**DEVIL BECOMES A SAINT**

William Anderson “Devil Anse” Hatfield was baptized into Christ on September 23, 1911. After his conversion at the ripe old age of 73 he helped establish a church of Christ in his hometown in the state of West Virginia. He died of pneumonia at the age of 81 and was buried in the family cemetery with the largest funeral ever held in Logan County, WV. He had fathered 9 sons and 4 daughters and had many extended family members who lived in the Appalachian Hills near Tug Fork Creek off the Big Sandy River on the border of Kentucky and West Virginia. He had fought for the Confederate army in the Civil War and had led the Logan Wildcats as a militia guerilla unit to protect the county from Union soldiers.

Randolph “Old Randol” McCoy also grew up near the Tug Fork, living on the Kentucky side of the West Virginia / Kentucky border. He married and had 17 children (9 boys, 8 girls). He also fought for the Confederates during the War, but was captured and remained a POW for the last two years of the war.

By now most readers know where this is heading. Yes, the famous Hatfield & McCoy Feud. Where I grew up in Tennessee it is the stuff of legends. It all started when Bill France, a neighbor and friend of Asa McCoy (Randolph’s son) was killed by “Devil Anse” Hatfield and the Logan Wildcats militia because he had fought for the Union. Asa was also targeted and killed too. That started it. But it really came to a head in 1878 when “Ole Randol” accused Floyd Hatfield of stealing one of his pigs.

One problem, “Preacher Anse” Hatfield was the presiding judge in the trial and ruled, obviously, in the Hatfield’s favor. The McCoy’s were infuriated. The McCoy’s had to get revenge. For the next 25 years there were at least 13 direct killings on both sides. The killing of a neighbor and the stealing of a pig led to decades of families fighting and killing each other. This was not Steve Harvey hosting “Family Feud” but real life family hatred, bitterness and bloodshed.

Amazing, isn’t it? One thing leads to another and before you know it future generations that had nothing to do with the original problem are still fighting over bad blood. It doesn’t make sense, does it? Before you answer that, think it through. What we might smile at and then shrug off as childish by mentioning the Hatfield’s and McCoy’s, suddenly becomes serious and hits closer to home when such hostilities of revenge start playing out right before our eyes.

Look at what is going on in our country, our state, our neighborhood. The cry of “racism” echoes through nearly every media outlet today. I open up the news on my computer and the top five lead stories are how there is a systemic problem of racism that has fractured our country. Every single story I read has painted the problem with a broad brush. It’s as if every white man has a prejudice against every black man and other minorities. To hear the anchors and reporters tell it America is seething with rank discrimination and bigotry. By listening to the headline news you would think every white Caucasian is against every Negro, Hispanic, Asian and Native American Indian. To witness the riots and the venom being spewed each night you would assume this country is still fighting the Civil War.

Enter the doors of nearly every church building in America and you will see a far different story. Are there still traces of prejudice and racism among some Christians? No doubt about it. But an honest, unbiased observer cannot blame Christ for rogue “saints” that go off the reservation. What went on in the Crusades between 1100 and 1300 A.D. – when Christians killed Muslims by the thousands in order to reclaim the “Holy Land” was not sanctioned by God. Jesus would have told every Crusader what He told Peter, “*Put up your sword, for he who lives by the sword will die by the sword*” (Matt. 26:52). What Jesus told Pilate should have shamed any soldier of the Crusades, for He said, “*My kingdom is not of this world, or My servants would fight*” (Jn. 18:36).

Just so, neither can Christians be blamed for racial or ethnic bigotry. Jesus changed the world forever when He “*broke down the middle wall of separation*” between Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:14). When He opened His arms and proclaimed a commission to “*go into all the world and preach the good news to every creature*” (Mk. 16:15), it forever changed the hearts of men. And my favorite is this, *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* (Gal. 3:26-28).

It was the Bible, and the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, that stemmed the tide of rampant bigotry and racial hatred in the world. John Lennon wrote *Imagine* in which others called him a “dreamer” for wishing for a world with “no heaven… hell… religion… countries” where “all the people are living life in peace.” Sounds utopian.

Long before Lennon there was Jesus Christ, and He actually did more to create that utopia than writing lyrics to a song. He went to a cross to break down prejudice and hatred and all other “*works of the flesh*” and produce in the hearts of men the “*fruit of the Spirit* … *love, joy, peace*…” (Gal. 5:19-23).

While Lennon wrote of his imagined future, “I hope some day you’ll join us and the world will be as one,” Jesus wrote of our here-and-now when He prayed, *“that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:21).* That was not His imagination, that was our reality! We are now living it. This Is Us. Let me prove it.

Go back and read the first two sentences of this article. I’ll wait…

“Devil Anse” Hatfield became a Christian! Like Saul of Tarsus, he had blood on his hands and thought himself the chief of sinners. But for the last eight years of his life he worked to establish a Lord’s church in the epi-center of the old family feud. Isaiah’s famous prophecy of future peace was not an imagined utopia. “Devil” Hatfield became “saint” Hatfield. Isaiah 2:4 reads,

*They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks;  
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore.*

While the world around us shouts “Systemic Racism,” (basically defined as prejudice in every heart and institution in the country) we prove them wrong by bringing heaven down to earth and introducing them to “The Prince of Peace.” Christ and His church are not racist!

Until next time… “*Blessed are the peacemakers, they shall be called sons of God*.”

*Imagine* that!

Rick