

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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When Prayer Is a Cover-up for Disobedience

"Then all the commanders of the forces, and Johanan the son of Kareah and Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiiah, and all the people from the least to the greatest, came near and said to Jeremiah the prophet, 'Let our plea for mercy come before you, and pray to the Lord your God for us, for all this remnant—because we are left with but a few, as your eyes see us— that the Lord your God may show us the way we should go, and the thing that we should do.' Jeremiah the prophet said to them, 'I have heard you. Behold, I will pray to the Lord your God according to your request, and whatever the Lord answers you I will tell you. I will keep nothing back from you.'" (Jeremiah 42:1-4)

"I need to just pray about it."

Sometimes when I hear someone say this, it makes me nervous. What makes me nervous is that the truth of God's Word has been read and comprehended. Yet, the truth may require some inconvenience or sacrifice, and so the statement is made, "I need to pray about it."

I wonder what the prayer is for. If the prayer is for courage to do the right thing, that's good. If the prayer is for discernment to make sure everything has been appropriately interpreted and understood correctly, that's good. But if the prayer is for more revelation to come (especially revelation to contradict plain teaching in God's Word), then we've got a problem. It's kind of like when a child asks and doesn't get the response he or she wants and so they ask again and again until they succeed.

To pray for anything more than what God has already said (especially to suit our whims and fancies) is to pray for too much. In that situation we need to get up off of our knees and get our noses back in the Book.

Father, may your will and not our own be done.

- David Maxson

Overcoming Obstacles to God's Mercy

Jesus told a story about a servant that owed his master 10,000 talents and could not pay back this massive sum (Matthew 18:21-27). The master forgave him the entire debt. What a tremendous master! Of course, the master represents God and the indebted servant describes us, sinners who can't erase one sin much less all of them. God's loving mercy overwhelms the sinner's ability to understand it. Obstacles exist for those who long for and need God's forgiveness. These hindrances endanger the grace and mercy we long for.

Sin offends God! It destroys man's relationship with the Lord. He grieves over the great chasm of sin that separates all men from him. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Mankind can regain their close fellowship with God but only through a special type of faith that involves genuine repentance and commitment to The Lord. Without this faith we are lost (Mark 16:15-16 and Luke 13:3-5). The saving message seems simple, and intellectually it is. However, man must be able to see himself as a sinner, hopeless and helpless, without God. Until one does he can't humbly turn to The Lord. Too many proud people try to deny or excuse their sins, only to later confess them in some general way. King Saul demonstrates this pattern perfectly. The Lord instructs Saul to fight and completely destroy the wicked Amalekites with their flocks and herds. Instead, Saul returns with Agag, Amalek's king, and the best of the animals. When confronted by Samuel regarding his disobedience Saul first said he did obey, next he excuses his actions by blaming the people, and finally he says, "I have sinned" (1 Samuel 15:19-30). One of the greatest obstacles to truly turning to God is human pride. Unless and until one can see himself as a sinner he is lost!

Sinful attitudes and activities also obstruct people from becoming true followers of Jesus Christ. Jesus lays down simple but strict requirements for discipleship. "Then He said to them all, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me'" (Luke 9:23). Two things can prevent us from tasting of God's mercy. The force of habit causes people to do many things without thinking them through: drinking alcohol, bad language, or inappropriate literature. Habit feels comfortable and easily can sweep us away from our Savior. Habit practiced too long becomes character. Also, pleasure can enslave people. Obviously the works of the flesh often control one's heart and diverts them away from God's saving mercy (Romans 1:18-21). Sometimes fleshly sins involve transgressions with our heart and our mouth; these are just as condemning (Galatians 5:19-21 and Ephesians 4:24-29).

Salvation by God's mercy is free, but it places great obligations on us. To be children of God means first seeing ourselves for what we are, "sinners." Only then can we humble ourselves to allow our Lord to save us from the evil one (1 Peter 5:8).

- David Hartsell (1956-2017)

Life

Life is a strange word, and a strange thing, yet loved by most of us. Few people had rather die than live. Though life is strange, death is even more so, thus most of us had rather cling to life than explore death.

Life has been described in various ways and has been the subject of many questions. What is that: having we live, and having not we die? The minute we begin to live we begin to die; we just begin to learn how to live when we die! What is life? A perfectly healthy man walks down the street - someone puts a bullet through his head - he falls to the pavement. He still looks and weighs the same. His body still contains the same chemical elements. What is the difference between him now and before? He was animate before, he is inanimate now -- why? His life is gone, you answer. But, what is life?

Ingersol, the noted infidel, said in an immortal oration at his brother's funeral, "LIFE is a narrow vale between the cold and barren peaks of two eternities." Franklin, the great statesman, said, "Do not squander time for it is the stuff out of which LIFE is made."

Truly, life is time. Time to be tried, time to prepare for a better world -- "For verily in this we groan longing to be clothed upon with our habitation which is from heaven . . . Now he that wrought us for this very thing is God" (2 Corinthians 5:1-5). He who wastes his time wastes his life and will find at the judgment that he has wasted his soul!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH YOUR TIME - YOUR LIFE?

- James P. Needham, via *Truth Magazine*, July, 1958

Christ is Head of the Body!

The Lord God of heaven made His Son, Jesus Christ, the head of His body "when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His

feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." (Ephesians 1:20-23).

Jesus Christ has been given all authority, power, lordship, and dominion over all other authorities whether in heaven or on earth, whether spiritual or material. Whatever authority there is, Christ's is greater. Colossians 1:18 indicates, "He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything." Do we appreciate the divinely superior position of the Son of God? Certainly He is "head over all things to the church, which is His body."

The body is the church, the spiritual body of believers of a spiritual head. The head guides and controls the body. This is accomplished by members of the body (Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:14) functioning according to their designed purpose (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:25-27; Ephesians 2:10). When believers abide in the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9-11), they function in harmony with and under subjection to the head. Wisdom resides in the head. The head has established the laws of operation. The head thus controls the movements, actions, and behavior of the body.

There is no legitimate alterations or appeals that can made in the body. The authority of Christ is absolute. One or more members of the body cannot lawfully, rightly, or justifiably change ANY of the Lord's directives for the church (3 John 9-11). It is nothing but presumptuous sin when power-hungry men usurp the authority of Christ by seizing power (dressing themselves as authoritative) and enticing a following from the ranks of those who have, in their hearts, forsaken the diligence necessary to preserve faithfulness to the Lord. No person is free to assume prerogatives that belong to Christ. The role of every believer is to submit to the head.

In view of this truth, can you figure out how the world has become so filled with different "churches," all claiming allegiance to Christ, the Head?

- Gary Smalley

* "Boldness in prayer is the result of faithfulness in life and service!"

* "Nothing is discussed more and practiced less than prayer!"

* "An important part of praying is a willingness to be a part of the answer!"

* "When the knees are not often bent the feet soon slide!"

* "The purpose of prayer is not to get what we want, but to become what God wants!"

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)