

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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It's What We Make of It

An old man was sitting on the porch of the community store when some settlers came by in their horse-drawn wagon. "What kind of people will we find in this area if we choose to make our home here?" asked the settlers. "What kind of people did you find where you came from?" the wise old man queried. "Terrible," was the reply, "hard to get along with." "That's funny," said the old man, "we have the same kind of people here. If I were you, I would probably move on."

After a while, another load of settlers stopped. The questioning began much as before, but this time the settlers could hardly say enough about the wonderful people they had left behind. To which the old man replied, "That's funny—we have the same kind of people here!"

People are pretty well what we make of them; and so is a job, a community, or life in general. We often hear of someone who "has had a rather unhappy life," but then we think of others who have been faced with equally severe losses and trials who have not had unhappy lives at all. They have learned that "life is what we make of it."

The apostle Paul comes immediately to mind. No one could have been more deserving of love and appreciation: "I labored more abundantly than they all," he wrote (1 Corinthians 15:10). Yet, no mere list of sufferings adequately describes the heartaches, disappointments, and setbacks experienced by this one man. Friend and foe alike contributed to his hurt. "What an unhappy life!" someone might think. Unhappy? No one wrote of "joy" and "rejoicing" more than did Paul. He found joy in his sufferings in behalf of others (Colossians 1:24; Philippians 2:17). He found joy in his hope of glory (Romans 5:2). Paul was a happy Christian. Paul had learned that life is what one makes of it. He had learned where real happiness lies—that real happiness comes from qualities that are within, not from circumstances that are without; that real happiness comes through Christ, not through ideal surroundings. So, from his Roman imprisonment, he could write: "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. . . . I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians

4:11-13). Paul could take what, for others, would have been an unhappy life, and "through Christ" make a happy life out of it.

What Paul teaches us concerning life, Barnabas teaches us concerning people: people are often what we make of them. Barnabas could see hope and promise where others could see only failure and hopelessness. He looked for the best in others; he believed in others; he could extend the helping hand; he was truly "the son of exhortation." If the view of some toward their fellow-man was basically, "You aren't—You can't be—You won't be," Barnabas' view was, "You may not be now, but I know you can be and you will be." And people not only looked better when they were with Barnabas, they became better. People rarely rise above what is expected of them. People are to a great degree what we make of them.

This writer had occasion several years ago to visit a friend dying with cancer. He found the patient alone. Totally absent from his room were the morbidity and gloom generally expected under such circumstances. The friend spoke of how wonderful life had been; he expressed gratitude for his good wife, his son, his daughter-in-law, his brothers and sisters in Christ; he spoke of his faith and hope; then he spoke of his funeral, of his lost friends who would be there, of his excitement in knowing the gospel would be preached to them, and of his confidence that their hearts would be touched. The faith that had sustained this friend in life was shining most brightly in death. In death! Yes, even death is what we make of it.

Faith is the key—the ability to lift up our eyes from the cares and worries of this life "to the hills, from whence cometh our help;" to see life in its relationship to eternity; to see life and people and job and community and death through the eyes of one who has been transformed into the image of Christ rather than through the eyes of one who has no hope. Such faith is worth more than all the gold in the world.

Strange as it may seem, the question, "What kind of people and life and job and community do you find where you come from?" requires more self-evaluation than evaluation of others. Improving others starts with improving me!

- Bill Hall, via Christianity Magazine, 1987

No Work? No Food!

"For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat." (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

Years ago, I lived in a community that had a lot of transient people flow through it. There was a constant number of people passing through begging for handouts. My wife and I did not have a lot ourselves and skimmed by from pay check to pay check. There were times when we took food off our shelves to give to others and then did without. I struggled with what to do until I was reading Paul's second letter to the church at Thessalonica. Even though I had read and studied the verse that is the text for this article before, a light bulb came on that day. From then on, if someone asked me for food or money, I offered them a chance to work. If they would not accept my offer, I said, "No." I could turn someone away and it no longer bothered my conscience. Go back and read what Paul said. He did not make what he said optional. He gave it as a command. All these churches that think they are doing the Lord's work by handing out food, clothes, etc. to people who are capable of working are actually doing something that is sinful. If those people are capable of working, then that is what they should be doing. Now, Paul is not addressing someone who has been hit with a catastrophe. Nor is he addressing people who have health issues that prevent them from working. Paul does not address the person who can't work. He is addressing the person who can work but won't work. There is a difference. When you or I or any church engages in mass handouts to people with no distinction between those who can't and won't work, God's command is being violated. Try this instead. Give people a hand up instead of a hand out.

"Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." (Ephesians 4:28).

"And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you;" (1 Thessalonians 4:11).

Though your intentions may be honorable in giving a person a handout, you are doing them a disservice. You are compounding their problem and stifling their self-esteem by turning them into a beggar. Stop it! The old adage is true, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him to fish and you feed him for life." Stop the church (food, clothes, etc.) handouts. What your church is doing is sinful. Think about it!

Please join us for Bible Study and worship each Sunday.

- Keith Hamilton

Clippings . . .

I expect to pass through this world but once. Any good, therefore, that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any fellow being, let me do it now. Let me not defer it or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.

- unknown

Harsh Consequences of Being Deceptive!

Bible students are familiar with the fact that Jacob used deception to obtain the blessing from his father, Isaac, which should have gone to his brother, Esau. As a result, Genesis 27:41 says, "So Esau bore a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him; and Esau said to himself, 'The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob.'" Because of the fact that Esau was nursing a grudge against him, Rebekah, the mother of Esau and Jacob, immediately formulated a plan for Jacob to flee to the safety of her relatives at the place where she had grown up.

Rebekah then told Jacob to "Stay with him [her brother Laban] a few days, until your brother's fury subsides, until your brother's anger against you subsides and he forgets what you did to him. Then I will send and get you from there." (Genesis 27:44-45). Rebekah was either grossly underestimating the time that would be needed for Esau's anger to subside and his remembrance of the deed to fade, or she was being dishonest. Her plan to send for her son never materialized. As far as we know, they never saw each other again.

What bitter consequences result from the sin of deception! Jacob had to live with the resulting effects of his behavior. This "mama's boy" had to leave the comforts and familiarity of living at home with his parents in exchange for, not a "few days," but twenty years of hard work and struggle in Haran (31:41)!

God will forgive the sin of deception if we turn from it and seek forgiveness according to His directive (cf. Acts 17:30; 26:18; 1 John 1:9), but the consequences of the sinful choice to deceive may last a long time. There are many sins that come with lasting consequences (cf. Hebrews 6:6), for which little or no forethought is given. Resulting bitterness is hidden away by the tempter (cf. 1 Thessalonians 3:5; John 8:44; Luke 8:13; Genesis 3:16-24). Are there things you have done for which you sought forgiveness, but are still suffering the consequences of your sin? Pray that God will grant you resistance in avoiding sin (James 4:7), and strength to bear the consequences of your wrong choices. You will find encouragement among God's people! "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the

throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:16). May we help you?

- Gary Smalley

* "Write your injuries in the dust but your benefits in stone!"

* "We are homeless until Christ is at home in our hearts!"

* "The riches of heaven will more than compensate for the poverty of earth!"

* "And when we gain the shore at last, We shall not count the billows past!"

* *"Thou hast made us for Thyself, and the heart of man is restless until it finds its rest in Thee!"*

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)