

THE TIME IS SHORT.

"But this I say, brethren, the time is short; so that they who have wives, should be as if they had none; and they who weep, as if they wept not; and they who rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they who acquire, as though they acquired not; and those occupied with this world, not going beyond the proper using of it." – 1 Cor. 7:29-31.

It is a great mistake, and yet a very common one, to apply the teaching of the Apostle Paul to the world and the church indiscriminately. It should be borne in mind that the apostle is addressing the church only, as a peculiar people, separate from the world, with hopes and aims, and present conditions and future destiny entirely different from those of the world, although they appear to be as other men. It would seem strange indeed if such a class should need no *special* instruction.

Under the erroneous impression that these and other teachings of the apostle were intended alike for all, Paul is generally considered as an extremist, and as a teacher who though good in some respects, had his peculiarities which colored his teachings, and which should therefore be received at a discount to that extent. Paul was indeed a man of marked personal peculiarities, and therefore he was a fit instrument and a chosen vessel to do the greatest work that any man, except "the man Christ Jesus," was ever privileged to accomplish. He was a man true to his convictions, untiring in energy, and full of zeal, – one of the meek who, when called upon by the Lord even in the midst of his zealous persecution of the saints, in which he verily thought he was doing God service, meekly inquired, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" And what the Lord showed him to do, he did immediately, not stopping to confer with flesh and blood.

But these were not the only peculiarities which influenced Paul's teaching. By the favor of God, Paul was caught away (in the spirit, that

is, mentally) to Paradise, to the third heaven, the new dispensation or kingdom of God, where he saw things to come, which were not then lawful to be uttered clearly, because it was not yet due time. And the broad view of God's plan thus given to the apostle enabled him to realize the real position [R901 : page 3] of the saints, and the weighty interests involved in their development as members of the body of Christ. Yes, Paul at that early day of the church's history was by special favor of God permitted to know what is now due to all the saints, viz., the plan of God spanning the ages past and future. And from this standpoint of knowledge he was able to guide the church by his teachings all through the age – from the beginning down to the closing days of her course, until she is presented to her Lord as a chaste virgin accounted worthy to be his bride. In this great work of preparing the bride for the marriage, the various apostles and prophets were privileged to share; but Paul was more highly honored thus than any other.

As we are now privileged to see from the same standpoint of knowledge, it now being due time, we can see a propriety in Paul's teaching which is in perfect accord with God's plan and purpose for the saints, though it must seem extreme to others. Being begotten to a new nature, they are no longer to live after the old. We should now live, not as men, concentrating our interests, affections, hopes and aims on earthly things and striving after them, but as new creatures, whose sole interest and concern is for the advancement of the interests of the heavenly kingdom.

The principal work in the interest of the heavenly kingdom during the present age has been the selecting and development of the church, who are to be God's agents for the enlightenment, conversion and blessing of the world in the age to come. The all-important work, therefore, to which every earthly consideration should now bend, is the seeking out and preaching the gospel to the meek, few though they be; encouraging, strengthening, and helping them in every possible way to make their election sure.

For this great work we are reminded that the time *is short*, and that if *we* would have a share in it, we must push aside the earthly hindrances and improve every passing hour; for very soon our opportunity will be gone. Consider for a moment how very short is the opportunity which as an individual you possess, that you may more fully realize the necessity for haste and diligence in the service. Deduct from the brief space of your present life the years past, before you came to a knowledge of the truth and consecrated your life to the service of God, and then the declining years of life, when sight grows dim and physical strength grows more and more feeble, and then the time and strength which must be expended in providing things needful for the temporal wants of ourselves and those necessarily dependent upon us, and with the greatest economy of time, how much is left for the great work in hand to which we have consecrated ourselves? When we actually figure it out, how very insignificant it appears! Truly, Paul is right here – the time left for service is extremely "*short*"; and it behooves the saints to resolutely push aside the hindrances and overcome the obstacles, if they would run successfully for the prize, or accomplish anything to the Master's honor, or to show their love and appreciation of the good tidings by sounding the trumpet of truth to fellow-pilgrims.

The *time is short*; so that they [of *us*] who have wives should be as if they had none. The establishing of an earthly home and the rearing of an earthly family, which is generally regarded as the principal business of life, should not be the ambition of the saints. The injunction to increase and multiply and fill the earth, was given to the natural man, but not to the little flock, the new creatures, partakers of the divine nature. Their mission is not to help to people the earth, but to help bring to the spiritual birth the new creatures of the divine nature – the little flock – begotten of the heavenly promises. And the time for that work being *short*, they cannot afford to further cumber themselves by increasing their earthly cares. The idea of consecrating one's life to the service of God, and then going on, year after year, tying ourselves down and loading ourselves with cares and responsibilities of an

earthly character, which when once incurred we dare not shirk, and which with increasing and necessary demands will require more and more of our time and thought, and care and attention, is simply preposterous, and entirely out of harmony with our covenant. It is not following the footsteps of either the Lord or his most faithful apostle.

Jesus said he had finished the work given him to do at his first advent, and how did he spend his life? He spent it in selecting, teaching, training and developing a small and apparently insignificant company of men and women, who should form the nucleus of the church, which under his future direction and care would be fully developed and perfected. He did not cumber himself with the cares of this life, and let his *special work* take its chances, in the odds and ends of time which could be spared from earthly things. The increase of the earth's population, he considered no part of his work; nor is it the mission of those who follow in his footsteps.

With his clear insight into the plan of God, and a realization of the importance of the great work in hand, Paul's counsel that the unmarried should remain so, that they might thus give themselves without hindrance to the Lord's service, and that the married should not add to their earthly cares, and thus make their pathway more difficult and their opportunity for service less, was timely and important, and in perfect harmony with The Lord's example and teaching (Matt. 19:12), which he also so closely followed.

None should make the mistake, however, of supposing that the responsibilities of a family already incurred can be ignored or set aside; on the contrary, it is written, that he that provideth not for his own is worse than an unbeliever, and hath denied the faith. – 1 Tim. 5:8.

The worldly and lukewarm Christians are in total ignorance of the great work before the saints either in the future or in the present age, and therefore our work seems to them unimportant and foolish – a waste of energy; but we must not for a moment view it from their standpoint. This work, insignificant though it may seem in the eyes of

others, and small though it may appear to us now in its results, is the grandest work in which it was ever the privilege of any to engage. Eternity alone will reveal to the world its magnitude and importance, or enable us to fully realize it.

Further, we are told that because the time is short, those who weep should be as if they wept not, and those who rejoice as though they rejoiced not, and they who buy as if they acquired not. We may and have, in common with all mankind, causes of an earthly character for both weeping and rejoicing; but we should not allow either joy or sorrow to unfit us for our work, nor to detract from our interest and effort in it. But we may rejoice always in the Lord, knowing that in due time all tears shall be wiped away, and that fleeting earthly joys shall give place to the songs and everlasting joy which by-and-by shall be upon every head. And those who acquire wealth or goods should not reckon their acquirements *their own*, or for the gratification of self-pride or the love of display, but as something belonging to the Lord, something more of his entrusted to them to be utilized in his service. If once thoroughly awake to the fact that every acquirement is the Lord's and not their own, that their time, influence and talent, past, present and future, is all consecrated, it would free such from many of the snares to which they are subject – "which some coveting after, wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." – 1 Tim. 6:7-12.

Finally, while necessarily occupied with the business of this life and the expenditure of its income, we should not go beyond the just using of it for ourselves as becometh saints. Provide things honest, neat and comfortable for the temporal necessities, and then give them no further thought. Though we have consecrated ourselves and all our goods which we have acquired or may acquire, to the Lord, he permits us to appropriate *this much of it* for our temporal wants. In harmony with our covenant, this only is the "proper using" of earthly goods.

O how narrow is the way in which the saints must walk who follow in the footsteps of the Master! There is self-denial at every step, but Jesus said, "He that taketh not up his cross, and followeth not after me, is not worthy of me." If we cannot prove our love for the Lord by thus sharing in his reproaches and self-denials, we are not of the class he wishes to make his Bride. It will be no easy thing for any to endure unto the end, but blessed is he that shall do it. If we keep looking at the things behind, cherishing the old ambitions and fostering the old spirit which once impelled us, endurance of our trials will become more difficult if not impossible; but let us take the apostle's advice, and forgetting the things behind, seek new conquests over the world and flesh and devil. Let us thus press forward to the mark of the prize of our high calling, which is of God through Christ Jesus. And bearing in mind that the time *is short*, let us make haste to improve passing opportunities for such a grand and blessed service.

HE is a great conqueror who can conquer himself

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WHEN you make a mistake don't look back at it long. Take the reason of the thing into your mind, and then look forward. Mistakes are lessons of wisdom. The past cannot be changed. The future is now in your power. – *Hugh White*.

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