

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Sin, Repentance, and Judging Others

Some discussions just seem odd to me. One such oddity goes along these lines (and it seems to happen over and over, especially on social media, so this is not a reference to one particular discussion):

Person A: "People who engage in this activity are in sin and need to repent." (What the specific sin is differs from case to case, and it is irrelevant for this point.)

Person B responds: "We shouldn't judge others because we are all sinners who need forgiveness."

By this response, person B sweeps away the point made by person A because we all sin and we don't want to be judgmental of others. Now it is true that we all need forgiveness, and it is doubtful that many will deny this; no one is claiming perfection here. However, that does not negate the fact that we still need to call attention to sin and the need to repent. Recognizing that we are all guilty of sin is not a reason to think, "Therefore we should never tell anyone else that they ought to repent."

Consider the case of Isaiah, who, overwhelmed by God's glory, confessed his own sinfulness and the sinfulness of those around him. Upon receiving forgiveness, he was then ready to go preach to stubborn people who wouldn't listen to the message of repentance (Isaiah 6). The point is that Isaiah did not refrain from preaching about sin and repentance based upon the fact that he himself needed forgiveness.

How do we know we are all sinners who need to repent unless someone first tells us about sin and God's will for repentance (2 Peter 3:9; Acts 17:30-31)? Shall we just assume everyone knows this before they are told? If we are all sinners who need to repent, then someone told us at some point, and this assumes an understanding of sin and repentance. Shall we not give others this same message at the risk of sounding too judgmental? Shall our fear of sounding judgmental overcome our need to love others enough to present God's message to them? Are we showing real love if we ignore the

sin, fail to point people toward repentance, and just embrace their situation no matter what? Is that the godly thing to do? Jesus didn't die in order to silence the message of repentance. His death provides the hope that is attached to the message, and we need to be preaching it with clarity.

The gospel is about grace and forgiveness, but knowing about that grace only works when we first understand why we need grace and forgiveness. If we don't know about the sin, we won't know about our need to repent. If we don't know of our need to repent, we won't know we need grace and mercy. Again, how can someone say, "We shouldn't judge" based on the fact that we are all sinners, unless that person first knows the problem of sin? If not careful, the "we shouldn't judge" mantra can become a mask that veils the fullness of the gospel.

We are not being self-righteously judgmental by expressing what God has said about sin and repentance; we are being true to His word. Our message is not, "You need to repent and I never have to." We are all indeed in the same boat. We can show the problem of sin while recognizing our own guilt and need for God. We can do this with humility and grace. We can speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Calling out sin and the need to repent is not automatically unloving and self-righteous, and we must not assume that one who calls attention to sin is being some kind of prudish, holier-than-thou hypocrite. (We could point out that Person B is, in fact, judging person A for the perceived sin of being judgmental, with the implication that he ought to repent and quit being judgmental. Is that ironically unloving and judgmental?)

Paul knew of his own sins, but that didn't stop him from rebuking Peter (Galatians 2). Peter surely was aware of his own weaknesses, but that didn't stop him from rebuking Simon (Acts 8). Both Paul and Peter repented of sins, but they still told others what was necessary.

Show love. Show grace. Show kindness. But don't, for a moment, think that these are in contradiction to calling out sin for what it is and pointing people to God's message of repentance. Yet while doing this, let's never stop short of sharing the answer to the problem — the blood of Jesus through which we find grace and forgiveness. Repentance is not an end in itself; salvation is the goal. Our purpose in calling out sin and showing the need to repent is not to condemn, but to point the way to that relationship with Christ in which there is "no condemnation" (Romans 8:1-2).

"Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord . . ." (Acts 3:19).

- Doy Moyer (2016)

Success

Brother John L. Rainey, my Greek teacher at Lipscomb used to say, "Success comes in cans, not in can'ts." He emphasized what I have since observed numerous times, we can if we think we can.

There are four things necessary to success: ability, desire, opportunity, and persistence. Although some are naturally endowed with greater ability, all can by effort increase their capacity for growth. One must want to excel or he will surely fail. Occasionally opportunities comes by luck, but most are made by pluck. Though he has often tried, man has never achieved real lasting success without patient and diligent toil. The pot of gold at the end of the rainbow cannot be reached through idle wishes.

"Large oaks from little acorns grow." No mountain was ever scaled in a single stride. Many a man with sufficient ability has stood with folded arms waiting for some grand opening, that he may perform a notable work, and has lived and died at the foot of the hill. It is the little un-applauded things done each day that bring success.

These principles apply to spiritual success. You may wish to be an able preacher or teacher, a worthy elder, or maybe a more perfect Christian. You can do greater things in Christ if you will only use the ability that you have, kindle a burning desire to do more, seize every opportunity that opens, and stick to your task. No one is a failure in the Lord if he does what he can. This is all that God expects. (2 Cor. 8:12). But this he does expect. (Lk. 17:10).

None is able to exceed by his own strength but with Paul we can say, "I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me."

- Jimmy Thomas, via Gospel Anchor, August, 1979

Do We Have the Right Kind and Amount?(5)

The command to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith, being such a vital part of our spiritual growth and maturation, provides us with occasions to sharpen our effectiveness in such self-reviews. Checklists are helpful.

5. Do we have the confidence that will move us to steadfastly endure the trials of life as a Christian?

Just as love steadfastly endures (1 Corinthians 13:7) as we face difficulties in life, maintaining a strong faith builds our spiritual fortitude enabling success in being "a good

soldier of Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:3). How is our confidence built? How can it move us to endure to the end?

The writer of Hebrews said: "For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end," (Hebrews 3:14). We obeyed the gospel commands resulting in our forgiveness by the grace of God, which was our beginning, the start of our journey to heaven to be with the Lord. We must cling to the confident assurance we started at that time, persevering to the end. We know our sins were forgiven; we know God strengthens us as we endure temptations and trials; we know He watches over us and gives us what we need to improve and mature, becoming complete and suited for the reward of eternal life. We never doubt His word, nor His promises (He always kept them!). Even if we are called upon to endure suffering and material loss as countless Christians before us, the writer of Hebrews reminded God's children: "you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward." (Hebrews 10:34-35).

Christians "are waiting for the hope of righteousness" . . . "by faith" (Galatians 5:5). The victory that overcomes the world is "our faith." (1 John 5:4). Consider the example of Moses: Every decision he made relative to God's leading, was "by faith", that is, by confidence in God and in the promises of His word. Every personal resolution ("conviction") and resulting action was made because of "things hoped for" but "not seen" (Hebrews 11:1, 23-29). He believed God and acted accordingly. All that you and I do as Christians is with the assurance of what God has promised and a conviction in a God we have never seen. God has given us the victory through Christ, "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).

Christians endure to the end (Hebrews 3:6; 6:11-12; cf. Romans 6:22). We are not quitters (Hebrews 10:38). We maintain and strengthen our faith as we go. We "lay aside every encumbrance" and avoid being entangled in sin; we "run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith," (Hebrews 12:1-2). We live this way and encourage one another so that every single one "will not grow weary and lose heart." (Hebrews 12:3). Mutual encouragement prevents an "unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God." (Hebrews 3:12). It prevents our being "hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." (Hebrews 3:13).

Peter understood the steadfast endurance and its glorious result: "obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls." (1 Peter 1:9). Christians who have patience will not give up in the middle of the battle! We will keep on until the victory is won!

Have you developed the confident assurance of faith? Have you learned patience and steadfastness by enduring hardships, afflictions, and persecutions? Study and worship with us. We will encourage you!

- Gary Smalley

- * "If the entire church would work as hard for the Lord as a faction will work to carry its point, nothing could stop its progress!"
 - * "A gospel feast is better for the church than a religious spree!"
 - * "In churches, as in nations, peace at any price generally results in war at any cost!"
 - * "Making the world safe for democracy may be the proper thing, but no church was ever made safe by democracy!"
 - * "I am only one, but I am one, I cannot do everything, But I can do something; What I can do I ought to do, And what I ought to do By the grace of God I will do!"
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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)