

# **The Old Hickory Bulletin**

## **Old Hickory Church of Christ**

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

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### **Strength in Christ**

Christians need much more strength than those who make no pretense of serving the Lord. The life Christians are called on to live is not the easiest life. While it offers the greatest rewards and provides the greatest blessings here and hereafter, Jesus said it is the "strait way" with the "narrow gate" that leads to life. (Matthew 7:13-14). The word "strait" is translated by "difficult" or "narrow" in more recent translations. You might imagine a mountain climber who must pass through narrow clefts of rocks, pull himself upward toward the top, and know why strength is important to those who want to reach the top.

The illustration is not too good, for God does not expect us to pull ourselves to the top without His help. But we cannot expect God to pull us to the top when we make little effort. God promises us that He will strengthen us. Paul wrote, "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might through his spirit in the inner man" (Ephesians 3:16). But, in the same epistle, Paul urged Christians to, ". . . be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might" (Ephesians 6:19). Strength comes from God. Still, we have to avail ourselves of it. And the question remains: How do I do that?

Some basic rules must be followed to become a stronger Christian. This is true of anything worth doing or getting, or a Christian can become stronger.

Let's consider some of them.

#### **Develop resistance against sin.**

Recognize what sin is, and know that it is the main thing that saps strength from a Christian. Christians can and do sin, tragically. Those who refuse to correct their sins become weaker and weaker the older they get. Notice Peter's statement. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world" (1 Peter 5:8-9). Weaklings are gobbled up by Satan like babes at the mercy of a vicious, wild, ravenous lion on the loose. The more sin and Satan are resisted, the stronger the Christian becomes.

### **Cultivate a desire to serve God.**

It does not seem to be the "natural" thing for a human being to want to serve God faithfully. That seems to require cultivation. It may be like learning to eat or drink some nourishing food that initially did not taste good. But every one of God's children can learn the sweet taste of faithful and loyal service. Study this next verse thoughtfully. "It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift . . . and have tasted the good word of God . . ." (Hebrews 6:4-5). These expressions are lifted from the text deliberately to focus attention on them. The taste may have been less than appealing initially, but the longer one serves the Lord, the sweeter the experience becomes. Never making the effort often keeps people from great enjoyment. There is a song that describes it well and is "sweeter as the years go by."

### **Engage in exercise.**

Athletes and others who want strength make it a regular practice to exercise. I am told that irregular exercise is the same as no exercise, if not worse. Paul wrote the young preacher, Timothy, as follows. "For bodily exercise profits a little, but Godliness is profitable for all things, 'having the promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.'" (1 Timothy 4:8). A practical way to exercise is to establish the habit of regular Bible study, a special time for prayer and the routine of attending Bible studies and worship. Those who have done this become markedly stronger in Christ.

One final thing to consider is that we need to know what we need to strengthen. Some may need to strengthen their ability to control their temper, while others need to strengthen their resistance to temptation. Whatever the weakness, the rules studied in this lesson will work when taken seriously and applied.

- Dudley Ross Spears, via Sentry Magazine, Vol. 16 No. 3, 09/30/1990

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## **Was Abraham Justified by Works?**

As Paul examined how man is justified before God; that is, how he attains the righteousness which is revealed in the gospel (Romans 1:16), he has shown that the righteousness of God is separate from the Law and undeserved by man.

As he continued his search, he raised the question every Jew should have been interested in: What about Abraham? Had he attained righteousness through works? He poses that question by asking,

"What then shall we say that Abraham our forefather hath found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he hath whereof to glory, but not toward God. For what saith the scriptures? And Abraham believed

God and it was reckoned to him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh the reward is not reckoned as of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness" (Romans 4:2-5).

The problem with which Paul dealt was with the Jew. He believed Gentiles had to be circumcised and keep the Law in order to be saved (Acts 15:4). Unwittingly, the Jewish stand regarding the Gentile would have excluded Abraham from being accounted righteous in God's sight. As the question from Romans 4:2-5 shows, Abraham was both uncircumcised and lived 430 years before the Law was given when it was said of him that he was "accounted righteous" through his faith. So, Abraham was in the same state as were the Gentiles of Paul's day, yet what Jew was willing to affirm that Abraham's condition was no different from the Gentiles, that he was lost because he was not circumcised nor kept the Law?

Many of today's religious leaders make no difference between one who seeks to earn his salvation through works, and one who obeys a command God gave and through his obedience demonstrates his faith in God. Would we ever have heard of Abraham had he never left Haran at the Lord's command, or had he never sought to sacrifice his son Isaac? It was through Abraham's leaving home and country to go to Canaan that he demonstrated his faith in God. It was not until he had laid Isaac on the altar and lifted his hand with a knife to plunge it into his son that God responded, "Do thy son no harm. Now I know that thou fearest God" (Genesis 22:12).

When Paul wrote, "Now to him that worketh, his reward is not of grace, but of debt" he did not speak of obeying a command God gave such as to repent and be baptized. He was speaking of one who thought he could earn salvation by keeping the Law, and that because he had obeyed, God "owed" salvation to him. Many Jews believed that he could. Moses had written, "The man that doeth the righteousness of the law shall live therein." On the other hand, when Paul further wrote, "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness" (Romans 4:5), the statement cannot be taken to mean, "He that obeyeth not." His faith is reckoned for righteousness. Two different attitudes are illustrated in Paul's statement. There were those who believed that physical obedience was all that was necessary to be saved: faith played no part in redemption. Then there is another attitude: one immediately obeyed the Lord's commands, knowing that whatever he did, he did not deserve to be saved. If he was saved, it was by God's grace. David wrote, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered, blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not reckon sin" (Romans 4:7; cp. Psalm 32:1-2). According to David, righteousness does not come through earning it, it comes through grace and forgiveness. Upon that basis, Abraham,

though neither circumcised nor a keeper of the Law, was accounted righteous, and if he could be then so could the Gentile who walked by faith as did he.

- Jim McDonald

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## *Clippings . . .*

Godliness means responding to God's revelation in trust and obedience, faith and worship, prayer and praise, submission and service. Life must be seen and lived in the light of God's Word. This, and nothing else, is true religion.

- J.I. Packer (Knowing God, 16).

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## **WHO THEN IS THIS?**

You may recall reading of the Lord and His disciples sailing on the Sea of Galilee when the Lord fell asleep,

"and a fierce gale of wind descended on the lake, and they began to be swamped and to be in danger. They came to Jesus and woke Him up, saying, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!' And He got up and rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped, and it became calm. And He said to them, 'Where is your faith?' They were fearful and amazed, saying to one another, 'Who then is this, that He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him?'" (Luke 8:23-25).

Who then is this? Is the answer not given because it is so obvious?

"By awesome deeds You answer us in righteousness, O God of our salvation, You who are the trust of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest sea; Who establishes the mountains by His strength, Being girded with might; Who stills the roaring of the seas, The roaring of their waves, And the tumult of the peoples." (Psalm 65:5-7).

Jesus Christ is Lord over Creation!

Again, "O LORD God of hosts, who is like You, O mighty LORD? Your faithfulness also surrounds You. You rule the swelling of the sea; When its waves rise, You still them." (Psalm 89:8-9). Yes, Jesus Christ is Lord over Creation! His disciples saw His humanity in His tired sleep. They saw His deity in His command over nature. "He caused the storm to be still, So that the waves of the sea were hushed." (Psalm 107:29).

Do we know enough about Christ to have a stronger faith than these men possessed at the time? Do we know enough about Christ to avoid the fear that these men felt? "Who then is this, that He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him?" Soon, Peter will answer that question (Matthew 16:16).

- Gary Smalley

[All Scriptures quoted are NASB, 1995 © The Lockman Foundation, unless otherwise noted.]

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- \* "Christ sends none away empty but those who are full of themselves!"
  - \* "It is no small gain to know your own ignorance!"
  - \* "Life has but two ends and one of those has been used; better take care of the other one!"
  - \* "Satan selects his disciples when they are idle, but Christ chose his when they were busy at work, whether mending nets or casting them into the sea!"
  - \* "He who is cowardly will do right when it is safer to do so. He who is overly ambitious will do right if it is to his advantage to do so. He who is miserly will do right when he finds it cheaper to do so. He who is average will do right because it is expected of him. But blessed is he who does right because it is right!"
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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)