to look ahead and prepare than to look back and regret!"

* "Are you living or existing?"

* "A mistake is evidence that someone has tried to do something!"

* "When success turns a man's head, it always leaves him looking in the wrong direction!"

* "What a world of gossip would be prevented if it were only remembered that a person who tells you of the fault of others, intends to tell others of your faults!"

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)