

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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What Made Him Turn?

Every Bible student is familiar with the account in Luke 15:11-ff of the prodigal son. He was that young man who took his father's gracious blessings and wasted them in riotous living. Anyone who has ever rejected His Father's will can identify with the son who came to his senses in the mire of a hog pen and made up his mind to return home.

One relevancy of this story is found in the reasoning of this young man facing the consequences of his unwise choices. Understanding what made him turn may help us understand how to reach others to bring them home to the Father also. So, what made him turn?

It is too easy to say, "the filth of the hog pen." There are many people who live in the hog pen of sin and have developed a liking for it. Consider it an "acquired taste" if you wish, but it's the truth. It takes more than just a disliking for hog food and mud baths to make a person swallow his pride and start back down that road he has come so far from. What would be the motivation?

Perhaps he saw finally what he was missing. I note that he did not hope to be received as a son again. He had fallen so far that to be taken back as a servant was all he desired. That tells me that rather than constantly pointing out the mud hole that people may be living in (certainly there's a place for this), maybe I should be letting them see what they're missing. Of course, to show others the peace of mind, joy of heart, love of fellowship, and confidence of spirit that comes from being a Christian – I'll have to make sure they are in my life first.

Maybe his view of the road changed. Where at one time he was following his feelings without regard to which way he went – now he was older and wiser and appreciated the high cost of unwise decisions. Suddenly the road meant more to him than the destination. Impatient people sometimes set their eyes and heart on a destination without regard for others or what they will do to themselves in getting there. This young man had learned that the road to self-indulgence was a hard one. And now another destination appeared

to his mind: home. The road back was just as long, and lonelier than when first traveled, but I suspect this time the young man considered the path. This time he made the decision that it would be well worth the effort of travel. Can we convince others that the effort of coming to our Father is well worth it?

Lastly, I will "borrow" an idea from a recent class. Perhaps what made this young man turn was an emptiness in his own heart that could not be filled by friends, foolishness, and frolic. It has been described as a "God-sized" hole in the heart that nothing else will fill. It is the echo of Simon Peter's question, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" When men open their eyes and finally realize there is nowhere else to turn, they will turn to the Father. It is sad to see one come to this point in his life, but it is much to be preferred over those who continue to deceive themselves and drown that quiet inner voice with alcohol and shouts of mirth.

There are many reasons to turn to God and no good reason not to. Let me encourage you to try and figure out the "turning point" of those you care about so that you can stir them to come to God. God bless your efforts.

- Carl McMurray

Heaviest Weight in the World Captive to the Conscience

1 Timothy 1:5, 19

1 Corinthians 8

Being captive to one's conscience can be good or bad. The conscience is a pupil of education. If brought under the influence of God's Word, one's conscience can be a very valuable guide, but, when brought under other influences, it can be worse than useless.

An improperly directed conscience approving something which is wrong does not make that thing right. The apostle Paul in addressing the Jewish council on one occasion said, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23:1). Yet, the Lord Himself had asked him the question, "Why do you persecute me?" and Paul, himself, testified, "Beyond measure, I persecuted the church of God and wasted it." Satan has done an effective job of selling the world that old bromide about "just be honest and sincere and everything will be all right." If that were true, Saul of Tarsus could have remained the persecutor of Christians.

To violate one's conscience is to compound guilt and to increase one's susceptibility to future disloyalty to conviction and the incursion of further wrong. Disloyalty to conviction is the basic ingredient of hypocrisy.

On the other hand, loyalty to one's conviction, or being conscientious, is fundamental to genuine character. When Martin Luther was summoned to the Council of Worms, his friends pleaded with him not to go. The apostate church had virtually absolute control both religiously and politically. Luther said, "I go. Though there be as many devils there as tiles on the roof, I go. I cannot do otherwise. I am captive to my conscience, so help me God!"

What the world needs now as it plunges deeper and deeper into moral and spiritual decay, as evidenced and typified by the base immorality of high government officials in Washington, is a knowledge of God's will and a conscience loyal to it.

The mastermind of a confidence gang which specialized in robbing the aged of their life's savings, when apprehended, said, "Memory is a luxury that only those who go straight can afford." Ah, there is sweet compensation for maintaining a clear conscience.

- Joe Malone, via The Sower, 10/1976

Partakers!

Paul referred to Christians in Philippi as God's good and lasting work which will be complete when the Lord returns at the Judgment Day (Philippians 1:6). The quality of these Christians that made them the center of Paul's emotional love was that they had three things in common: their fellowship in his imprisonment, the gospel, and grace.

They were partakers in his "imprisonment" (v.7). It was Paul's imprisonment while preaching the gospel there that gave many of these brethren "far more courage to speak the word of God without fear." (Philippians 1:14). Persecution surely spilled over on to them after Paul and Silas left town (Acts 16).

They were partakers "in the defense and confirmation of the gospel" (Philippians 1:7). They were well acquainted with the fact that there were plenty of people in the town that would object to the gospel message for one reason or another (cf. Acts 16:19-21). They remained courageous in defending the gospel, not with carnal weapons of flesh (2 Corinthians 10:3-4), answering objections with logical reason and persuasion (2 Corinthians 5:11) from heaven's message. The gospel appeals to and fights for the hearts of people. Generally speaking, people must be very strongly convinced of the validity of a message before they will risk harm to defend it.

They were partakers in "grace." Paul had been saved from his sins by God's grace. It was that grace that blessed him with apostleship to the Gentiles. The Philippians received the

grace of God when they received and obeyed the gospel of Christ. They were further shown the grace of God in that, unthinkable by worldly people, they were allowed to suffer for the name of Christ (cf. Acts 5:41; 14:22; James 1:2-3). What a privilege!

Are you a partaker in any of these things? If Paul were here, would he love you as he loved these brethren? Will you be a partaker upon the final completion of the work of God at Judgment Day?

- Gary Smalley

* "Knowledge may come by taking things apart, but wisdom comes from putting things together!"

* "The most untamable thing in the world has its den just back of the teeth!"

* "Young Christians may make mistakes working for the Lord, but they will make a bigger mistake by not working for Him!"

* "The smile is a universal language!"

* "If there is no sorrow for sin there is no joy in salvation!"

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)