

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Serpents and Doves

"Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16).

Serpents and doves — two creatures that have little in common. And yet, in the development of our character, we are to be "as" they are in some respects. Quite a paradox, isn't it? Well, much of the Christian's character is a paradox. For instance:

We are to control our tongues (James 3:1-f), but also speak boldly (Ephesians 6:20). There is no virtue in a bold tongue that is uncontrolled or one so controlled that it is never bold. Our tongues need a "controlled boldness" in order to rebuke sin both publicly (Galatians 2:11-f) and privately (Matthew 18:15). Though the consequences may be unpleasant (Mark 6:16-18), we must speak boldly, and when occasion demands it our bold tongues must be blunt (Matthew 23:15). Fear of saying a wrong thing should not keep us from saying the right thing (Matthew 10:26-27). "Silence is not always golden, sometimes it is just plain yellow."

Paul's humility (1 Corinthians 15:9) and yet his confidence (2 Timothy 4:7-8) exemplify yet another paradox. Humility should not breed timidity, but neither should confidence give rise to arrogance. Humility will keep us aware of our own weaknesses but should never cause a hesitancy to point out sin in the lives of others (1 Corinthians 5:1-13). We are humbled by our liability to err in opinions and understanding of Truth, but are confident that there are some things of which we are sure, that cannot be compromised (Galatians 2:5). The virtue of longsuffering (Galatians 5:22) must be balanced by intolerance (Colossians 2:4, 8, 16, 18). Longsuffering is needed as attempts are made to progress toward maturity, but intolerance is demanded when progress is not made and goals not reached (1 Corinthians 3:1-3; Hebrews 5:11-f). It is one thing to suffer long with sinners as they attempt to conquer sin but quite another to tolerate wrongdoing (Revelation 2:15-16; 20-21).

We must certainly care what others think about us (Matthew 5:13-16) but at the same time think little of how others evaluate us (Galatians 1:10). The virtue of living to influence others (Philippians 2:12-16) can so easily become the vice of living to please others (Galatians 2:11-f).

Some are prone "by nature" to be "as serpents" or "as doves" and the Devil uses our "natural inclinations" to cause an imbalanced character. He would have us emphasize what comes easily and de-emphasize what doesn't. As a consequence we often go to extremes: either a pseudo-sophisticated person who thinks that "cultured" people avoid bold speech, confident affirmations, intolerance of sin, and conduct that may "offend" others; or a crudeness that is abusive in speech, arrogant, intolerant, and unconcerned about what others may think.

The development of a balanced, yet paradoxical, character does not come quickly (Hebrews 5:12 — "by reason of time") nor is it easy (1 Corinthians 9:25 — "striveth ... self control"), but there are no short cuts to maturity.

- David Smitherman, in *Plain Talk*, September, 1983

Give Me The Truth!

If you are my friend, if you are concerned about my soul, give me the truth. Do not flatter me. Do not praise my virtues while remaining silent about my vices. Do not fear that the truth will offend me. Do not treasure our friendship, our friendly relations, above my salvation. Do not think that by ignoring my sins you can help. Do not think that being blind to my sins will prove yourself charitable. However I may react to it, whatever may be my attitude toward you after you have done it, give me the truth! For the truth, and only the truth, can make men free from the shackles of sin, strengthen me in the pathway of righteousness and lead me to the joys of heaven. If I am wavering, weak, lukewarm, indifferent, neglectful; if I have been overtaken in a trespass, if I have been drawn into the pleasures of the world; if I have left first love; if I have been led astray by error; or if I have done none of these, but simply need to grow in knowledge and be edified, give me the truth!

- Bill Crews

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I saw in Him the glory of a life lived in total abandonment to the sovereign will of His Father in heaven. I saw a life lived in utter poverty yet in absolute contentment. I saw a life triumph over every point where I have failed. I have seen Him come so near the poor, to those who are sick, and to those who are in need. I have seen Him holy, separate, harmless, and undefiled; so close to the sinner yet never contaminated. Ah, but most of all I have seen His tears, I have heard His crying, and I have listened to the cry which said, "Oh my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Mt 26:39). I have seen the nail prints, the marks in His hands and His side; I have heard the cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken Me?" (Mt. 27:46). I have seen Him made sin on my behalf, God in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself. I have seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and, bless His holy name, I have seen an empty tomb, an ascended Savior.

I have had a clear view of Jesus. I have seen Him, felt Him, and I have known Him in a far deeper way than simply by the outward physical appearance; I have felt the reality of His life begin to burn in my heart. I have seen in Christ the glory of a life that is totally submitted to the sovereignty of God. That glory has begun to take hold of me, and I have begun to see that this is the one life that God expects of any man He made in His own image. I have seen the marks of the cross upon Him, and by His grace the marks of the cross have been put upon me and I am no longer my own; I am bought with a price, redeemed by His precious blood. Yes, I have seen Him--not in the outward physical sense only, but in the inward sense of a deep spiritual reality. I have had a clear view of Jesus and my life will never be the same again.

- Alan Redpath, *Blessings Out of Buffetings*, Studies in 2 Corinthians, p. 44

Be Converted and Become Like Children!

As the establishment of God's kingdom by Christ was preached both by John and Jesus during their ministries (Matthew 3:2; 4:17), the closest disciples of the Lord would naturally have questions regarding their roles relative to the kingdom. Would this be a kingdom of great royal splendor providing them with prestigious distinctions and honors? It appears that their misconceptions and sense of entitlement formed their ambitious outlook such that it would. Jesus showed them that their concepts of such nobility were strictly imaginary. The Lord "called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, 'Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the

kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:2-4; cf. Mark 9:33-41; Luke 9:46-50).

The desires of these disciples had gotten very far out in front of the basic conditions for even entering the kingdom. First things must be first! Positions in the kingdom are irrelevant without the certainty of having met the conditions for entrance. These disciples needed to be turned around; they needed to be "converted" (cf. Acts 3:19). Only by going back down the ladder of personal ambition for greatness and by becoming like children would they be able to enter the kingdom. Jesus explained that He was talking about increasing their humility (cf. 1 Peter 5:5), going back to the humility of childhood, and this is the opposite of self-exaltation.

Kingdom citizenship requires forgetting one's self. Life as a kingdom citizen is life in loving service to others (Galatians 5:13). When self is number one and personal power and honor are one's quest, kingdom citizenship is forsaken; it is entirely rejected.

The Lord illustrated His truth by placing a child in their midst. By growing into men, these disciples lost some of the required qualities they needed to enter and remain in the kingdom of God. He is not at all indicating that they need to return to careless immaturity. Jesus indicated what change they needed to make.

Child-like humility is specified, but it includes many other valuable qualities. Generally, children have a thirst for knowledge in this world of wonder. The kingdom citizen must desire and gain the "wisdom and knowledge of God" (Romans 11:33; 15:14; cf. 2 Corinthians 4:6; Ephesians 4:13). Children are teachable! Sadly, many adults are not. They have made up their minds regarding what they believe and what course they will pursue. The kingdom citizen must trust and depend upon his heavenly Father in submission to His wisdom. He limits his belief to what is taught in the Bible (John 6:45; see Matthew 11:25); he retains it and lives by it (Hebrews 2:1-4). As Peter stated, "like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation," (1 Peter 2:2). Kingdom citizens must have this quality of newborn babies, longing for and searching for mother's milk. They "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matthew 5:6), which has been revealed in the gospel of Christ (Romans 1:16-17; cf. Philippians 3:9-11).

Friend, are you a kingdom citizen? Have you been converted, having become like a little child in these respects? Are you living in service to others as the Lord Jesus did?

- Gary Smalley

- * "Character is like a fence: It cannot be strengthened by whitewash!"
 - * "Christians are not sinless, but they ought to sin less!"
 - * "Can't follow the stars? Follow the One who made them!"
 - * "You reap what you sow, and also you reap what you don't sow (you suffer the consequences of not doing anything – Matthew 25:24-30)!"
 - * "There are few people who deliberately and in a moment turn their backs on God; there are many who day by day drift farther and farther away from Him!" – William Barclay
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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)