

# **The Old Hickory Bulletin**

## **Old Hickory Church of Christ**

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### **The Gall of Bitterness**

"See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears." (Hebrews 12:15-17).

Bitterness is a problem of the heart. It essentially comes from telling ourselves a story about how badly we have been treated, how much we have been hurt, and how unfair others are toward us. It works together with a heart of hatred, anger, and malice, often wishing ill will on those we think have offended us. Think about what bitterness does:

1. Bitterness causes us to come short of God's grace. A heart of bitterness is not a heart for grace. If we are seeking after the grace of God, we must cut away bitterness, for it cannot coexist with grace.
2. The root of bitterness will spring up and cause trouble. It is a poison that infects and kills, and through which many become defiled. All it takes is one bitter, angry person to wreak so much havoc that many will be destroyed. One bitter person can turn away many souls from Christ, leaving in its wake division and heartache, wherein is found "disorder and every evil thing" (James 3:16).
3. Bitterness stands contrary to repentance. While bitterness resides in the heart, there will be anger, excuses, complaining, and failure to repent. Shortly after Simon was baptized, he jealously desired the ability of the apostles to lay hands on others to bestow the Spirit. Peter told him that his heart was not right with God, that he needed to repent and pray for forgiveness, "for I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity" (Acts 8:21-23). Bitterness puts us in the bondage of sin; it is a horrible master that only pays the wages of death (cf. Romans 6:23).

4. Bitterness stands between people. Grudges cause division. Where there is bitterness, there can be no forgiving one another. When unwarranted divisions occur among churches and Christians, mark it down: bitterness will almost certainly be a factor! It is a wedge that destroys peace and unity.

5. Bitterness goes hand in hand with jealousy and selfish ambition. "But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth" (James 3:14). Bitterness coupled with pride makes for liars who will invariably speak against truth. It destroys good, sound thinking and warps our perspective.

Recall that when Jacob stole Esau's blessing, Esau became bitter and bore a grudge (Genesis 27:41). This consumed Esau so much that he wanted to kill Jacob. He found no place for repentance in his anger and bitterness. How much quality of life and happiness did he give up in order to remain angry and hateful toward his brother? Bitterness will rip out our hearts and cause us to hate one another. There can be no place for this in the heart of a child of God.

*"Be angry and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity." (Ephesians 4:26).*

Paul spoke of "spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another" (Titus 3:3). John was clear about the problem of those who hate their brothers: (1) They are in darkness and blinded (1 John 2:9, 11). (2) Their attitude is such that it renders them as murderers (1 John 3:15). (3) Those who say they love God but hate a brother are liars (1 John 4:20).

Hatred, anger, bitterness are all cut from the same cloth. These are works of the flesh that will keep people out of God's kingdom. Therefore: "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:31-32).

It matters not how much we think another has wronged us. There is no place for bitterness. Let's meditate, therefore, on what it means to be wise:

"Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is

first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." (James 3:13-18).

- Doy Moyer

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## Godly Reserves

"I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you." Psalm 119:11 (ESV)

In ancient times, foreign invaders would besiege a city by surrounding it and cutting off commerce, travel and supplies from entering the area. Then the invaders would play a waiting game to see if they could make the city submit due to hunger or thirst, before any allies might come to provide military aid. If the city were unprepared for such an event, they would soon run out of supplies and would be forced to open the gates to the invaders to avoid a sure death from starvation in exchange for the very real possibility of slavery or being killed.

A perfect biblical example is the siege of the Assyrian king, Sennacherib on the city of Jerusalem during Hezekiah's reign. In the Assyrian Taylor Prism, Sennacherib recorded that he had trapped Hezekiah in his palace "like a bird in a cage" (J. B. Pritchard, ANET). The account in the Bible tells how Hezekiah took counsel and was able to build a conduit from the Gihon Springs and provide a water source inside the walls for the people of Jerusalem. In 2 Kings 20:20, it states: "And the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and his might, and how he made a pool, and a conduit, and brought water into the city, are they not written in the Chronicles of the kings of Judah?"

This act certainly sustained the city, but the real salvation for Jerusalem was Hezekiah's appeal to the LORD. We read in Isaiah Hezekiah's earnest plea to God for salvation, recognizing that the LORD had control over all things including a pagan world power. In Isaiah 37:36-37 it is recorded: "And the angel of the Lord went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and returned home and lived at Nineveh."

If we haven't stored up God's word within our hearts, how long will we last against the Devil's worldly assault of temptation and trial? How should we prepare for a siege by our adversary Satan? The only hope we have lies within building a reservoir of spiritual

strength from partaking of God's living word, and a constant appeal to our Father for His deliverance from this foe through His tender love and mercy.

- Nick Chapman

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## Does Doctrine Really Matter?

Doctrine is simply teaching. It is not unusual to hear people in the religious world make some kind of disparaging statement about doctrine, such as, "Doctrine is not all that important anyway. What matters is whether or not a person believes in Christ." Usually, such statements are made by people who are frustrated by the failure of humans over the last two-thousand years in maintaining unity of believers that Christ prayed for in John 17. Man-made doctrines have driven a huge wedge between various churches. This is quite evident in our day, and the resulting frustrations have made a fertile ground for various compromises. Errors in doctrine bring spiritual death! It is that dangerous!

(1) Personal zeal for God can never replace knowing and obeying His word (Romans 10:1-3)! People must never seek to establish their own form of righteousness. Worship of God will not be accepted by Him when it is done according to the traditions and precepts that originate with men (Matthew 15:1-9). Doctrinal error voids acceptable worship!

(2) Carefully notice that the Lord Jesus warned His disciples to beware of the "doctrine" (teaching) of the religious leaders of His day, the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 16:1-12). He correctly described them as "An evil and adulterous generation". He was not condemning sexual immorality among them, but rather they had placed their affection upon their own doctrines rather than the word of God.

(3) Corruption in doctrine leads to division, strife and condemnation. Notice how the Lord rebukes the early churches of Pergamum and Thyatira for corruptions in doctrine (teaching) in Revelation 2:12-29). Are churches of today, two-thousand years later, immune from such corruptions in doctrine? It would be ludicrous to affirm such! What did the Holy Spirit of God affirm with regard to what some believers would begin to pay attention (1 Timothy 4:1)? The Spirit declared that they would fall away from the faith. Am I bold enough to deny the truthfulness of that claim? Paul commanded the church to not only "keep your eye on", but also to "turn away from" anyone whose teaching was "contrary" to the doctrine of Christ, for "by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting." (Romans 16:17-18).

(4) Fellowship with the Father and Son is destroyed by failure to remain in His doctrine! "Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have

God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son." (2 John 9-11). This teaching or doctrine of Christ also includes the teaching that His apostles continued following His return to heaven (Acts 2:41-42). Failure to remain true to that doctrine is grounds for rejection of anyone teaching differently (cf. Galatians 1:6-10). To depart from the doctrine of Christ is to depart from God!

Doctrine is vital! We must never embrace anything "contrary to sound teaching" (1 Timothy 1:10). God's people must be "constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine" (1 Timothy 4:6) because the time has already come wherein many "will not endure sound doctrine;" (2 Timothy 4:3)! Can they successfully appeal to Christ to save them if they have turned "away their ears from the truth" (2 Timothy 4:4)?

Yes, doctrine really matters!

- Gary Smalley

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- \* "Success is sweet, but its secret is sweat!"
  - \* "Light your lamp before night overtakes you!"
  - \* "It takes a lot of horse sense to maintain a stable life!"
  - \* "Failure isn't bitter if you don't swallow it!"
  - \* I prayed for the Lord to send someone who would discover and reveal the cure for cancer. Then it occurred to me: God sent His Son to reveal the truth about salvation from the consequences of sin!
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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)