

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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It's What You Are Today That Counts

The ancient Israelite in Ezekiel's time had the same trouble that many modern Israelites (Christians) are having now - placing sin's responsibility where it belongs. But, God left no doubt as to who is responsible for sin: "The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself." (Ezekiel 18:20).

The Israelite loved a false proverb (v.2) that suggested that their fathers were really responsible for their sins. They asked "Why should the son not bear the guilt of the father?" (v.19). But God would not let them pass the buck to the fathers. He, through Ezekiel in chapter 18, pressed the point that each person is responsible for himself and must answer of himself for either good or bad. He would not let them off with the "You May Have Done Wrong But It Is Not Really Your Fault" philosophy of sin so popular in modern psychology and sociology. It is the same philosophy that encourages the delinquent, the unfaithful, and the criminal to blame their actions upon parents, the church, or society rather than face the responsibility for their conduct.

Even though God holds each individual accountable for his sin, it does not mean that he must answer for those sins in the Judgment Day. One can turn from his sins have them remembered no more (vs.22-23). How thankful I am that this is so! When I think of all the foolish things that I have done and to think that they might still be remembered against me makes me shudder. How glad I am that my brethren follow the Lord's instructions to forgive even as He has forgiven - that many who know my past have in a very real sense forgotten it. With the Lord and these brethren it is what I am (or am trying to be) today that counts, the past does not matter. I once knew a lady whose husband's past conduct had been shameful, but he had repented and asked her forgiveness, who very pointedly told another who brought her husband's past up in conversation: "I distinctly remember forgetting that!" Now I like that!

Most Christians that I know accept this principle and find it upsetting when other brethren insist on holding a now faithful brother accountable for his past life. He has repented of his past conduct and is now striving to do right. After all, WHAT THE BROTHER IS NOW

COUNTS! This is as it should be. It is right and fair (see v.25) for God to forget past sins - so it is for us to forget them too. We like that arrangement because it wipes out the guilt of so much of our past conduct. We don't want it to be remembered by anyone.

We need to be reminded that since God is absolutely fair (v. 25), His rule of remembering and forgetting works the other way too!

"But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die." (Ezekiel 18:24).

We prefer to ignore that side of the coin. We think that surely our past faithfulness and good ought to count for something! We often continue (long past any reasonable period for longsuffering) to excuse, endorse, and receive brethren - without rebuke or rebuff - regardless of how bad their present views, teaching, or conduct may have become, because of what they have been in the past. Their past goodness, soundness and faithfulness is the only justification that we can give for our failure to deal with them as being unfaithful. It is sad, tragic, but factual that the greater one's reputation for faithfulness in the past, the more dangerous is his influence for evil, if he turns aside after error. His present influence is more readily imitated and dangerous than it would otherwise be.

But, you and I need to look that this matter personally. How wonderful it will be to get to Judgment and not have all of our past unfaithfulness and sin remembered against us. But, how sad it will be to get there and not have all of our past service for God remembered because we turned away later in our lives to serve the cause of sin and error. To have all of our past sacrifices, deeds, and faithfulness to count for nothing . . . I can think of nothing more tragic. Let each of us examine himself and "take heed lest he fall".

God has given each of us a "second chance" (and most of us a third, fourth, fifth, etc.) - let's not waste it in the final analysis. Let us not assume that God (though rich in mercy) will judge us with the same sentimentality and nostalgia that so often characterizes the judgment of our brethren. We certainly would be foolish to risk our souls on such presumption.

- Edward O. Bragwell, Sr., via The Reflector, January, 1983
[Scripture quotations from the New King James Version.]

The King Who Comes in the Name of the Lord!

Luke wrote of Jesus Christ and His fateful journey to Jerusalem:

"As soon as He was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen, shouting: 'BLESSED IS THE KING WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!' Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, 'Teacher, rebuke Your disciples.' But Jesus answered, 'I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!' When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, 'If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.'" (Luke 19:37-44).

What great joyful enthusiasm burst forth loudly from the lips of these excited disciples! This wonderful public praise was due to the fact that they had been eye witnesses of His miracles. Probably the crowd consisted of people from all around the country, some witnessing sight restored to the blind, lepers cleansed, the sick made well, and maybe even the dead raised (cf. John 11). I love this impressive glorification of God!

Enter the Pharisees, like a caustic bad odor, the stormy rain on a beautiful parade! And they would be coercing some, maybe even in this very crowd, a mere few days away, shouting, "Crucify Him!" Indeed, the "chief corner stone" will be rejected by these builders (Psalm 118). But no Pharisee could bring to a halt the acclamation of Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. Stopping their mouths could not have prevented the rightful praise and honor given to Him.

As is true with the prophets of old who delivered ominous messages to God's disobedient people, the Lord wept disappointedly over this city. Heaven's judgment would fall upon it, its citizens would be slain, its massive walls would tumble down, and its legacy would finally be destroyed, all because of their rebelliously stubborn, iron will. This dreadful prophecy would come to pass because the Light of the world who brought salvation and peace with God through forgiveness of sins would be rejected with bitterness and guile. They were visited by God, but were too blind to see it!

As the details of our Lord's entrance into the city where God's name dwells is told over and over through the remaining years of this earth, may His glory never be neglected nor forgotten, and may His praises continue to be heard from the lips of His servants, both now and through eternity!

- Gary Smalley

- * "It is proper to be on the right track, but if you sit down there you'll get run over!"
 - * "The one thing worse than a quitter is the man who is afraid to begin!"
 - * "Some "Christians" are like lightning bugs - they keep going on and off!"
 - * "Real friends are those who, when you've made a fool of yourself, don't feel that you've done a permanent job of it!"
 - * "Worship designed to satisfy the worshipper is diametrically opposed to Biblical worship. Worship must not be designed to please you; it must please God!"
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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)