

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Keeping the BIG Picture Before Us

"Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin" (Hebrews 11:25).

The faith of Moses ought to be inspiring to every Christian. He was raised as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He "was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds" (Acts 7:22). Every day he had access to every form of luxury and pleasure this ancient kingdom had to offer. He was surrounded by immense wealth and was directly connected to royalty. And yet he chose to align himself with the persecuted people of God. He chose rather to "endure ill-treatment" (NASB) with the people of God who were slaves of Egypt experiencing harsh bondage each day. He chose guaranteed mistreatment rather than enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season. He realized that path in life wasn't worth it in the end. The pleasures of sin are always fleeting. Those who are deceived by them and indulge in them are left empty and unfulfilled. There is no lasting satisfaction that attends sinfulness, only misery, sorrow, and condemnation. As the apostle John wrote, "the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:17).

Is there pleasure in sin? The Bible says "yes" there is. Is it worth it? Why don't we ask David (2 Samuel 11-12) or Judas Iscariot (Matthew 26-27)? As someone once said, "Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay." No, the temporary pleasure of sin is never worth it. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Our sins separate us from God (Isaiah 59:1-2). There is no peace for the wicked (Isaiah 48:22). The consequences of fleeting sin will often destroy your life like it did to David. And if un-repentant of, it will ultimately cost you your soul (Luke 12:20). As Jesus asked, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Mark 8:36).

Let us be wise and learn from the example of Moses. Let us possess that kind of faith. Let us always be willing to suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than love the

world and the things of the world (1 John 2:15-16) that will be burned up in that Day (2 Peter 3:1-14). Let us always keep the BIG picture before us, as Moses did, and look to the reward (11:26), the eternal reward of heaven!

- Jesse A. Flowers

You've Been Wronged!

One of the many guarantees of life is that going through it, sooner or later someone is going to do something wrong against you. The deepest wounds come from friends, relatives and people you have regarded as Christians.

In our determination to get closer to God (James 4:8), to be transformed into the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18) and to preserve our names in the Lamb's book of life (Revelation 21:27), let us carefully consider the truths that Christians must implant (James 1:21) and demonstrate by our behavior (1 Peter 1:15; James 3:13; 1 Timothy 3:15), especially when we have been wronged.

(1) Check your heart! This is the beginning point of all responses you make toward others who mistreat you. The last thing you want is to issue forth words and actions that defile YOU (Mark 7:20-23; Matthew 15:18-20). The prophet Jeremiah issued a startling wake-up call: "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). People continue to rely upon their own hearts to lead and guide them, in spite of what God has revealed: "There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death." (Proverbs 14:12).

Those who choose to go their own willful way, disregarding God, are self-deceived. We must purify our hearts and cleanse our hands (James 4:8). When the word of God is treasured in our hearts, it enables us to avoid sins against God (Psalm 119:11). Our hearts must be "honest and good" (Luke 8:15) to produce the fruit which glorifies God (Matthew 13:18-23; cf. 7:18-19; Galatians 5:22-23). The pure in heart will see God (Matthew 5:8).

(2) Guard your lips! There is no occasion where it is easier to allow wrong or hurtful words to come out of your mouth than when you believe you have been wronged. Verbal abuse often leaves enduring emotional scars. What is worse is that we will be held accountable to the Judge of all mankind for idle words (Matthew 12:33-37)! Once the words leave your lips, like feathers in a windstorm, you will never succeed in calling them back. Evil words are like many things: "a sharp razor" (Psalm 52:2), "drawn swords" (Psalm 55:21), "sharp arrows . . . burning coals" (Psalm 120:4), "poison of a viper" (Psalm

140:3). "And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell." (James 3:6). Further, "But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison." (James 3:8). Such things as slander, abusive speech and lies proceed most easily from a heart inundated with anger, malice, wrath and bitterness (Colossians 3:8-9; Ephesians 4:31). Know that "the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart" (Matthew 12:34).

Strength to overcome is provided from God in answer to prayer: "Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips." (Psalm 141:3). Let our hearts sing the song of the Psalmist: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer." (Psalm 19:14)!

(3) Control your actions! Christians "have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." (Galatians 5:24), therefore we do not practice deeds of the flesh, which include "enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions," (Galatians 5:20). Paul appealed to the Christians in Rome:

"let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts."
(Romans 13:12b-14).

He reminded Christians that, "you laid aside the old self with its evil practices," (Colossians 3:9). Those with "clean hands and a pure heart" are blessed by the Lord (Psalm 24:4). Christians control their behavior: "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." (Ephesians 4:32).

(4) Never forget to whom you belong! Forgetting hinders our walk with God (cf. Matthew 16:23). Christ bought you with a precious price (1 Corinthians 6:20; 1 Peter 1:18-19). You belong to Him (Acts 20:28; cf. Mark 9:41). You are preserved in this world to do His bidding (Jude 1; cf. Matthew 5:13-16) and to glorify God (1 Corinthians 6:20; Romans 15:6; 1 Peter 4:16).

Christian: retain your place as a servant of the Most High God! Our adversary, the devil, seeks every advantage in his efforts to devour God's people (1 Peter 5:8). We band together as God's people! "But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul." (Hebrews 10:39).

(5) Suffer the wrong! This divine directive is most often overlooked by Christians! From childhood we were taught principles of justice and fairness. We were allowed to freely

express ourselves (if at times only to those we were confident of being on our side). Paul taught the Christians in Corinth to patiently endure a loss from a brother rather than initiate a lawsuit against him: "Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?" (1 Corinthians 6:7). Wouldn't behavior like that indicate that I have been with Christ (cf. Acts 4:13)? Would it not prove that I desire to be Christ-like and acceptable to God (1 Peter 2:20-23)? Christians should learn patient endurance, not verbal abuse and threats. Our Master taught us to love with genuine sincerity: this love is patient and kind, not acting unbecomingly, not self-seeking. This love bears all things and endures all things because it is not provoked and does not take into account a wrong suffered (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). What better effort could there be, complaining loud and long? Nurturing, rehearsing, and advertising the wrong? Should we fall into the tempter's snare with "evil suspicions and constant friction" (1 Timothy 6:4-5)? Which party in a dispute is the first to admit that they could be in the wrong or even partly to blame? Are our demands to THEM drowning out our instructions from the Lord to "examine yourselves!" (2 Corinthians 13:5)?

Remember, "the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." (1 Peter 3:12). Christians must "pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another." (Romans 14:19). Who are the sons of God in Matthew 5:9? The peacemakers! What if MY assessment of WHO made things wrong is NOT CORRECT in the Lord's judgment? Is it possible for me to be guilty of the very sin I charge against others? The Lord says it is (Romans 2:1-3)! We need to "cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (2 Corinthians 7:1). Can I not give up the nagging desire for justification and entrust myself to Him who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:23)? If I refuse love and forgiveness, can I ever have such humility of mind so as to regard others as more important than myself (Philippians 2:2-5)? Our Lord always provides the remedy for these difficulties, we just need to receive His word into our hearts and encourage each other to live so others will see Christ living in us!

- Gary Smalley

* "Learn from the mistakes of others. You can't live long enough to make them all yourself!"

* "Jesus declared the truth; He never gave opinions!"

* "Lighthouses don't make noises, they just shine!"

* "Keep your words sweet — someday you may have to eat them!"

* "Jesus Christ is right for whatever is wrong in your life!"

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)