

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

841 Old Hickory Blvd.
Jackson, TN 38305
oldhickorycofc.com

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Pleasing the Pharisees

"Nevertheless even of the rulers many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the glory of men more than the glory that is of God." (John 12:42, 43).

"Even of the rulers"-even among the elite Sanhedrin were many who believed on Christ. Speculation about whether they actually believed only reflects on the skeptic's faith, not the rulers'. God said they believed and for believers, that's enough. But "they did not confess it", and herein lies their great sin. It was not so much what they did as what they failed to do. Their faith indicates knowledge. They knew, yet still would not confess and follow Christ. Why? What power, what influence could be so compelling as to cause believers to turn their backs on the Savior and salvation? We are not left to wonder.

It was "because of the Pharisees". The One who knows all hearts shows their weakness as loving the glory of men more than the glory of God. To them, getting along with men (gaining their favor and avoiding their disfavor) had priority over pleasing God. These were not men to allow such things as truth and right to interfere with their religion! While these Pharisees no longer exist as a religious sect, they are still very much in evidence as they represent those who men strive to please more than God. "Because of the Pharisees" many of all ages have proved themselves to be as these rulers: found wanting at a crucial time; succumbing to pressures and circumstances.

Accordingly, we read of many Old Testament characters who were influenced "because of the Pharisees". Even Abraham lied, calling Sarah his sister to avoid the disfavor of king Abimelech (Genesis 20). Aaron yielded to demands for an idol saying, "thou knowest the people, that they are set on evil" (Exodus 32:22). King Saul disobeyed the commandments of God and later confessed it was because he "feared the people, and obeyed their voice" (1 Samuel 15:24).

"Because of the Pharisees" Pilate delivered up Christ to be crucified, "wishing to content the multitude" (Mark 15:15). It was for the same reason that Peter followed Christ from

afar, denied Him with cursing and swearing and said, "I know not the man". He later showed the same weakness in Antioch by withdrawing from the Gentiles, "fearing them that were of the circumcision" (Galatians 2:12).

Fear and favor of the "Pharisees" continues to flavor the religion of many. It has influenced the revision and updating of Catholic and denominational creeds. It promotes watered-down preaching and encourages the "fear of offending" phobia. As the rulers, many have learned the way of truth, but "because of the Pharisees" will not embrace it. Even among the brethren are some who prefer to stay with the "synagogue" rather than to stand for what they know to be right. No "Pharisee" should be allowed to determine where I shall spend eternity! "For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? or am I striving to please men? . . ."

- Dan S. Shipley, via Pause-Ponder-Profit, September, 1994

The Power to Transform

The most powerful force in the world is the gospel of Christ. Paul, in writing to the Roman Christians said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God unto salvation" (Romans 1:16). The gospel of Christ can make saints out of sinners, Christians out of murderers. The changeable, impetuous Simon Peter became the staunch, rock-like apostle of Jesus. A "son of thunder", John, became the apostle of love. The secret of such a change in the lives of these men is the power of the gospel of Christ in their thoughts and lives.

We must never underestimate the power of the gospel in touching and tendering the most hardened and most calloused heart. What could never be done with our own persuasion nor with weapons of force can be done with the gospel, namely, change men. You can bring a nation of people to its knees in defeat or imprison them beyond steel doors or barbed wire but you cannot make them change their ideologies or believe what you believe.

The gospel, however, can change man's way of thinking. It can literally pick him up, turn him around and change him. The gospel is able to give man new hopes, new goals, new ambitions and new drives in life. We sing the phrase in one of our songs, "His power can make you what you ought to be"--this power is in the gospel of Christ.

We praise and thank God that He has made the gospel so powerful that as form can be given to mud by the sculptor, so transformation can be made in the soul of man.

- unknown

Clippings . . .

"No man can expect to find a friend without faults, nor can he propose himself to be so to another. Every man will have something to do for his friend, and something to bear with in him. Only the sober man can do the first; and for the latter, patience is requisite. It is better for a man to depend on himself than to be annoyed with either a madman or a fool."

- unknown

Sanctified Behavior of the Christian!

It may be repeated that the purpose of the gospel of Christ is to call people to depart from the "domain of darkness" and enter "the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." (Colossians 1:13-14). The death of Christ on the cross gave mankind the avenue for peace with God (Colossians 1:20; cf. Ephesians 2:12). We "were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach" (Colossians 1:21b-22). This is the "hope of the gospel" which, when embraced, has the power to "present every man complete in Christ." (Colossians 1:23, 28).

Leaving the "domain of darkness" and entering "the kingdom of His beloved Son," we find redemption and forgiveness (cf. Ephesians 1:7). We find "every spiritual blessing" in Christ, where "we would be holy and blameless before Him." (Ephesians 1:4). In other words, we become sanctified.

To be sanctified is to be separated to God (1 Corinthians 1:30; cf. Acts 20:32) and live lives of honor and purity (1 Thessalonians 4:3, 4, 7). Christians are sanctified by faith in Christ (Acts 26:18); they "abstain from every form of evil." (1 Thessalonians 5:22; cf. 2 Timothy 2:21). The power to live this way comes through the gospel, the word of God (John 17:17, 19; cf. Romans 1:16).

How important it is for Christians to maintain their personal sanctification as servants of Christ. Also of great importance is our confessing our hope to others (1 Peter 3:15) and working to "stimulate one another to love and good deeds," (Hebrews 10:23-24). We must maintain our moral courage so we will "be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one." (Ephesians 6:16).

Conforming to the rough and ugly world will destroy us. Let us ever be vigilant so that we will not drift away from the faith (Hebrews 2:1). We are increasingly surrounded by

boisterously loud shouters who are shallow enough to allow those who pay them to provide the destructive commentary. The decency and politeness of our grandparents' day has diminished almost to the point of non-existence.

In the face of our rude and inconsiderate society, let us remember to always follow the example of our Lord: "while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;" (1 Peter 2:23). Recall Paul's example: "when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate;" (1 Corinthians 4:12b-13a). Since the peacemakers shall be called sons of God (Matthew 5:9), let us strengthen our refusal to allow the screaming abuse of those who rail against the righteous to disturb the fruit of the Spirit in our lives: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control;" (Galatians 5:22-23). Such self-control is vital in the confrontations with evil men when they hurl insults and injuries toward us.

In our sanctification, we are not charged to be self-assertive, working to display our own self-interest. Notice: "as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;" (Colossians 3:12). Further, we are "to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men." (Titus 3:2). As representatives of Christ in a world where "everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed" (John 3:20), we "pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness." (1 Timothy 6:11). In our duty and service to the Master in fighting "the good fight of faith" and taking "hold of the eternal life to which you were called," let us remember Paul's admonition:

"The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will." (2 Timothy 2:24-26).

Peter similarly enjoins,

"but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong." (1 Peter 3:15-17).

Our sanctification in Christ is made known to others, even the enemies of Christ, by our words and reactions to harsh behavior. Let us remember to love and pray for them (Matthew 5:44). The world watches us very closely because of the name we wear. They observe our reactions to wicked and foolish people and to the things they say and do to us. We must not react in irritable anger as is the habit of unbelievers.

Our sanctification must ever be in our minds. Many took notice of our Lord's reaction in similar situations (cf. Matthew 27:14, 54). How many were won for His cause by His striking and different behavior?

- Gary Smalley

* "Any dead fish can float downstream, but it takes a live one to swim upstream!"

* "Conscience is a small voice deep down inside where the acoustics are generally poor!"

* "It is better to understand a little than to misunderstand a lot!"

* "It is easier to carry your cross than it is to drag it!"

* "Conscience is a still small voice — when it calls, often the line is busy!"

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)