

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Heaping Burning Coals

The character traits of how we should act as a Christian are laid out in many different places in the New Testament, but few stand out so prominently as the Beatitudes. Jesus Himself tells us in His opening statements of His ministry that blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those hungry and thirsty for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness. Jesus puts these words out there like a manifesto, and a declaration of spiritual war on those of the day who would pervert the Word of God. Never in those words are a description of vengeance, wrath, or pleasure in the misfortune or discipline of others. Regardless of the time of which you are trying to understand God's Word, one message was consistent across all dispensations of the Bible and that is to not take revenge. Romans 12:19 illustrates this idea across time: "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'"

The writer is quoting from Deuteronomy 32:35, so the Old versus the New Laws do not matter. This leads to a question regarding the message in Proverbs 25:21-22 which reads, "If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink, for you will heap burning coals on his head and the Lord will reward you."

The first half of this passage is easy to understand how it fits with the messages of peace and lovingkindness that Christ speaks of in passages like the Beatitudes, or later in His Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5:38-42: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you."

This relationship with other people where we should care for and not do evil to one another is consistent throughout the Bible. It is the second half of the passage that is

confusing to some. Why would it be a reward to heap burning coals upon someone's head? While it is true that this is figurative and that the people of God should not be dumping heaps of burning coals upon our enemies' heads, many have interpreted the intention of this to be a type of satisfaction; a revenge of sorts for those who have done us wrong.

But it said in Romans: "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord." Should we get satisfaction in knowing that we have inflicted frustration and spiritual turmoil upon someone else? Should that be our motivation? Is this the one bit of vengeance — achieved through kindness — God has allowed for us?

No. The message of the Bible is one which directs all persons toward salvation and back to God's will. Having a mindset where we shall be kind to enact revenge is inconsistent with God's will put forth in the Bible. Instead, it is an insight into how God will deal with the evil deeds of others through the conscience. The joy and satisfaction, or reward, which we experience in doing kindness to our enemies is a godly one.

In 1 Corinthians, a man was engaged in a terrible sinful practice and God said, ". . . you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 5:5).

The Corinthian people were able to rejoice, not in throwing the man out and making him pay for his sinful lifestyle, but by what we see his reaction after going through this disciplinary action: "For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So, I beg you to reaffirm your love for him" (2 Corinthians 2:6-8).

Imagine the joy in the Corinthian church when this man, who was engaged in this heinous sin, was welcomed back. Joy is in repentance, and the coals are in the disciplinary actions motivated, not by revenge or the will to cause pain, but in a desire to see them repent and turn back to the Lord. We must keep our motivations in check and lest that we become victims of sin as well.

- Lance Byers

Clippings . . .

"We will be glad and rejoice in Thee" Song of Solomon 1:4

We will be glad and rejoice in Thee. We will not open the gates of the year to the dolorous notes of the sackbut, but to the sweet strains of the harp of joy, and the high sounding

cymbals of gladness. "O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise unto the rock of our salvation." We, the called and faithful and chosen, we will drive away our griefs, and set up our banners of confidence in the name of God. Let others lament over their troubles, we who have the sweetening tree to cast into Marah's bitter pool, with joy will magnify the Lord. Eternal Spirit, our effectual Comforter, we who are the temples in which Thou dwellest, will never cease from adoring and blessing the name of Jesus.

We WILL, we are resolved about it, Jesus must have the crown of our heart's delight; we will not dishonor our Bridegroom by mourning in His presence. We are ordained to be the minstrels of the skies, let us rehearse our everlasting anthem before we sing it in the halls of the New Jerusalem.

We will BE GLAD AND REJOICE: two words with one sense, double joy, blessedness upon blessedness. Need there be any limit to our rejoicing in the Lord even how? Do not men of grace find their Lord to be camphor and spikenard, calamus and cinnamon even now, and what better fragrance have they in heaven itself?

We will be glad and rejoice IN THEE. That last word is the meat in the dish, the kernel of the nut, the soul of the text. What heavens are laid up in Jesus! What rivers of infinite bliss have their source, aye, and every drop of their fullness in Him! Since, O sweet Lord Jesus, Thou art the portion of Thy people, favor us this year with such a sense of preciousness, that from its first to its last day we may be glad and rejoice in Thee. Let January open with joy in the Lord and December close with gladness in Jesus.

- C. H. Spurgeon: Morning and Evening: Daily Readings

Jesus Christ: The Head of the Body!

"For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." (Romans 12:4-5). "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ." (1 Corinthians 12:12).

In these passages, the church belonging to Christ is represented as a body. It is compared to a physical body in its parts, relations, and functioning for ease of understanding.

The Lord God made Jesus the head of the body, ". . . when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in

the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body . . ." (Ephesians 1:20-23). Further, "He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything." (Colossians 1:18).

Simply, the power of control and direction for the body is the head. The head determines and guides the actions. So also is Christ to His church. Christ has the authority of control. As the source of wisdom, He has made the governing laws. His authority is therefore absolute. There is no man that is above Christ.

Wherever there are others who appear to have such high authority, their attempts to repeal His laws, establish new laws for the church, no matter how enlightening, relevant, or popular this legislation may seem, amount to usurping His authority, a grievously presumptuous sin. No man has any right to do this. In attempting it, he, or he with his associates (collectively) assume prerogatives that belong only to Christ.

The Bible student is not surprised to find, that even among the very closest disciples of Christ, one observes growth of a desire to rule over others. "And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest. And He said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called "Benefactors." But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant.'" (Luke 22:24-26).

Throughout history, men have aspired to rule in this fashion, and hundreds have been successful, establishing and fortifying their power through new legislation, codes, annotations, by-laws, creeds and decrees. Following this usurpation, they granted consent to increasing numbers of people who desire to serve the God of heaven on their own terms. Such is impossible in God's kingdom (Jeremiah 10:23; cf. Psalms 19:13; Proverbs 20:24)! These actions demonstrate only iniquity, lawlessness, and the Lord condemns it (Matthew 7:21-23; cf. Matthew 15:9). "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master." (Matthew 10:24).

The Lord has already defined the roles for members in His body. It is one of humble submission. All members of the body obey the directives of the head. Why should any member assume authority over another member? Upon becoming Christians, we declared allegiance to the Lord. Why should we dethrone Christ and substitute another set of laws or another ruler to exercise authority over us? Such is directly opposed to the Lord. Never forget: Christ is head of the body!

- Gary Smalley

- * "The most dangerous stumbling blocks are those under our hats!"
 - * "Courtesy is said to be contagious, and what we need is a good epidemic!"
 - * "Jealousy is to the soul what sickness is to the body!"
 - * "The heart is the mainspring for the tongue!"
 - * "Loose conduct will get a person in a tight spot!"
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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)