



SOUND WORDS

“Hold the pattern of sound words which thou hast heard from me, in faith and love which is in Christ.” (2Tim. 1:13)

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Stewardship

Matthew 25:14, 15; Luke 19:13; 1 Cor. 4:2; 1 Peter 4:10; and various other passages speak to the subject of stewardship. We are all entrusted with various abilities and resources. The Bible teaches that we should not waste or misuse our talents and resources. There is so much to do in the kingdom of the Lord. God could have chosen other means of spreading His Word or taking care of various needs, but in His ultimate wisdom, He chose to use people like us to carry out His will.

We as Christians are mere stewards (caretakers) of the things God has blessed us with (Luke 19:13). It all belongs to God but we are responsible for the manner in which we manage that with which He has blessed us. Whether it is possessions, money, children, marriages, businesses, or our lives, we must all realize that we are responsible and accountable to God for how we steward these things. We will all be called to give account.

Likewise, the Elders are responsible for proper stewardship of the local church. They will give account for how they tend the work of the church and for the souls over which they have the oversight. They dare not take that charge lightly. They are responsible for the proper management of the fiscal affairs of the local church (how to allocate funds to scripturally authorized matters). If they are frivolous or wasteful, they will give account. We live in an exciting time as far as technology. Our opportunities to spread the gospel to the entire world have increased greatly, and an expedient way to spread the word is through mediums like this bulletin.

We realize that not everyone has a computer or internet access, so “snail mail” is the best avenue to reach them. However, most people today do have computers with all the advances that accompany them. We are updating our website (easthillchurchofchrist.com) in order to better teach the word. By using the internet, we can truly go everywhere and teach the gospel.

We must be good stewards of the Lord's money. This bulletin is a good way to reach out to people about their soul's salvation but the printing and mailing costs have increased greatly over the past few years.

*By containing our costs, we can spread the gospel to a greater extent. If you can help us by receiving the bulletin by e-mail please send a message to:
Soundwords@live.com*

News & Notes

Sickness- Martha and Leonard Beck continue to struggle with illnesses. Martha now has a combination of pneumonia and the flu. Keep them in your prayers. We are thankful that Eunice Oglesby has been feeling well enough to be with us recently. Ronnie Gandy is out of the hospital and was able to be with us twice since her release. Bea Baston has been told by the doctors that surgery on her back is too risky and that pain management is the course of action for her. Ed Stacy is out of the hospital but still receiving dialysis, and he is having some pain from his back surgery. Several have had the flu this year, and it has taken its toll on our attendance. Keep all of the sick in your prayers.

Death- Our deepest sympathies to Bea Baston in the loss of her brother Arthur. We also mourn with Steve Browning and family in the sudden loss of Steve's father, Grady Browning. He died on a Sunday morning while preparing for worship. Keep all of these families in your prayers.

Traveling- Keep Matt Adams and Betty Smith in your prayers as they travel this month. Matt is going to Egypt for two weeks, and Betty is going to Greece with Stephanie. Also continue to pray for those in the military: Jean Clopton's grandson and Jeremy Townsend need to be in our regular prayers.

Men's Training Class- Our men's training class is going well. Progress is being made and has been demonstrated already. We are currently working on public prayers, reading scripture, and preparing a talk and sermon. We need to have all men come to these sessions. It is good to see growth in so many.

New Quarter- We begin a new quarter in April. We thank all of our teachers who have worked so hard. We are growing in knowledge but let us be sure to apply the knowledge in our everyday lives.

Gospel Meeting- Stan and Carla will be in Seffner, Florida for a gospel meeting March 31-April 5. Matt Adams will be speaking in a one day effort at Oak Grove on April 19. Pray for both of efforts.

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THE HARDENING OF A CONSCIENCE

God has given us a moral governor in so fashioning us with a conscience. Our consciences can be trained properly or improperly. It is possible for someone to do evil with a good conscience. Paul was one of those (Acts 23:1) who had his conscience trained in a wrong direction. He was thoroughly and zealously convinced that the course of life he was pursuing was proper. However, when he was taught the truth, his conscience was moved by honesty to make the proper changes. He repented of his past, obeyed the gospel, and began to act in good conscience for the Lord instead of against Him.

On the day of Pentecost we see that when they heard what they had done to Jesus (the Messiah of prophecy), they were “pricked in their hearts and cried out, Men and brethren what shall we do” (Acts 2:37-39). The indication is strong that many of them may have thought what they did was justified before God. When confronted with the overwhelming evidence of the Scripture, these people changed their direction.

We each must guard our conscience. We learn in Titus 1:15, 16 that we can possess a defiled conscience- “Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled. They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable and disobedient and unto every good work reprobate.” Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:2 that some would depart from the faith, “speaking lies in hypocrisy having their consciences seared with a hot iron.” This is the calloused conscience. Earlier Paul told Timothy that deacons were to “hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience” (1 Timothy 3:9).

We live in an evil world where it so easy to let our consciences be hardened and seared. I am afraid that we have forgotten how to blush, as happened to the children of God in ages past. Paul warned in Titus 1:15, 16 that we must all be careful to maintain outrage at evil and be moved by godliness.

How does one begin to develop a hard or defiled conscience?

Psalms 1:1 shows the gradual demise of a conscience.

Vs. 1- “blessed is the man who walks not in the council of the ungodly...”

We must all realize that we dare not even begin to think that the ungodly are reasonable. If one opens the door of his conscience to the ungodly he is heading for a fall.

Vs. 1- “...nor stands in the way of sinners...” When a person begins to entertain the sinners’ behavior as interesting and not dangerous, he is heading for a fall.

Vs. 1- “...nor sits in the seat of the scornful.” Here is the final step in the hardened conscience. Now the person is not only fascinated with the sinner and his ways, he has become comfortable sitting down in the midst of them, and considers himself as one of the guys.

To illustrate this verse, picture a young man who is told by his parents to stay away from the bar down the street. One day he decides there will be no harm in “walking by it.” For several days he just walks by until one day his curiosity compels him to stand at the window and look inside. He does this for a few days until finally he enters and sits down in the middle of the group. He yearns to be accepted, so he decides that these people are “not so bad” after all. After all, they could be doing a lot worse! Eventually he is one of the sinners. When was his conscience compromised? Did it happen only when he sat down in the middle of the group? No, it happened when he made the decision to depart from the command of his parents and “just walked close by.” He began to flirt with evil until evil took him up on his advances and consumed him.

Continual bombardment with dose after dose of evil wears away at the “immune system” of our conscience until our defenses are completely destroyed and we give up the fight. Ephesians 4:17-20 says, “...do not walk as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind. Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart. Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness to work uncleanness with greediness? But you have not learned this of Christ.” When one sins and ignores his conscience long enough, he puts his feelings in storage. If he stops and considers what he was doing in light of the Bible, it would hurt him and cause him to alter his lifestyle. Because he is consumed with the world, he does not want to feel uncomfortable, so he ceases feeling completely. When someone gets to this stage, all sin is possible. Things that were once abhorred will seem reasonable and even fun. Things that even the world would consider horrible are often acceptable to the one who is past feeling.

Is it any wonder that David (who ignored his conscience) writes after being convicted of his sin by Nathan, (Ps. 51:7-12) “purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean, wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which you have broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities, create in me a clean heart, O God;’ and renew a right spirit within me.” He is asking the Lord to help him reform his conscience. He has committed cold-blooded murder of a fellow soldier (Uriah was one of David’s 600). He had committed fornication and then engaged in lying and a cover up. When he “came to himself” after Nathan bravely convicted him of sin, his good conscience surfaced again. He begged for that heart and feeling to be within him and guide him again in the right ways.

Compromise, complacency, and ignorance of the devices of Satan will carry us all to hell. When it does not hurt us that people are dying in sin, when we defend worldly practices among Christians, and when we demand a softer more palatable gospel that will not offend or convict the conscience, we are on our way to damnation. May we guard our hearts from being past feeling and having a hardened conscience! May we always pray as David for clean hearts and pure minds! May we always hate evil, love good and refuse to compromise or harden our conscience. ---SWA---