

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

841 Old Hickory Blvd.
Jackson, TN 38305
oldhickorycofc.com

January 01, 2023

Volume 43, # 01

The Price of Excellence

While many speak of excellence, there are few who truly excel. The price of excellence is high and must be paid in painful installments over a long period of time. This price includes at least the following:

(1) Hard, unrelenting toil—hard work. There is no short cut to greatness. Days and years must be spent in purposeful action. The renowned pianist Paderewski practiced eight hours each day when on tour. Madame Guiomar Novaes, one of the greatest living pianists, spent two days before a concert at Lipscomb in practice for that one performance. Baseball's matchless Ty Cobb practiced base running and sliding until his hips were raw and his uniform stained with his own blood. Winston Churchill, whose speeches are classics, prepared each address with the utmost care. Someone remarked with truth, "Sir Winston has spent most of his life working on his impromptu speeches." [Jesus said, "We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work." (John 9:4); Paul stated, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:58).]

(2) Critical and searching self-examination. Pride prevents most of us from ever looking squarely at our faults, much less searching for them. To hide or defend our weaknesses and faults is to guarantee mediocrity and court failure in life. [Paul wrote, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test?" (2 Corinthians 13:5).]

(3) Self-discipline. The wisdom to see shortcomings and the self-discipline to overcome them are essential to excellence. For example, millions of people are overweight and will die an untimely death for lack of self-discipline. [Paul commanded Timothy, "But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness;" (1 Timothy 4:7).]

(4) Recognition that the difference between victory and defeat is often hairline thin.

Richard Nixon missed being President of the United States by a handful of votes, but it was the difference between occupying the most powerful position on earth and the relative obscurity which has closed in about him. The extra hour of study, of training, and of effort in general, represents the difference between greatness and mediocrity. [Paul charged all Christians: "Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil." (Ephesians 6:11).]

(5) A willingness to compare each achievement with perfection rather than with the accomplishment of others.

Christ is the perfect example, and perfection is the highest goal. Those who compare "themselves among themselves, are not wise." The relatively good, not the bad, is often the worst enemy of the best. ["fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2).]

(6) Singleness of purpose.

"If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness ... No man can serve two masters." One cannot be everything. The besetting sin of this age is that many people spread themselves too thin and are excellent in nothing. Someone has said: "You cannot fight all the battles on all the fronts all the time." ["But Jesus said to him, 'No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.'" (Luke 9:62).]

(7) Top performance on a consistent basis over a long period of time.

The world is full of people who reach the top for a moment, or for a season, but who lack the qualities essential to maintain their high position. This is the difference that marks champions in every field of human endeavor. "Be thou faithful unto death," and "Let us not be weary in well doing," are admonitions which each person must heed in order to achieve and maintain the quality of excellence. [Paul stated, "This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord." (1 Corinthians 7:35).]

- Stanley J. Lovett, via *The Preceptor*, March, 1966
(Edited: Scriptures in brackets added, GFS)

Is Salvation Conditional?

"Not everyone that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 7:21).

"And Jesus said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode." (John 14:23).

"And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46).

"And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: and hereby we know that we are in him." (1 John 2:3-5).

"Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness." (Romans 6:16-18).

"Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have a right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." (Revelation 22:14).

LET US TAKE WARNING!

Self-Correction

One day a preacher walked into my study and placed a quarter upon my desk. Here's your money, he said. I surely wasn't thinking straight when I chipped into that pool.

We had been fishing together some days previously, and he thought I had had part in a pool which was given to the man who caught the first fish. When he was convinced that I had no part in the gambling game, I helped him identify the men who had been in his boat. He returned their money, with apologies for participating in the caper. Perhaps these worldly men thought he was a real square, but in my book that man's stock soared.

He had proven himself equal to one of the most demanding requirements of Christianity — that of *self-correction*.

The betting incident was unknown to brethren who might have criticized. Among the participants he was Hale Fellow, well met! This was the popular thing to do. Correction took money he could have used, time, a fifty-mile round trip — and most of all, it required humiliating self-censure. Saving faith exists only among those who trust in Christ, not in

themselves (Matthew 16:24). Obedience to commands, per se, does not make a Christian. A follower of Christ is truly submissive to Christ as Lord — self is crucified in obedience, or the effort is wasted. He is a Jew who is one inwardly (Romans 2:28-29), who delights in the law of God after the inward man (Romans 7:22). The ultimate test for Christianity in man comes when that man, separated from all external inducement and coercion, motivated only by his desire to serve God, corrects himself in keeping with that which he believes to be the will of God. It ain't easy, brother!!

This takes us to the core of the free will controversy. It tests our faith in God, obviously; but it also tests our faith in the very nature of the man whom God made. God said man could repent and turn — now we must demonstrate that God knew His product.

The man with the beam is not only a poor mote-remover (Matthew 7:1-5); his myopic vision is so self-centered he fails to see the way to heaven.

- Robert F. Turner, via *Plain Talk*, November, 1975

"A Mighty Hand and an Outstretched Arm"

While camping at Gilgal and preparing to cross the Jordan into the Promised Land, Joshua, the leader of God's people addressed the children of Israel and reminded them of the familiar: "that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, so that you may fear the LORD your God forever." (Joshua 4:24). Moses had used similar expressions describing the power of the Lord God as he gave the Law to His people: "and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with great terror and with signs and wonders;" (Deuteronomy 26:8).

The arm and the hand are images of power. These and similar expressions are *anthropomorphisms*, descriptions of God (who is not human) using language drawn from the life and features of man. Without such expressions that you and I can relate to our personal lives, divine communication to us regarding the nature and character of God would not be as effective. Since we were made in His image (Genesis 1:26), and nothing else in the physical creation is, it is not misleading, but illuminating to see these expressions.

God's "outstretched arm" is found in the Scriptures several times. We observe it in reference to God's power in creation (Jeremiah 32:17), in the deliverance of His people (Deuteronomy 4:34), or in His divine judgment (Jeremiah 21:5).

When we read such expressions in the Bible, let us be careful that we do not attach the limitations of the human to the divine, the Lord God. Some of our fellows have behaved as if man is the measure of his Maker.

Today, God's people find comfort in reading and singing of "the everlasting arms" of the eternal God (Deuteronomy 33:27)! God as the great Shepherd tends His flock and carries the lambs in His powerful, yet gentle arms (Isaiah 40:10-11).

Let us praise our God as we lean upon His everlasting arms!

- Gary Smalley

* "Sin will keep you from the Bible, but the Bible can keep you from sin!"

* "Some people are humbly grateful; others are grumbly hateful!"

* "Stay happy and make the devil mad!"

* "Sin offers much and pays little!"

* "Once we assuage our conscience by calling something a 'necessary evil,' it begins to look more and more necessary and less and less evil!"

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)