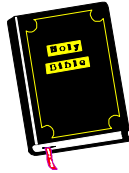


WEST COLUMBIA CHURCH OF CHRIST



“every disciple that is perfect shall be as his master.” Luke 6:40b

THE STRUGGLES OF A GOOD HEART

“And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ So I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting’” - Acts 26:14-15.

The gospel is designed only for people with good hearts (Lk. 8:15). Those who do not have good hearts see nothing of value in the gospel and turn away from it (Jn. 6:26, 64-66). However, we often oversimplify this principle and assume that as soon as a good heart encounters the gospel, he is immediately swept away by its beauty and surrenders to his Lord. In reality, conversion is usually not that simple. Even the best of hearts sometime wrestle with the changes that conversion requires.

The story of Saul, the early archenemy of Christianity, is a good example of this. Let’s reconstruct the sequence of events that led to his conversion, and notice how a good heart can sometimes struggle to accept the truth.

Recall Paul’s later statement that he had “lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Ac. 23:1). His heart was not dominated by selfish interests such as greed, lust, or revenge, but by a desire to please God. “I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men” (Ac. 24:16). Here was a man with a good heart, striving to serve God to the best of his knowledge.

Of course, his knowledge was deficient. Oh, he had heard the truth preached alright, by men like Stephen and others (see Ac. 6:9; 7:58). But that message did not fit into the rigid template of “truth” that had such a tight grip on his mind. So he rejected it outright, without pausing to consider “what if?” Later, Paul would characterize his response as the reaction of “an insolent man” (1 Tim. 1:13)—although he was quick to add that he had reacted “ignorantly in unbelief.” So it is possible for a good heart to be temporarily blinded by the prejudice of long-held convictions.

But Saul had not only heard the gospel preached, he had also seen it practiced, specifically at the stoning of Stephen. To witness a man call for the forgiveness of the ones who at that very moment were stoning him to death must have jarred Saul’s confidence (Ac. 7:58-60). Throughout his furious campaign of terror against the Christians in the years that followed, that image must have been gnawing at Saul’s mind. (Many years later, as Paul neared his own martyrdom, he spoke almost the exact words as Stephen, 2 Tim. 4:16).

- *(continued on page 2)*

THE BULLETIN—VOLUME 38, NUMBER 47 December 11, 2011

SERMONS THIS SUNDAY:

AM: ED KELLEHER

PM: ED KELLEHER

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable,
always abounding in the work of the Lord,
forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” - 1 Corinthians 15:58

EYES ON HEAVEN IN 2011

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CHRISTIANITY
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LADIES CLASS

To be announced

EVANGELIST

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“PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER” - James 5:16

- **REMEMBER IN PRAYER:** *Wilson Burton, Betty Mathis, Margaret Herring, Lamar Reeves, Elma Berrier and Phyllis Johnson.*
- Brother **Ralph Jones**, an elder at the Twin Cities church fell last week and had a stroke. He spent some time in LMC, but apparently is doing better and is home.
- **Margaret Herring** was to have eye surgery last week. Pray for her relief.
- Give thanks to God and pray for all these, and the work of the Lord here at West Columbia.

**"Some trust in chariots, and some in horses:
but we will remember the name of the Lord our God." - Psalms 20:7**

“AND THEY CONTINUED STEADFASTLY” - Acts 2:42

- **Holiday drop-in** at the **Gamble's** home, Friday 12/16, starting 7pm all are invited.
- We appreciate brother **Jones Gamble** publishing a list each week of those we missed on Sunday. Give those folks a call, or send a card to see if their ok, and to encourage them and let them know we miss them.
- **Bible Study at Church Building, Saturdays 3 pm**, all are invited and please invite visitors to come! It's a good way for people to learn more of us. An informal session around a table with everyone using their bibles and Strong's Concordances.

**"For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love,
which ye have showed toward his name,
in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." - Hebrews 6:10**

“WEEP WITH THEM THAT WEEP” - Romans 12:15

- **Lois Bradford** of the North Columbia congregation and **Harriet Macon's** mother passed away last Sunday, the funeral was Saturday. Harriet is **Daryl Macon's** wife. We all remember Lois' faithful attendance. She visited here many times. Remember the family and the church in your prayers.

EYES ON HEAVEN IN 2011

THE STRUGGLES OF A GOOD HEART (continued from page 1)

So when Jesus appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus, He did not have to dangle Saul over the fires of hell to convince him to change. Saul's own good heart had been quietly "kicking against the goads" for some time, struggling with the truth. All it took was one startling image of the resurrected Lord to trigger the conversion.

What's the lesson here? Good hearts sometimes require a long process of contemplation before accepting the truth. We must be patient, and allow them the time to struggle with the implications of that truth in their lives.

- **David King**, elder, Pleasant Valley church of Christ, Wichita, Kansas

“And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;” - 2 Timothy 2:24,25

GIVE ME A CHANCE TO SERVE

Have you ever asked the Lord to open a door for you? To give you a chance to serve him? It's a good thing to pray for. In Matthew 7:7 the Lord promised us **"Knock, and it shall be opened unto you"**.

How many of us, though, **believe** that promise? How many of us **keep** asking, and asking, and asking? But maybe we never seem to get the chance we're looking for. Maybe that's the problem—we're not **seeing** the chances or opportunities to do good the Lord is giving us. Maybe we're being too picky or choosy: "Not that one Lord, I want a **really** good work to do!"

Let's remember that it is the **Lord's work** we're about, not ours. It's He who gives us the opportunities we have. It's He that gives the increase:

“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? ⁶I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. ⁷So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.” - 1 Corinthians 3:5-7

Let's trust Him, that He'll give us what we need, because He **has**—His Word, the gospel! Let's take advantage then of the opportunities we have, no matter how small they might seem to us. Let's open our eyes and hearts to them:

"He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much." - Luke 16:10

Maybe when we want to do some great thing, what we're **really** wanting is to say: "Look what I did." **We** want the recognition for the deed; from people instead of from God. But the real power and strength we have can only come from God:

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”—Philp 4:13

He wants us to know this and **act** like we know it. He'll be pleased with us if we do—if we trust in His power and strength, just as He was pleased with the church in Philadelphia. Look at what the Lord praised about them:

"I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name." - Revelation 3:8

They didn't **deny** the name of Christ by seeking to please themselves and trusting in their **own** power or wisdom. They humbly **did** what the Lord put in front of them (the essence of humility is subordinating ourselves), trusting in Him and His word - looking to please God and not themselves. Let's do the same, so our Lord will say the same—of **us**.

- Ed Kelleher, West Columbia church of Christ, South Carolina

“But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.” - Luke 22:26