

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Where's Your Emphasis?

"How many times did he make reference to himself?" This question was asked me while I was speaking to a brother about a recent convert. Not yet realizing the intent of the question, I again explained that I had been meeting and studying with this particular babe in Christ for several months, but there seemed to be little progress. The same problems and weaknesses kept coming back with little or no effort being made to overcome them. Sure, he listened to the scriptures and wrote them down, convinced that this time he would do better. Yet a few days later, he would return with the same problems. Again, the brother who had been listening to me asked, *"How many times did he make reference to himself?"* Remembering past conversations, I began to realize at least part of the problem. The young convert was always referring to himself — what he wanted to do and why he couldn't overcome his weaknesses and his failures. He was so preoccupied with himself that there was very little room for God or others. His self-centeredness was the main hindrance to his spiritual growth.

The saying that a seed must die to itself before it can grow applies to the spiritual realm as well. Truly, we must die to ourselves before we can begin to grow. The most destructive weapon against that growth is selfishness. This self-centeredness manifests itself in many ways: bearing grudges, prejudices, pouting, rebellious and angry attitudes, temper tantrums, destructive criticism, self-indulgence, etc. What work of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21) does not stem from selfishness? Is there any sin which is not, in some way, connected with selfishness? If we are to overcome our weaknesses, we must first learn to overcome our selfishness. Jesus said, "For whosoever would save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it." It is for this reason that he said in the preceding verse that we must deny ourselves. (Matthew 16:24, 25)

Are you denying yourself as far as your brethren are concerned? Do you take the time to visit those that may have a spiritual problem (Galatians 6:1, 2)? Do you take the time to visit the new Christians; to invite them into your home — or are you too busy? Do you notice who missed services at the last assembling, or are you too concerned with getting

home to watch the ball game? Selfishness can blind us to the needs of our brethren, but an even greater tragedy is that it can blind us to the needs of the lost! "The harvest indeed is plenteous, but the laborers are few" (Matthew 9:37) — and a lot of potential laborers are too selfish to help bring in the harvest! Christ gave up his life — can't we give him our time in return?

As long as Satan can keep us preoccupied with our own selfish desires and pursuits, Christ's work will continue to be pushed aside. As long as our emphasis remains on what we want and our "compassion" remains self-pity, we will continue to neglect the needs of our brethren and the needs of the lost. Remember, selfishness hinders not only your own growth, but the salvation and growth of those around you. Where is your emphasis: on yourself or others?

- Kevan O'Banion, via *Plain Talk*, November, 1979

Reactions to Jesus

Jesus was about thirty years old before He stepped out and began His ministry (Luke 3:23). Prior to His baptism He had only been known as the son of a carpenter. He would have been the least likely person to change the world. When He was only twelve He was found "in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were amazed" (Luke 2:46–47). No one expected Jesus to be engaged in such a discussion.

Even after He was grown, His humble reputation followed Him. When Philip came to Nathanael and told him that they had "found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth" (John 1:45), Nathanael replied, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Jesus, who had "no stately form or majesty . . . nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him" (Isaiah 53:2), was an unlikely candidate to become the most important person in human history.

It must have been odd to see this unlikely person teach an altogether unusual message. Jesus spoke paradoxical beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–12), taught that the scribes and Pharisees were not righteous enough (Matthew 5:20), and expanded Old Covenant laws (Matthew 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43). It's no wonder there were so many different reactions to Jesus.

Some Were Amazed

Following His "sermon on the mount" we read, "the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" (Matthew 7:28–29). They recognized something about the way he spoke that was different. Shortly

thereafter, Jesus and His disciples boarded a boat. When Jesus rebuked the storm the onlookers "were amazed" (Matthew 8:27). During His lifetime Jesus did some amazing things. The gospel of John records a few of the marvelous miracles that Christ performed so that we would be in awe of His power. John's gospel concludes with the declaration, "there are also many other things Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25). Who cannot help but be amazed at the life Christ lived?

We must be careful, however, that our relationship with Christ does not end at amazement. Too often people are content to be in awe of Christ without following Him further. We live among a world of scholars and free-thinkers who study the Bible to learn about who Christ is. Often they are amazed at what He accomplished in His short life, and the effect it continues to have on us today. They see His power, but refuse to obey Him. Just as King Agrippa answered Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian" (Acts 26:28). Are we merely amazed or are we persuaded to follow His every command?

Some Were Repulsed

Matthew 8:28–34 tells of a time when Jesus cast a multitude of demons out of two men. The text tells us that the demons "came out and went into the swine, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and perished in the waters" (Matthew 8:32). Those who were made aware of this miracle were not amazed. Perhaps they feared Jesus or feared for their livestock, but they were clearly repulsed by Christ's power. "And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw Him, they implored Him to leave their region" (Matthew 8:34).

This was a reaction Christ anticipated. While preparing His disciples to go out and teach He told them, "Whatever city you enter and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your city which clings to our feet we wipe off in protest against you . . .'" (Luke 10:10–11). This is a reaction we see today as well. People frequently come to recognize who Christ is, they see His power and Lordship, and then reject Him. We must never let this be our reaction toward Christ.

Some Glorified God

After Jesus had been rushed out of "the country of the Gadarenes" (Matthew 8:28), He crossed the sea of Galilee and returned "to His own city" (Matthew 9:1). Upon His arrival some people "brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed" (Matthew 9:2). Once again Jesus proved His power by healing the paralytic man. We're told that the man "got up and went home. But when the crowds saw this, they were awestruck, and glorified God, who had

given such authority to men" (Matthew 9:7–8). Those who observed this miracle were moved to give glory to God!

This is the reaction that Jesus desires from all people. His mission on earth was to show people His Father. As Christ's life drew to a close He told His disciples, "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him" (John 14:7). God and Jesus are one. Therefore, when we see Christ's power we ought to be motivated to give all praise and glory to God. How great a God we serve—Who saw fit to send His Son to earth to demonstrate His power to a lost and dying humanity.

Conclusion

For the Son of a simple carpenter, Jesus Christ made an enormous impact in the course of human history. People have been reacting to Jesus from the beginning of His ministry, and they continue to do so even today. What will our reaction be? Will we marvel at His abilities, attempt to get rid of Him, or recognize who He is and glorify God?

- Andrew Dow

The Destiny of Those Who Reject God

One may hear of a theological doctrine embraced by many people because of its desirability: Universalism, which holds that all people will eventually be saved. If true there would be no reason to classify people who reject God any differently than those who do not reject Him. If true, was Jesus incorrect regarding what He said about Judas (Mark 14:21; cf. John 17:12)?

The Bible, the Lord God's divine revelation to man, indicates two ultimate destinies: simply stated, one for those who serve God and another for those who reject God. These are far from identical. Jesus Christ spoke of both: "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Matthew 25:46). There are two destinies: "eternal life", or "tribulation and distress" (Romans 2:5-9). There can be no doubt about the suffering in recompense for a life lived in rejection of God (Luke 16:19-31). After his death, the rich man continued to live in a "place" of consciousness: "being in torment," "in agony in this flame." Upon the death of the poor man named Lazarus, it was stated: "he is being comforted" in a place called "Abraham's bosom".

The Lord Jesus gave a picture of the final Judgment scene in Matthew 25. He, as the Judge, will separate the "sheep" from the "goats." Compare the broad way with the narrow as Jesus did in Matthew 7:13-14. One way "leads to destruction" while the other way leads to "life".

How do I avoid the destiny of eternal punishment? Give up your rejection of God. Those who reject God while living in this life will forever be rejected by God in the next. Become "righteous" by faith in and obedience to Christ (John 3:36; Hebrews 5:8-9; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; 1 Corinthians 16:22; Romans 2:5-10).

What way are you making for yourself on earth? Are you living a life in service to God, or have you rejected Him? What place will God assign for you in eternity because of the choices you made here?

- Gary Smalley

* "Destroy an enemy, make him your friend!"

* "Christians, like pianos, need frequent tuning!"

* "Believing Christ died, that's history; believing Christ died for you, that's FAITH!"

* "The beginning of all things is explained in two words: 'God Created!'"

* "If we confess our sins, but don't forsake them (Proverbs 28:13), the only purpose it will serve is testimony against us in the courts of heaven!"

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)