

## Christianity Is A Fight! (Part 4)

Commitment, Vision, and Time Management

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 06-Jan-07; Sermon #808

Today I am going to continue my series on the Christian fight. This will be Part 4. We will begin by turning to Matthew 6:31-34.

**Matthew 6:31-34** Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink? Or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek); for your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things. But seek you first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

As we were concluding the previous message regarding the Christian fight against our carnal heart, the world, and the Devil, we were just beginning to see that in order to win these battles the solution lies in the resources that can only be provided by God through our relationship with Him.

We are to put on the whole armor of God, which is the way Paul described it in Ephesians 6. That armor is the power necessary, and as we saw from other sermons, power belongs to God; thus, the seeking of God in the battle, in the face of these three major foes which constantly tempt and allure us, should be very high on our priority list.

These verses contain vital, foundational advice for all those who are fighting the daily battles in this warfare. Ordinary, everyday things like food and clothing are necessary to have, and the efforts to secure them can be an anxiety-producing and worrisome affair. What we need to do, according to Jesus here, is to quit worrying and to begin trusting God. Jesus' reasoning goes something like this: God is real to us, is He not? He very visibly provides for things as seemingly unimportant as grasses and flowers, does He not? Now since you are so exceedingly more important to Him than those things, can you not see that He can and will provide the necessary things in life for you?

Seeking God *first* and seeking the Kingdom of God are simply other ways of terming the Christian's fight. Did you notice that Jesus said "all these things shall be added unto you"? This then becomes a promise to all those who are truly seeking God and His Kingdom. It is a dogmatic statement. God *will* do this because He wants to see us make

it, and He will provide.

Here Jesus was primarily stating material things would be added, but we find in other places that God is the source of *all* powers that He alone can add. That is a firm platform to work from for anyone who is truly seeking God's Kingdom. Jesus is focusing on priorities here so one can devote far more effort toward the most important goals of life.

Once one knows what his goal is, does not one normally lay out a plan for getting there? A simple illustration for all of us is that each year we have a goal of keeping the Feast of Tabernacles, so one has to plan on having sufficient money to finance the considerable travel, hotel, meals, clothing, gasoline, and entertainment costs. We use a calendar to set when we will leave, and when we will return. One will plot the route for driving, flying, or train transportation. We may contact friends from other parts of the country and plan to do things together, and we will prepare spiritually, making sure that we are in the correct frame of mind so that the Feast can be kept spiritually as well as physically.

The same general principle is involved to a lesser or greater degree in the accomplishment of any goal numerous times every day of the week, let alone a single occasion that occurs once a year. What about the goal that is to be the highest priority for the rest of your life—that is, seeking God and the Kingdom of God?

Since seeking God is to be our major spiritual occupation once a relationship has been established through God's calling and His justifying us, what is foundational to *your* plan of seeking Him?

I do not know whether many of us have ever written down a plan. I do not mean for the purpose of consulting it each and every day. I mean just to lay out before us a map, a plan of major things that we want to be a part of us so that we will be accomplished to a far greater degree than if we were attempting to do things in a helter-skelter, come-what-may manner.

What I am going to do in this message is to suggest some overall qualities I feel must be part of a successful plan. These are useful every day, except for the occasional times when everything is disrupted by some unexpected occurrence. Now why do this?—because establishing priorities is essential to success.

Despite the steps one might lay out in one's plan, there are a number of qualities that one must determine to have and use, or *no* plan, regardless of how precise or appropriate, will work. I am going to concentrate on the qualities needed to make a plan work.

Perhaps the highest of all priorities in this is one's commitment. No plan, no matter how good or how perfect, is any good whatever unless one is committed to accomplishing the objective. As the proverb says, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." I think we all have good intentions, but how far do we get down the road with just having intentions? If we are not really committed, it is very likely that one of the first obstacles is going to make us turn aside, and we will not accomplish it despite our good intentions. There has to be a solid commitment to accomplish. Now Jesus agrees.

**Luke 9:62** And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plow, [his intention when he does that is to get to the other side of the field. He is going to walk behind that donkey, he is going to walk behind that horse, or he is going to get on his tractor, or whatever, to get to the other side of the field.] and looking back, [he is already showing a flaw in his commitment because he is looking back.] is fit for the kingdom of God.

Commitment is pretty important, but I am going to add something to it. I want you to turn to Luke 14.

**Luke 14:25-27** And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever does not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

The quality I am thinking of here is devotion. Devotion must be added to commitment in order for commitment to be truly strong in relation to seeking God. To be committed merely expresses the general idea of obligating or pledging one's self to a certain action. However, commitment all by itself does not carry the emotional force of devotion. In fact, my *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* defines devotion as "to commit by a solemn act." In other words, even by definition, devotion attaches a quality that mere commitment by itself does not have. Devotion indicates consecration, the setting of one's self apart for a higher end. It is commitment, plus an intense loyal attachment.

Do you know what this verse said? "If any man come to me and hate not his father, mother,"—that is devotion and commitment together to a literal Being of importance of a magnitude we *can* begin to imagine. It is the kind of commitment that Christ is asking of us. It is not unreasonable that He should do such a thing, that we should be committed and devoted to Him. You put that word "love" in there, and it begins to indicate an

emotional attachment that goes beyond mere commitment; thus, devotion suggests that one has an unusually compelling motivation for one's dedication. That is why it is very frequently used in relation to fulfilling one's responsibilities to God.

In John 14:15, Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." Put the emphasis on the word "Me." "If you love **Me** . . . " This is not a disinterested run-of-the-mill keeping of God's law. It has with it an emotional attachment to the One who is our Lord, Master, and Savior because devotion includes thoughts of love, whereas commitment can easily be used in contexts requiring thoughts only of merely meeting a duty.

In our impatience, it is human to want to cut to the chase and get right to the top without having to go through all of the steps normally required to get there—steps that prepare us for being in a position of leadership in God's Kingdom. Attempting to evade those steps is foolish. God absolutely will not allow this to occur in regard to His kingdom.

I want you to go back to Proverbs 19.

**Proverbs 19:10** Delight is not seemly [or appropriate] for a fool; much less for a servant to have rule over princes.

This proverb describes two inappropriate but similar situations to make an interested observer shake his head in sad wonderment at the waste, at the inappropriateness of it. First of all, the first phrase there: "Luxury possessed by a fool who will squander his gift on dissipation and useless frivolity is totally inappropriate." You do not want a fool to come into money. He will just waste it on himself. The second is a slave to human nature, who having been in subjection all his life, when given power to rule stands every chance of going to the opposite extreme of becoming abusively tyrannical. It is as though he forgets his slavery, and forgets that he was one of them at one time, and now *he* is the big boss, and he is going to be tyrannical.

There is a vivid historical example of this when the French people overthrew the aristocracy. Guess who it was who used the guillotine left and right, one after the other? It was the people who came into power, and once they got into power *they* became the abusers who were every bit as bad as the aristocracy was.

We are talking about inappropriate things. God is not going to bring into His kingdom somebody who is not prepared to rule. Those people who will be in His kingdom will never forget what it was like to be a slave of human nature. They will never forget what it was like to be poor, down and out, or whatever. They will remember those things, and

their judgments and their rulership will be tempered by their memories of how one should really use in a wise and effective way what one has been given.

Both of these things have to do with commitment and devotion, because it takes commitment and devotion to go through the training God is giving us—training that often seems to us to say, "What are we doing this for? Why do we not just go right into the Kingdom of God? I am ready now, God. Take me!" No, we are not ready, and so He makes us go through the paces to learn lessons that will be appropriate for use in His kingdom.

**Proverbs 30:21-22** For three things the earth is disquieted, and for four which it cannot bear: For a servant when he reigns, and a fool when he is filled with food.

I put this in here because this proverb affirms the previous one. Each of these illustrations describes people unprepared for their new status. You can be absolutely certain that God is not going to allow this to happen in His family kingdom. Those who are in it are going to be prepared to work, to live, and to rule at the level they are assigned by Him. Their responsibilities there will be challenging, but they will not be constantly frustrated because they are in over their heads, nor will their office go to their heads. They will humbly serve, and will exhibit no abusive authority in the conduct of their office now that they have the power. They will be balanced in all areas of life. For the most part, dynastic rulers, as in the throne of England, understand this principle well.

I recently read a fairly long article in the *Smithsonian* magazine about Marie Antoinette. Her Austrian-Hapsburg parents arranged her marriage while she was still very young. She was promised to the Bourbon family who ruled France, to be wife of their son who eventually became Louis XVI. This occurred while he, too, was very young. What caught my attention and interest in relation to this sermon is that within a year after this arranged marriage was made—they were not brought together yet; the marriage was just arranged then—the Bourbons sent a tutor to Austria to school Marie for the time when she would be queen. This tutor remained her almost constant companion until the marriage was made when Marie was fifteen.

The same is true of Prince Charles of England. He has been trained since birth to take over the throne of England. In one sense, especially in his pre-adult years, he had very little life for himself. One might think that this does not work well, but we must not forget that these people had no gift from God for disciplining human nature. The important element for us to remember is that God follows the same principle of preparation, and

our life must be devoted to the same operations.

We are in the preparatory phase, and we have to be not only prepared for God's kingdom, we have to be prepared for something else which I will mention in just a little bit. Thus we must follow the same basic program laid down for Prince Charles, except that our preparation is for the Kingdom of God. And just assuredly as Charles must give his devotion over to learning all the ins and outs of the throne's operations, so must we. I can guarantee you that God is not going to allow us to escape these responsibilities.

We are now going to turn to an interesting verse in II Corinthians 6.

**II Corinthians 6:1** We then, [the "we" is Christians—the Corinthian congregation, and includes Paul himself] as workers together with Him, beseech you also that you receive not the grace of God in vain.

This is a much-overlooked verse by this world's "no works" advocates. You might wonder why I have said many times that we must cooperate with God. Here is the verse that told me that. I am going to read this verse in a modern translation. It is from the *Phillips* translation, and *Phillips* rendered that verse this way: "As cooperators with God Himself, we beg you then, do not fail to use the grace of God." Paul is appealing to these people to receive God's grace with purpose in mind. Grace is given by God to be used by those receiving it.

The sanctification process requires our cooperation with God in order that right qualities, understanding, and sensitivities are produced through God's creative effort. If we do not cooperate, if we resist Him, if we rebel against Him, are we going to nullify His creative efforts? We certainly will. But if we are committed to what He is doing, and we are devoted to Him because we do sincerely love Him, we will give Him that cooperation and make whatever sacrifices are required in order to yield to God.

It is this cooperation that produces Christian works, so we have to stop resisting Him by simply drifting. Do you get my drift there? If we are just drifting, we are actually resisting God. If we are committed to working *with* Him our cooperation with Him will be energetic. We will *not* be drifting. We will be driving ourselves in the same direction He is headed in, and that is toward preparation for the Kingdom of God. So this combination of commitment, devotion, and cooperation works to produce godly conviction. Godly conviction is very important to our success in this warfare. I will drop that subject right now and will speak on it a little bit later in another sermon, but I cannot in any way deny, lessen, or whatever, the importance of conviction.

The first element we need in our platform is that we need to be committed, *with* devotion

The second element that one must have in his platform is vision. Because human nature is strong and is ever with us, and we are so easily distracted by things attractive to our personality, or if one becomes discouraged, it takes strong devotion for the task at hand. These factors amplify why vision is so important toward encouraging devotion.

We are going to go to Hebrews 11.

**Hebrews 11:13** These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

So now, what do we know? Abraham looked for a city whose builder and maker is God. Is that not correct? It is.

**Hebrews 11:20-21** By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped leaning upon the top of his staff.

He too was looking forward to something. That is why he blessed Ephraim and Manasseh.

**Hebrews 11:22** By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.

Joseph foresaw Israel leaving Egypt and therefore made arrangements concerning his burial in his birth homeland.

**Hebrews 11:23** By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.

Moses' parents foresaw. They looked into the future.

**Hebrews 11:24-26** By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.

**Hebrews 11:31** By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.

On and on the testimonies of the vision of these heroes of faith are recorded. Let us consider something. They, too, faced difficult circumstances within the world around them—that is, the one from which *they* were called. They obviously made comparisons to life's circumstances and made serious choices to go one way rather than the other that was more easily available to them.

Do you take time to seriously consider the vast difference between what God is offering us, His royal children—which is exactly what He calls us—as compared to the confusion, violence, and hopelessness this world has produced since Adam and Eve? How much evidence does it take to convince us that this world's system is going nowhere but to destruction? Do we ever stop to think really seriously where the events are headed in the time that we now live? Which are you, as judged by the pattern of your lifestyle? You judge that yourself. Which are you seriously casting your lot and your life with?

We have already seen two very important factors to affect day-to-day motivation regarding choices: commitment and vision. Those two go hand-in-hand. The commitment enables us to go where our vision is telling us to go. If the vision is off, we are going to go in the wrong direction, but if the vision is the right one, then we can cooperate with God and be workers together with Him.

A third high priority in this plan has to be time-management. This is part three of the platform that we need, or it is not going to work. We need commitment, vision, and time-management.

In an overall sense, how do you, as a Christian, perceive time? Every day we are witnesses to its progression. Daylight comes, passes, and night arrives, only to be followed by daylight once again. We can look at a clock and we can see that it is moving, but how and in what manner is it moving? This is important.



We are going to go to Ecclesiastes.

**Ecclesiastes 1:2-11** Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity [useless, futile]. What profit has a man of all his labor which he takes under the sun? One generation passes away, and another generation comes: but the earth abides forever. The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to his place where he arose. The wind goes toward the south, and turns about unto the north; it whirls about continually, and the wind returns again according to his circuits. All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers came, thither they return again. All things are full of labor; man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. The thing that has been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there anything whereof it may be said, See, this is new? It has been already of old time, which was before us. There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.

That is pretty downbeat, is it not? It is enough to depress a person.

The Greeks as a culture have become known as a people sensitive to the rhythm of time, and this, though written by the Hebrew Solomon, is a decidedly Greek view of life and time-movement. The Greeks allowed this perception of life and time to be a major building block of their philosophy regarding life. They were acutely aware of things like the ebb and flow of tides, the continuously repeating cycle of the four seasons, and the constantly repeating patterns of the weather. This led them to develop the concept that time is cyclical; it is going in a circle. A man's life is lived within a series of continuous changeless recurrences.

To them, the movement of time is like a wheel turning on its axis, and the events that mark the movement of time repeat themselves inexorably. Their conclusion was that nothing can be done about it because these events will happen continuously, endlessly; thus to them, a person is born, lives his life on a stage, and when his part is done, he exits. This inexorably leads to a fatalistic view of life: "What's the use?" Notice especially verse 8. It says, "All things are full of labor; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing."

The *Soncino* commentary states that what Solomon is saying here is that this inexorable repetition in life is such weariness that he actually lacks the words to aptly describe it.

He just kind of threw up his hands. Now despite what Solomon, a Hebrew, wrote in Ecclesiastes, the general Hebrew view is decidedly different. Their conception of time is greatly benefited by revelation that God gave through the prophet.

We are going to leave the Old Testament for a little bit, but I want you to turn to the book of Jude, because Jude gives an example that will start us in the right direction.

**Jude 14-15** And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

This is one of the earlier quotes in the New Testament of an Old Testament personality that shows that the Hebrews who believes God *knew* time was headed in a very different direction from the Greek view of things. Jude told us what it is. Time is *not* going in a circle. Time, according to God, is lineal. It is going somewhere. It is not just going around and around and around endlessly, always repeating the same things over and over. But there is a God in Heaven who redirects things every once in a while, and the overall course is in a straight line toward what He is headed for.

What Jude is saying here is that things just do not happen in a vacuum, but events are actually moving in a very definite direction; and the time is coming when men are going to have to answer for what they have done during their lifetime. You just do not float off the stage into nothingness. There is a time of judgment that is going to occur, and that is where time is headed for *all* men.

Enoch is nowhere near the earliest revealer of this process. I want you to go all the way back to Genesis 3:14-19. The sin that occurred in the Garden of Eden has been exposed, and God is pronouncing what is going to be the result of this.

**Genesis 3:14-19** And the LOORD God said unto the serpent, Because you have done this you are cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon your belly shall you go, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life: And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; it shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. Unto the woman He said, I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in sorrow you shall bring forth children; and your desire shall be to your husband, and he shall rule over you. And unto Adam He said,

Because you have hearkened unto the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, saying, You shall not eat of it: cursed is the ground for your sake; in sorrow shall you eat of it all the days of your life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to you; and you shall eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread till you return unto the ground; for out of it were you taken: for dust you are, and unto dust shall you return.

God revealed here all by Himself. He did it. He took it on Himself to be the revealer of where time is headed, and to the Hebrew descendants of Abraham who believed Him. People like Moses, people like Joseph, people like Jacob, people like Abraham believed what God said. That is why Abraham was looking for a city. That is why Jacob blessed Ephraim and Manasseh. That is why Joseph did what he did regarding his bones, and that is why Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ greater than the treasures of Egypt. They *knew* that time is not cyclical as the Greeks perceived, but lineal. Time, and what happens within it, is being moved by the Creator in a very definite direction—the judgments and the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

The prophet Amos is given credit for giving that "somewhere" a general title—at least it is within his prophecies that the term is first used. He called where time is headed "the Day of the Lord." He appeared to mean in a general sense of the time, or a time, that God would intervene and take a strong hand doing something that is definitely not repetitious.

The Hebrews had something going for them in regard to time, but it remained for the Christian church to properly define time and its right usage for its members. The Christian church is a blending of both cyclical concepts of the Greek, and the lineal concept of the Hebrew.

It is true that many things in life, like wars and economic depression and so forth, do occur in an inexorable manner, but as the New Testament shows, much of this is caused by man's self-centered nature. In other words, the New Testament teaches us pretty strongly that these things do not have to happen. Man, by his choices, *makes* them happen. They happen because man's choices make them happen, and man continually makes bad choices because his nature is inexorably unchanging. In a way man has an excuse. He cannot help himself, unless God intervenes in his life. His nature is always anti-God. Is that not what Romans 8:7 affirms? "The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

So things like greed, lust, envy, and jealousy, drive this world to these sad things that keep happening over and over again. Thus, in general, the view expressed in the New Testament indeed does contain stressful and continuously repeating cycles like Solomon described, and it is interesting that the New Testament calls them *evil*.

However, it also clearly shows that time is moving in a very definite direction, and that very many of the events occurring within its movements are being orchestrated by God Himself toward the return of Jesus Christ—that is, the Day of the Lord, and the seventh one-thousand-year day, and the establishment of God's family kingdom on earth. This led the church to develop (and I am sure under the inspiration of Jesus Christ) the overall general concept of time-management that is unique to church members themselves. Believe it or not, it has its roots in the Old Testament. That is what they began with. They began with the Old Testament, did they not?

Let us go to the book of Isaiah 55. Remember, this is written to people who made the covenant with God, and under the circumstance, when the book of Isaiah was written, it was the Old Covenant, but the whole book is written to the New Testament church and, therefore, it is appropriate to us that we take advantage of the counsel that is given here by Isaiah.

**Isaiah 55:6-7** Seek you the LOORD while he may be found, call you upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LOORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

"Seek you the LOORD while He may be found." Are you beginning to see an element here that time is running out? An opportunity has been given, and because the time is moving on, it can be lost. So it weighs upon our shoulders a responsibility to take advantage of the time as it now exists for each of us. An opportunity has been open to us. What are we going to do with it?

Now why seek God? That is the advice. It is because He has the power, and He has the willingness, if men will trust Him, to give them a completely new nature, to get rid of that nature that is constantly, inexorably bringing forth those bad events that we do not like to face. He has the power and the willingness, if men will trust Him, to give us a completely new nature.

Let us go to another place in Isaiah.

**Isaiah 61:1-2** The Spirit of the Lord GOOD is upon me; because the LOORD has anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LOORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn.

Here is a prophecy that Jesus partially quoted as He was beginning His ministry in the synagogue in Nazareth where He grew up. You can see that in Luke 4:18-19 where Jesus quoted this scripture.

Did you notice that in both of these scriptures there is an element of time and its movement towards something that is about to happen? Isaiah 55 says, "Seek you the LOORD while He may be found." Time is moving toward that time when He will not be able to be found. In other words Isaiah is saying, "Get with it, because the LOORD is moving on, and if you do not do it now it might be too late."

The verse is similar in Isaiah 61. **NOW** is the acceptable day for those called of God. Again, there is an idea of movement, and if one waits, the "acceptable day" will be past, and the day of vengeance, which is now even moving toward us, will be here, and it will be too late to avoid its destructive power.

Recall that in Solomon's description, God was nowhere mentioned. In fact I do not think He is mentioned in the entire book of Ecclesiastes. Events to Solomon were just going around and around endlessly, effectively describing Solomon's frustration. But in the prophet of God's description, God is involved in the movement of events that are impacting directly on His peoples' lives.

We are going to go back to the New Testament again to II Corinthians 5:19. We are going to go through to chapter 6, verse 2. Paul is speaking.

**II Corinthians 5:19-21** To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and has committed unto us [meaning primarily the ministry, and secondarily the church in general] the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be you reconciled to God. For he has made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

**II Corinthians 6:1-2** We then, as workers together with him, beseech you

Christianity Is a Fight! (Part 4) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

also that you receive not the grace of God in vain. (For he says, I have heard you in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured you: behold, **now** is the accepted time; behold, **now** is the day of salvation.)

I am going to read from the *Revised English Bible*.

**II Corinthians 5:20-21** [*The Revised English Bible*] We are therefore Christ's ambassadors. It is as if God were appealing to you through us. We implore you, in Christ's name, be reconciled to God. Christ, who is innocent of sin, and yet for our sakes God made Him one with human sinfulness, so that in Him we might be made one with the righteousness of God.

**II Corinthians 6:1-2** [*The Revised English Bible*] Sharing in God's work, we make this appeal. You have received the grace of God. Do not let it come to nothing. He has said, "In the hour of My favor I have answered you. On the day of deliverance I came to your aid. This is the hour of favor. This is the day of deliverance."

The admonition in these verses is "Seek God Now!" Time is moving, and it will not wait for anybody. God has a schedule He is working upon. We do not know that schedule. We only know little bits and pieces of where it is headed. We know that His kingdom is coming on earth. We know that Jesus Christ is going to return. We know that there is a resurrection of the dead. We know that there is judgment coming upon all of mankind, but we do not know the specific time, and so the New Testament church teaches us "Get on the ball Now!" because even though we do not know the specific time, we do not know how long we are going to live either. It is the New Testament version of "Time waits for no one," and it is moving, and hopefully we are moving with it.

These verses are denoting a passing opportunity, a specific period of time during which events are working toward the culmination of some occurrence, and if the present time is not taken advantage of, the opportunity may never come again.

Let us get Jesus into the act, personally, in the book of Matthew. If you think time-management is not important, I hope you will think again.

**Matthew 25:6-13** And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom comes; go you out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil;

for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go you rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man comes.

The major lesson of this parable is that both life and time are moving on. The precise time of Christ's return is unknown, and Christ is urging us to take advantage of the knowledge and time that we already have at hand, and those who do not follow His advice will find their way into the Kingdom of God blocked. It did not go in a cycle. It just ended.

Recall that II Corinthians was written to Christians, and what we have here is a call in all those verses—Isaiah 55:6-7, Isaiah 61:1-2, and then the verses I gave you out of II Corinthians 5 and II Corinthians 6—every one of these is a call to Christians to strike while the iron is hot. Both James and Paul are reminding us that our calling is ripe with possibilities, so much so that each moment can be considered as big as eternity. That is how important time is to us, and so the New Testament's instruction to a Christians is: "Now is the time. Everything is in readiness for success." It is as though they are saying, "Do not be like the slave who refuses freedom, or the diseased who refuses healing when they are at the doorstep of freedom or healing. God's door is open to us—charge through it, cooperating with God."

If you saw the movie "The Shawshank Redemption" you will recall what I am going to use as an illustration. That film showed the timid inmate that was played by James Whitmore. I think he was the prison librarian. His time was up. He was released from prison to freedom to the outside world after twenty-five years or so of incarceration for a very foolish moment of passion during which he committed murder. When they released him they gave him a suit of clothing. They also provided an entry-level job as a bagger in a supermarket, and they gave him a small amount of money to get on for awhile. But the world was far different from when he entered prison, and he so missed the familiar repetitious and relative security of the prison, that out of fear he committed suicide. He was unprepared for freedom.

Now what is the Bible's advice? In Ephesians 5 there are some very familiar scriptures.

**Ephesians 5:14-17** Wherefore he says, Awake you that sleep, and arise

from the dead, and Christ shall give you light. See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be you not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

This is a familiar passage to us, and it is another one telling us to strike while the iron is hot. But I want to focus more on other things surrounding the "Strike while the iron is hot" statement that we are so familiar with. I hope this will help you better grasp the church's view of time.

First notice the reason why Paul says to wake up and look carefully at how you live. "Do not fear," he says, "because Christ will give you light." Remember, I told you at the very beginning Jesus said, "Seek you first the Kingdom of God, and all these things *shall* be added to you." Now here is Paul confirming this. "Do not fear," he says, "Christ will give you light." That is another flat-out promise that God will give us the help to do what we must do.

Following the "Redeeming the time" statement, he then says that we are to do these things because the days are evil. Now wait a minute! If Paul thought *those* days were evil, what would he think of *our* day being evil, what with atomic and hydrogen weapons thrown into the mix so that you can kill from long distance? We have missiles and guided bombs that go directly to their target, and besides that, there are bacteria that one can put into the water supply and kill perhaps millions of people at a clip. Besides that, there are all kinds of gases that can be let loose on man.

Are our days evil, or what? Is that a motivation, or what? Did not Jeremiah say that when that time comes what is going to happen has never before been experienced by earth and its people? How much motivation do we need from the comparison that we might make between what God promises and what is happening in this world, and what this world's history shows has happened endlessly for millennia?

So, for a Christian then, we have to understand that *all* days are evil. Every period of time in which God's people have had to live their lives with the understanding that God gives, and thus live by faith, has been evil, because God's truth has always been gone against by the course of this world, and thus truth adds a peculiar difficulty to life regardless of when it is lived. When we add this to each and every person called, the called only has one shot at eternal life, and must grow and prove his loyalty to God at that time. We must make the most of this one opportunity we are given.



**Galatians 1:3-4** Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave himself for our sins that [and here I am going to insert a word because it should be there:] He *only* might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.

In terms of growing and overcoming, there is no particular advantage to any particular time a Christian might live his life. Every era, every age, is against the Christian, and the Christian must take advantage of his calling. The times have *a/ways* been evil. The church then must operate responsibly toward God with a highly specialized understanding of life and its purpose. Every age is filled with the cyclical, frustrating repetition of events that Solomon called futile, vanity, and these events are things that lead ***nowhere***. Understand that. That is why God, through Solomon, called them vanities. They are useless in terms of the Kingdom of God. These are events that lead nowhere, and we have a cultural example the Greeks have left: a vivid picture of a deadly discouraging fatalism. It gave people the idea, "What's the use?"

The Christian possesses the knowledge that God is directing time to His desired end, and thus the church's view of time is a neat combining of both realities, and that it, as an organization, has a work to accomplish, and each individual Christian must grow and overcome within the time given him. So we have the evil of repetitious vanity, produced by sin that history clearly shows, combined with the hope of a glorious ending for God's called-out ones that God's word shows. The two of them go hand-in-glove.

The point of this is why Paul said in Ephesians 5:18 to "understand what the Lord's will is." He is saying, "Do not get distracted by this repetitious cycle of things. You have been called, and you are expected to work within the time God has made available to us despite these things occurring. That is God's will."

Do not let these ugly terrible things that are happening in the world caused by man's sin get you down, or get you discouraged. With the help of God, Christ only can deliver us. We will escape it because of His mercy, but we have got to pay attention during the time that He has given to us. So what Paul was saying is that as you live your life each and every day, do not ever let what God says slip from your mind. The overall understanding of this context is to make the most of every opportunity because time is inexorably moving toward *God's* desired end, and it is not going to stop and wait for you. Do not get left behind. (That sounds like a good title for a movie or a book.)

No occasion is too insignificant to do the right thing. That is the overall lesson. Do not let the opportunity slip by to do what is right and good, according to God's will. Personal

Bible study and prayer are times of clarifying God's will. Every day occasions will arise, but we must do God's will in them as they arise.

What are we doing? Do not be like the Hebrews Paul wrote to. They were neglecting what they knew to do. That is what their problem was. They were neglecting what they knew to do.

What I said in this sermon is this:

(1) A foundation for seeking God must be commitment, combined with devotion to Christ personally.

(2) It requires that one evaluate this world and its imminent destruction with God's promises in order to have a correct vision. You have got to get the chaff out of the way. Concentrate on the vision God gives us.

(3) It requires that we be acutely aware of the movement of time, and manage it in order to make proper use of that which remains.