

# **The Old Hickory Bulletin**

## **Old Hickory Church of Christ**

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### **Making Difficult Decisions**

Daily life presses us to make decisions. Many are fairly inconsequential, but some have far-reaching ramifications for ourselves and our loved ones. Choices regarding employment, marriage and a place of residence will greatly impact the story of one's life. The local church to which a Christian joins himself may, over the course of a life time, be the difference between making it to heaven's rest or falling short of it (cf. Hebrews 4:1). Just think of the spiritual peril one would have put himself in by deciding to become a member of the church at Laodicea and allowing himself to be influenced by their attitudes (cf. Revelation 3:14-19). Other significant life decisions may relate to choosing friends, disciplining children, and participating in civic or social activities.

Such decisions are important. The thoughtful, mature Christian will see the significance of these decisions, but he will not allow the difficulty involved in making them to detract from the joy he has in Christ. I have observed (and the Bible reveals) that there are three practical steps successful Christians regularly take when faced with difficult decisions.

#### **#1 They Pray.**

God is ready and willing to hear the requests of His children (1 John 5:14-15). The apostles relied on Him in making the difficult decision regarding who would replace Judas (Acts 1:24). No matter what hard decision confronts us today, we may still, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

#### **#2 They Consider the best and worst scenarios.**

When faced with the choice of living or dying, the apostle Paul recognized that either scenario was good and would please him. To live on was needful for others and would

mean increased fruit for his labor, but to "depart and be with Christ" would be "far better" (Philippians 1:23). Sometimes in life the "worst that could happen" is something we could tolerate if our attitude is right. If we, like Paul, believe that the most important outcome of any decision is how it affects our relationship with Christ and His cause, then we will realize that all the alternative outcomes of some decisions are acceptable.

### **#3 They Determine Pro's and Con's Based on Scripture!**

God's word is "a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). It is the most practical tool there is for making life's decisions. In it God has provided for the Christian "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). While a few decisions Christians may face are not specifically addressed in scripture, many are! Those that are not specifically addressed are often addressed in principle. The wise decision-making Christian will take all of the truth that applies to his situation and use it to make his decision. He will not make a decision based on what feels good to him or what he likes best. Rather, he will rely upon God's word to make the determination. Specifically, before a decision is made, he will have considered (1) whether or not any option he could choose would hinder his obedience to Christ and (2) whether or not any option he could choose would adversely affect the spiritual condition of others. Even a choice which would not lead oneself into sin may be "a stumbling block to those who are weak" (1 Corinthians 8:9, 13).

Sadly, there are not a few Christians who fail miserably at making difficult decisions precisely because they do not follow these steps. Often it happens that these individuals will seek advice from others for making tough decisions. When you ask them, "Have you prayed about it?" the answer is, "No, I didn't think about doing that!" Ask them, "Have you considered what God's word says about it?" and you might hear, "Oh, I didn't even know the Bible said anything about it!"

Proverbs 3:5-6 instructs us to "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths." The wisdom of an all-knowing God is at our disposal to help us make difficult decisions. We must trust in Him and avail ourselves of it.

- Steve Klein, via The Hickory Heights Messenger, 12/24/2023

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## *Share a Quote ...*

It is a right, yes a duty, to search in cautious manner for the numbers, sizes, and weights, the norms for everything [God] has created. For He himself has let man take part in the

knowledge of these things ... For these secrets are not of the kind whose research should be forbidden; rather they are set before our eyes like a mirror so that by examining them we observe to some extent the goodness and wisdom of the Creator.

- Johannes Kepler, Scientist (1571-1630)

There cannot be design without a designer; contrivance without a contriver; order without choice; arrangement, without any thing capable of arranging; subserviency and relation to a purpose; means suitable to an end, and executing their office in accomplishing that end, without the end ever having been contemplated, or the means accommodated to it. Arrangement, disposition of parts, subserviency of means to an end, relation of instruments to use, imply the preference of intelligence and mind.

- William Paley, Natural Theologian (1743-1805)

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## REFINING

My paternal grandparents lived in Birmingham, Alabama, a city known for its iron and steel production because of the plentiful ore found there. We would visit them three or four times every year and were always entertained with the sights, sounds, and even smells of the "Magic City." When leaving the downtown area headed to their home on North 50th Street, we would always cross the viaduct, which gave us a nice overhead view of the active Sloss

Furnaces, owned and operated at that time by the U.S. Pipe and Foundry Company. Sometimes at night, we would pass when they were making a pour. This was greatly exciting for young boys! I will never forget the smell and my Dad's joke that he bought Mother a bottle of expensive perfume: "Evening in Birmingham." The serious air pollution problem there was addressed by federal legislation, the Clean Air Act of 1963.

In the refining process, minerals and ores (crude metals) were loaded into a furnace, and when the heat was intensified, the process of smelting separated the dross (the waste material). The end product of refining was pure metal that was separated from low-quality material by the process. It is interesting to note that Ezekiel described the wretched degeneracy of the house of Israel by using "dross" of the refining process (Ezekiel 22:17-22).

The craft of metalworking appears very early in the Bible (Genesis 4:22). The purity of God's word is illustrated by the refining process in Psalm 12:6, "The words of the LORD are pure words; As silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times."

Many of the hymns we sing, sermons we hear, and prayers we pray use the language of refining to express the difficult experiences of life. This might be because the Bible student is familiar with figurative expressions that draw from the refining process. Recall Proverbs 17:3, "The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, But the LORD tests hearts." As the dross perishes, the Master refiner brings through the fire what is pure. The Lord God thoroughly purged impurity from Israel by putting them through the heat of punishment: "Therefore the Lord GOD of hosts, The Mighty One of Israel, declares, 'Ah, I will be relieved of My adversaries And avenge Myself on My foes. I will also turn My hand against you, And will smelt away your dross as with lye And will remove all your alloy. Then I will restore your judges as at the first, And your counselors as at the beginning; After that you will be called the city of righteousness, A faithful city.' Zion will be redeemed with justice And her repentant ones with righteousness. But transgressors and sinners will be crushed together, And those who forsake the LORD will come to an end." (Isaiah 1:24-28). Most of the people were consumed in the crucible: "It will come about in all the land,' Declares the LORD, 'That two parts in it will be cut off and perish; But the third will be left in it. And I will bring the third part through the fire, Refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested.' They will call on My name, And I will answer them; I will say, 'They are My people,' And they will say, 'The LORD is my God.'" (Zechariah 13:8-9). Those who remained were purified through affliction (Isaiah 48:10-11).

Sometimes, God is compared to the refiner's furnace: "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness." (Malachi 3:2-3). When the people of God drifted into unfaithfulness ("the house of Israel has become dross to Me"), the prophet Ezekiel foretold the coming wrath of God: "As silver is melted in the furnace, so you will be melted in the midst of it; and you will know that I, the LORD, have poured out My wrath on you." (Ezekiel 22:17-22).

Let us not forget that the Lord's refining process proceeds from His desire to preserve, help and bless those who are faithful to Him. Notice Psalm 66:8-12, "Bless our God, O peoples, And sound His praise abroad, Who keeps us in life And does not allow our feet to slip. For You have tried us, O God; You have refined us as silver is refined. You brought us into the net; You laid an oppressive burden upon our loins. You made men ride over our heads; We went through fire and through water, Yet You brought us out into a place of abundance." The fire of testing is quite revealing (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:13).

- Gary Smalley

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- \* "Good looks go skin deep. Good character goes heart deep!"
  - \* "God allows trials, not to impair us, but to improve us!"
  - \* "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose!"
  - \* "Honesty is not only the best policy, it is the Will of GOD!"
  - \* "He who toots his own horn usually plays a solo!"
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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)