

## Trumpets, Christ'S Coming, And Works

Paul's Take On What To Do Now

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For those of us who understand the meaning of the festivals, the Feast of Trumpets immediately makes us think of the return of Jesus Christ to rule the earth. It may also make us think of resurrection and also of rulership. Even though it is a time of great discussion and the end of Satan's invisible domination of mankind, it is also the time of the receiving of rewards for many acts of sacrifice in the service of God and man. It will officially mark the beginning of God's Sabbath rest, and thus the time period just before that must be a time of working, and that time, from the indicators that we are able to see, is right now.

As we begin, let us take a look at two parables with which we are all at least familiar—one of them *very* familiar—in *their* time-setting because they have important instruction for those of us living in the period of time leading right into these great events.

A few weeks ago we had a very fine sermon from Richard built around Jesus' statement in Matthew 24—"...as it was in the days of Noah." He concluded that sermon by showing that in the days of Noah there was a great deal of demon activity seeking the destruction of marriage and family life. Let us turn to Matthew 24, and we are going to read first from verses 45 through 51.

**Matthew 24:45** "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season?"

Before we go any further, we need to understand that this is instruction that is coming to you and me. "Who is that faithful and wise servant—of Jesus Christ [if I can interject that]?"

**Matthew 24:45-51** "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him

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and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

We are not going to go into the parable with a great deal of depth, but we *will* point out for some reason the translators decided to end the chapter with it, even though Jesus' message continues right on into chapter 25. Next, notice that the instruction involves faithfulness—a "faithful and wise servant." It involves conduct and wisdom—"faithful and wise"—and the conduct is making energetic use of the time until his master returns.

I want you to notice that the time being described is in the same period of time as "the days of Noah" statement. In fact this parable begins only eight verses after the "days of Noah" statement. What makes this parable extra serious, to us at this time, is that the instruction specifically concerns how the master's servants treat each other during this critical period. They beat their fellow servants. That means mistreat, maltreat. They are not very nice. They are not very kind. They are not very tolerant. They are quite offensive in their bearing in attitude and conduct toward fellow servants.

The foolish servants smite their fellow servants and conduct themselves in a worldly manner. They do this because they ignore the signs of the times, and in so doing reveal that there is not a fulltime awareness of God during their daily life. The instruction has to do with dangerous, unacceptable relationships with fellow laborers. A very serious amount of instruction is here for us.

So important is our conduct toward each other that Christ says if they do not measure up, they will be cut in two, and there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. This, in the biblical use, indicates the ultimate in punishment for a servant of God. I think I will change that, because the ultimate in punishment would be the lake of fire, but what it does do is that it indicates the ultimate of despair of those who are being punished.

Now let us go on into chapter 25.

**Matthew 25:1-5** "Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.

**Matthew 25:13** "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour

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in which the Son of Man is coming.

What I want you to look at first here is the word "then"—the very first word in the parable. The word "then" indicates there is no break in Jesus' thought between the two parables. He just goes from one right to the other. It is almost like He is saying, "This will follow right on the heels of" sort of thing. So the time setting and the instruction for both parables are linked in Jesus' mind. The instruction in the first becomes the introduction to the second, and I perceive two factors each of us must come to realize, and discipline ourselves to deal with.

The first is in the parable of the ten virgins. If we individually allow it, at Christ's return here, a peculiar, spiritually-dangerous malaise can develop within the church. Five were wise, and five were foolish. This indicates there is a malaise there somewhere. He is warning us that we must be aware that each day, as it is lived, has a degree of monotonous regularity to it that is deceptively conducive to lulling us into a form of spiritual sleep. It does not have to happen, but it can happen.

The second is the times we live in are quite stressful. You will recall Daniel 12:4 fits into the same time sequence. He describes it as people "running to and fro" and "knowledge is increasing." It is helpful to understand that the "running to and fro" is applicable in a number of different situations—running the gamut all the way to individuals *literally* running, to individuals traveling from one place on the earth to another; but it is not limited to that.

It can actually happen within a person's mind, indicating a mind that is under stress and thoughts are just going around like crazy all over the place, and that is stressful indeed. It is sort of like, "What shall I do?" "How can I organize my day?" "What should I do first?" "What shall I put on the back burner?" That is the kind of time we live in, and that can build up in a person and actually make him literally sick. Events are happening very fast, and even our hearing of them creates anticipation, whether good or bad, that is psychologically wearying.

Now notice, as the cry went out that the bridegroom was coming, all the virgins were asleep. As a biblical metaphor, "sleep" almost always has negative implication. It does not level the measure of sleep. In other words, some people can be just drowsy; others are literally knocked out, we might say. In any case, it indicates a lack of awareness even though one is literally physically awake. That person could be spiritually asleep even though that person is awake. Why? Because that person is not alert to the times. There is an insensitivity there.

We say, "So and so was asleep at the switch" when he should have been alert. He was not *literally* asleep, but he did not act or react as quickly as he should have, or he did not anticipate what was going to occur, and so he did not react at the right time.

At that point the parable puts all ten virgins on the same level of awareness, and that time was very close to the arrival of the bridegroom. Now "aware," yes. Again there are levels of awareness, but they were all on the same basic level, at least in the parable. However, the point of the parable is that during a period of wakefulness, when work should have been done by all ten, the five sensible virgins, through vision, thoughtfulness, and discipline, had made a more thorough and better preparation. By way of contrast, the foolish virgins were caught short, apparently not prioritizing properly, and thus squandering their time doing other things.

In order to make a distinction between the two groups, to make it especially clear, Christ states that the foolish had no oil at all. When both groups went out, the foolish had no oil at all. Both groups are shown having lamps; therefore, all were equipped to shine forth.

It is interesting that when we see the word "virgin" we almost always invariably think of the female gender. However, men—this applies to you as well physically. You can check this out for yourself by seeing what Paul says in II Corinthians 11:2, and what John says in Revelation 14:1-4.

**II Corinthians 11:2** For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

**Revelation 14:1-4** Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.

The virgins include men and women. It just indicates those who have been converted

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regardless of gender. We are looking at something that could be a failing of both men and women. Each virgin had a part in obtaining the oil after being given the lamp, but half had not done so. Now what good is the lamp without the power to make use of it? That is a shattering, Grand Canyon-wide difference between the two groups given. The oil represents God's Holy Spirit.

Verse 13 shows that the overall point of the parable is that all of us are to always be on the alert, prepared with oil for the coming of the Bridegroom, because He could come at a time we think not. I think that you are well aware of this, at least mentally. We do not know the time of Jesus Christ's return. We accept that, but are we doing anything about it? In that area, we are all on the same level. Some will take advantage of the time rightly, and others will not. Whether we have to consider that Jesus' "five and five" is an exact figure, or whether He just did that to illustrate a possibility, I do not know, but it is up to us to just take the instruction that is there and carry the ball and go forward and do what we have to do.

We are going to go to I Thessalonians, chapter 4, because from this point on almost all of the scriptural references we are going to use come from the Apostle Paul, and there is a reason why. That reason is that when he was living—when he was pasturing all these churches; when he was writing all these epistles—he clearly shows in his writings that he believed that the return of Jesus Christ was imminent. So what did he choose, under the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit, to give as advice to those living with this thought in mind?

What that means then, at least in terms of our thinking, we are in the same position as those people who lived from, we will say roughly, 50 AD to the time of the Apostle Paul's death, because that would encompass all the epistles he wrote, for they were all written in that period of time. I think you know what it says in I Thessalonians 4, because it ends with the instruction regarding the blowing of the last trumpet and so forth. We are going to pick things up in chapter 5, verse 1.

**I Thessalonians 5:1-3** But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.

The first thing Paul does here is, in effect, take comfort in the fact that you know this much, that we are living in this period of time right before Christ's return. That is a gift to

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know this. There is nothing that gives comfort like God's truth that is sufficiently believed and then is acted upon. The Thessalonians were not in ignorance, and neither are we. They and we are both enlightened so that we have direction, and warned so that we should have greater motivation to act. He then continues showing that nobody knows when Christ will return.

Jesus Himself said the same thing. Therefore knowing a date is not the solution to the problem of what to do with the time. If it were important that we know, God would give it, but He in His wisdom has determined that it is better that we *not* know. For His purposes in His judgment of us, and the preparation of us for His kingdom, it is *better* that we do not know.

You know that when we know something of this magnitude, we would probably rest on our laurels and do very little. We would not produce as much. God gives us a little edge to work with, and hopefully that will give us the right kind of motivation.

We know for sure that we will not know the exact time of Christ's return, because Jesus Himself said it. Both of those parables in Matthew 24 and Matthew 25 contain very stern warnings in "the gnashing of teeth," and "the door being closed" (which I did not read) in the parable of the virgins. That too is a very shocking statement. When Christ returns, it is too late, and those who did not prepare, it looks like they have had it. The door is closed. That is sobering.

Old Testament prophecies show that those not prepared for the Day of the Lord will be caught in its sudden appearance, and destruction ensues. In fact, the people caught in it imagined, before it appeared, that they were secure, and were saying "peace and safety." Pretty deluded. Pretty self-confident.

The way that this is worded in I Thessalonians indicates that the Thessalonians wanted to know when Christ was going to return, and giving them the benefit of the doubt, it was not just idle curiosity. They wanted to know because they believed it would give them the right motivation to get themselves ready. But Paul's answer shows he did not know, and besides that, he had already instructed them as to what Christ Himself said, and that is that the Father *only* knows when the time is. That being said, he then goes on to essentially tell them, "Be on the alert." "Do not be deceived." "Do not rest on your laurels."

Many times the scriptures liken the Day of the Lord and Christ's coming to being like a woman near delivery of a child. Like the imminent of a baby's birth, signs of Christ's return are in the news. We have a young lady here who is pregnant. It is obvious that

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she is pregnant. It is in the news, so we are looking forward to that. We are anticipating it. And thus it is with Christ's return. It is in the news. They are not saying those exact words, but we are seeing events prophesied coming to pass, and therefore, for our sake, it is in the news.

But we still do not know the exact time of Christ's return even as we do not know the exact time of the birth of a baby, even though it is obvious that it is getting close. Jesus uses "the thief in the night" illustration to drive this point home. No thief writes a letter informing the homeowner that he is going to arrive at such and such a time to do some stealing. No. What is the procedure here? You get prepared knowing that it might happen. Then again, maybe it will not while you are alive, but it might, and so what do you do? What is the wisdom? You make preparations for it. Even though we do not know the exact day of Christ's return, **it is going to happen!**

Everybody, in a sense, is on the same level here. This is something nobody knows, but some are making better use of the time than others, and they are more on the alert than others, and they are making more effective and efficient preparation than others. This is completely and totally an individual response. Everybody has to do this on his own. You cannot depend on parents. You cannot depend on a spouse. You have to carry the ball yourself because your calling and your relationship with Christ is individual. Everybody has to do this on his own.

We know that the world will be eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and sowing, marrying and giving in marriage. What that of course means is that people are entirely focused on the normal business of carnal life, and so Christ's coming will catch them completely unaware.

**I Thessalonians 5:4-7** But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.

It is in these verses that this instruction truly catches up with church members in these intense times in which we live. We are not in total darkness, but at the same time every detail of Christ's return is not specifically outlined. So in all of our minds, even though we have been enlightened to a degree, there is vagueness in our approach to these days because everything is not exactly spelled out. God leaves things hanging like that in order to make us exercise our faith, and live by faith while these things are going out.

There is a not-so-subtle warning in this when we recall that the five foolish virgins were judged totally unprepared, and therefore Paul encourages the Thessalonians to not let the days of darkness lull *them* into being unprepared. They and we have every reason to be prepared, because God loves us and He gives us enough, as we are going along, to keep us on that path.

What Paul does here is weave together a fascinating tapestry of symbolism, using the terms "light," "day," "darkness," "night," "sleep," and "drunkenness." Now light symbolizes truth, and truth clearly outlines, therefore giving us the ability to see, to perceive the importance of things from God's point of view. Paul was building a foundation and saying, "Look, Thessalonians, you have been enlightened. You have a good foundation under you." He knew that, because he preached to them. So they were of the light, and we are of the light.

Light is the counterpart of day. Remember, day outlines things clearly and gives understanding. Day is that period of time that began when Christ came to the world. We learned that in Clyde's sermonette. He came on the fourth day of God's re-creation of the earth, and light—truth—dawned in the person of Jesus Christ. So we are "in the light," and we are living in the "day" that this light has brought. Therefore, again Paul is showing that we are prepared to face the responsibility of this period of time, and this gives us a wonderful opportunity to continue to understand and do the work that God requires, and to be saved.

Now darkness and night are the opposite of day. "Night" symbolizes times of evil, and "darkness" of men being dominated by Satan's deceptions and falsehood. What happens when it is dark? You keep running into things. Boom! Boom! Boom! You get into accidents, and you get a lot of hurt. A lot of pain goes on within it. You see, again God has revealed things to us so that we are not in the darkness, and our lives should be a great deal freer of the kind of things the world is going through, because we are able to see and make right choices.

"Drunkenness" indicates people living in uncertain, staggering lifestyles under the influence of deception and falsehood, but at the same time they are certain that they know what is going on, and that they are in control. That is what alcohol does to a person. The drunken person thinks it elevates his sensitivity when his actions are nothing but "funny" to those who are watching him. But he thinks he is in total control. That is why these people are shown in the Old Testament as saying "peace and safety." They are blind to the condition that they are in and that the world is in. So darkness, night, and drunkenness symbolize reasons why the world will be taken by surprise.

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Being in darkness symbolizes being in ignorance and wandering around spiritually, with no firmly and correctly set spiritual goals. Again, night pictures the realm of Satan and all the evils he represents, thus showing people under his dominion.

By way of contrast—for believers, Christ will not come in darkness. He is not unexpected. They have control of their mind, and thus their guard is up. Again, reflecting back on Matthew 25 and the parable of the virgins, they all had lamps, enabling them to see their way in Satan's darkened world.

Back to Paul here. He is warning us that we have the tools with which to make our way. "Do not allow yourself to be lulled into sleep." "Do not let yourself aimlessly drift into drunkenness." "Be alert." "Be self-controlled [or disciplined]." That is what the word "sober" in verse 6 means, which says, "Therefore, let us not sleep as others do, but let us watch and be sober [or self-controlled]."

We must not allow ourselves to be tired and yawn our way through life, or to be clothed in pajamas—if you understand what I mean). Daytime behavior means being completely open; there is nothing to hide; being faithful and true to the word of God; the conduct is upright.

We have seen thus far what Paul counseled the Thessalonians. Now was there ever another occasion to another people that he gave any indication that he felt (regardless of the city in which they lived) they were living in the end-time? If he did, did he warn those people, and what did he advise *them*?

We have seen so far what he advised the Thessalonians, which basically was, "Make the best use of your time." "Do not to let it slip away." Everybody has to make his own decision and has to set his own course. Nobody is going to do it for you. It has to be done.

Yes, there is such a place, and it is in I Corinthians 7:25-31.

**I Corinthians 7:25-31** Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy. I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress—that it is good for a man to remain as he is: Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you. But this I say, brethren, the time is short, so that from

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now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none, those who weep as though they did not weep, those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, those who buy as though they did not possess, and those who use this world as not misusing it. For the form of this world is passing away.

The context here, as you should be able to discern, concerns whether to marry or not. Paul's response is pretty clearly given, with the sense that he believed that Christ's return was imminent. To him it looked like it was really around the corner. Therefore, his counsel was that they should not marry in order that they may be able to more easily be single-mindedly devoted to Christ.

I will give you my take here, and that is that we have not yet reached this point. In fact, they never reached it in Paul's day, but I want you to see the sense of urgency that he had. He did not know when Christ was coming. He was looking at the signs he was aware of, and boy! he was gung-ho to make sure that everybody was really pushing forward, being on the alert.

I Corinthians was written after II Thessalonians—actually about three or four years later. How much longer Paul maintained that view that Christ's return was imminent is not known, but from every book I looked at just for this, he was still right on the same line of thinking. Now one thing that never changed was the advice as to what a Christian should do with his life.

We will go back to I Corinthians 7:23.

**I Corinthians 7:23-24** You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.

That is also pretty clear. The statement—"You were bought at a price"—is an indication of his concept of the focus of our responsibility. We owe our time and energy to the One who called us, the One who is serving us as High Priest, and the One we want to spend our lifetime with. That is the focus of life for a Christian. It is on Jesus Christ and the Father and their purpose.

We are going to go back to I Thessalonians 5:7.

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**I Thessalonians 5:7-11** For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

Sleeping is a normal and a natural event. However, it has negative connotations throughout the Bible, especially in such context as this where it indicates inactivity, combined with the sense of not being aware of what is going on; being awake, but not really being aware. This is a different category of people.

Many proverbs counsel us that sleep produces poverty. Think of that spiritually. Paul is admonishing us that we have no excuse, and in this context he is telling us that being spiritually asleep is being unproductive and being unaware of what is going on.

Now combined with being spiritually drunk, and thus drugged by this world's spiritual wine and unable to walk a straight line toward God's-given goal, we would be the very worst of a Christian; thus he urges us to take off our carnal pajamas and put on the spiritual armor of faith, hope, and love, and get to work. This means "get moving," because time and life are slipping away, and he tells us we must base our faith, hope, and love on who we are. We are the sons of God. We are not appointed to wrath.

We must base our faith, hope, and love on who and what God is, and what He has done for us. He has called us to an abundant life and salvation. He has provided us with the Savior Jesus Christ. He has given us His spirit, and He has provided these things, and we are involved in the process because we are not yet complete. If we were complete, we would not be in it. We are not yet complete. We are not going to produce salvation by all this activity, but we are going to greatly enhance what is achieved.

Almost every epistle Paul wrote contains some measure of exhortation to get on with our cooperation with what God is doing in our life. All this exhortation is given within an expectation that the times we are living in are just before Christ returns.

**I Thessalonians 5:15** See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.

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Again, I just want to briefly recall to your mind the parable at the end of Matthew 24 where the evil ones were smiting their fellow-servants. In verse 15, above, Paul says to render evil to no one, converted or unconverted. The *King James Version* says here, "To follow after what is good." Here it says, "See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always **pursue** what is good both for yourselves and for all."

The *King James* rendering is really weak. The word "pursue" is a better fit. It can also be translated "press toward." In more modern language it means "**Drive** yourself." It is really a strong word (*dioko*). "Follow after," you could just kind of tip-toe after somebody, and you are following after, but that is not what Paul is picturing. He is saying "**Push** yourself!" "Really be disciplined." "Drive!" That same word can mean "Drive away." It can mean, "Seek eagerly after." It can mean, "Pursue without hostility." It is just a burning desire to achieve what the other is doing. It can appear in a negative context, and be translated as "persecute."

What kind of evaluation are we giving God of the worth of what He has invested in us if our actions are to just dawdle along because the end is near? If you are familiar at all with I and II Thessalonians, you will know that there were some in the congregation who quit their jobs and were just sitting on their duff waiting things out. "Why even be working?" was the thought.

I bring this up only because it appears in the Bible, and giving these people the benefit of the doubt that they were converted, they were still capable of making such a decision. So the capability of making a wrong choice is there, but with the kind of instruction Paul gives, we are surrounded with a body of evidence as to what our approach ought to be.

I am going to take you to another set of familiar verses in the book of Romans. We went from I Thessalonians to I Corinthians, and now to Romans 13. Again we will see that Paul's thinking is exactly the same to the Romans as it was to those others.

**Romans 13:10** Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Recall that parable in Matthew 24:45-51. "Love does no harm to a neighbor," and we have no closer neighbors than our brethren in the church.

**Romans 13:10-14** Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. And do this, knowing the time [It is interesting he should say that right in this context], that now it is high time to awake out of sleep;

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for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

The book of Romans appears to have been written somewhere between 56-58 AD. In verse 12, we are told, as we were in Thessalonians, to "cast off" and "put on." It is interesting that he used a little bit different word; not just "take off," but "cast off." It is a very decisive word, and it is the word used to translate into "excommunicate," as to excommunicate one from the congregation or synagogue. He changed the words around, but the meaning is the same. Sometimes it had more of an edge to it than it did at others, but this is one where it has an edge to it: "Excommunicate." "Cast off."

Then he says "Put on." This is used either literally, as to don or be clothed, but metaphorically, as it is in this verse, in practical spiritual application, it means we are to quit sinning, and instead do righteous works. That is the sum of it. So in this context, which again includes a sense of time, it is telling us: "Time is running out. Hurry! Make the change from your filthy sinful lifestyle to new clean righteous conduct in the eyes of God." That is the paraphrase.

Let us go to another book, to Hebrews 12:12-15. The book of Hebrews appears to have been written in the mid 60s, and this is speculated on the basis of the frequent present-tense references to Temple operations. Temple operations stopped in 70 AD; and so whenever this was written, there is every indication the Temple was still operating. Paul was martyred probably around 66 AD, and therefore Hebrews was written just prior to that time. So here we are brought up to a time just before the apostle's death, and what is he telling Christians to do?

Notice Paul did not say, "Time is almost gone, and you are not in too good a shape right now. So don't try to get healthy. Don't try to really strengthen your body so that you can go forward." No. He told them "**Do it!**"

**Hebrews 12-12-15** Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. Pursue peace. [Drive toward it! Run after it! Charge!] with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest

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any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.

In this brief section of verses, Paul is urging these people "like there is no tomorrow." Maybe he felt the imminence of his own death, and that added an edge to these things. I do not know, but his concern for the brethren was such that he wanted them to be of the same mind that he was, being urgent about making the best use of time.

The word "lift" in verse 12 means "to strengthen." With it is the word "hand," which is built in—an instrument of labor. "Strengthen your hand so that you can work" is one of the inferences which can come from that. Paul is actually urging us to exercise them back into good spiritual health.

Why tell people that if the game, brethren, is almost over? Well, Paul did not look at it as though the game was over, even though in II Timothy he stated there that there was a crown set aside for him. He felt confident that he was going to be in the Kingdom of God, but he did not let up. He just kept pressing on, and he kept urging his brethren to press on, because he loved them too. You can be sure that he had the feelings just like everybody else of wanting to sit down and take it easy. I am sure he had times like that when he relaxed for awhile, but he got right back up again, and on he went.

It is estimated that the Apostle Paul was maybe in his mid 60s when he was martyred, and he called himself "Paul, the aged." He really was not that old, but I think I can guarantee you that he was worn out from the exertions of giving himself to the One who owned him. That is how real Christ was to him, and that is the way he felt about himself in relation to that One who owned him, that he owed Him because everything that Christ was to him was the only thing in life that was valuable. We will get into that in just a bit.

In verse 13 he is urging us not to allow ourselves to get sidetracked. In verse 14, the term "follow" in the *King James* means "strive to gain," or better yet, "make every effort to make peace." Let us bring in that parable of Matthew 24:45-51 again, where it says the unfaithful servants smite their fellow servants. Paul says, "Make peace." Do not let that get away from us.

Finally, for our purposes, in verse 15 he continues to strongly influence them by telling them to "Take heed, lest you fall short." He is appealing to them with everything that is in him to get on with it. So if time was almost over, why be so urgent? "We have plenty of time to overcome and grow."

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I think the reality of the matter, to him, was that whether Christ's return was imminent or a thousand years hence, the goal was so great that there was no time to waste, because brethren, tomorrow we might die.

Ephesians is one of the prison epistles, and was therefore written probably between 62-63 AD.

**Ephesians 5:14-17** Therefore He says, "Awake, you who sleep. Arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light." See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

I want to make a connection to an Old Testament scripture in Isaiah 60:1-2.

**Isaiah 60:1-2** Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LOORD is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; But the LOORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you.

Brethren, I have no doubt in my mind personally that the Apostle Paul was thinking of this scripture when he wrote this in Ephesians 5:14-16. There is a difference. Isaiah 60:1-2 is about the resurrection of the dead. Ephesians 5:14-16, where he says, "Awake, you who sleep," these people are *preparing* for the resurrection of the dead.

There is a tie between the two, but he draws the metaphors together so that we can see that if we are asleep, brethren, we need to be resurrected from that and open our eyes to the light of reality, to the truth of God, and let this be the guidance that we need in order to be in that resurrection.

He is urging those people to wake up, to take care of their responsibilities to God, and to be quick about it. He is again saying, "Make the most of every opportunity in the time remaining. Keep your life focused on what truly matters to God's purpose."

We are now going to go to Colossians 4:5. The book of Colossians is a prison epistle written about the same time as the book of Ephesians. Here Paul says the following:

**Colossians 4:5** Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming

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the time.

Again, in the context of the times, he mentions to them to make the best use of time.

Is there any place that the Apostle Paul used himself as an example of how *he* was conducting his life in relation to the time? There are most definitely places like this, but we are going to go to the most obvious. It is in I Corinthians 9. Paul followed in his life what he counseled other people to do. Recall we were in chapter 7 when he said that the time is near, that it was so bad do not even get married.

**I Corinthians 9:24-27** Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate [or self-controlled, or disciplined] in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore **I run thus**: not with uncertainty. [He is saying that he does not just dawdle along.] Thus I fight [another strong term indicating striving]: not as one who beats the air. [Paul is using a figure of speech. It means, "I do not shadowbox.] But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

So here we are, in the same time-period as chapter 7. He wrote this in the late 50s. He had been converted for over twenty years. He had, as we might say, "seen it all" from the time of his conversion, and he is not slowing down one bit even though, by his own words, he is approaching old age.

In the beginning of verse 23 he says, "I do all things for the gospel's sake." Everything in his life was now wrapped around what he had been called to. He did everything for the gospel's sake. What an example he is to all of us! There is pretty good indication from places where he dropped a hint or two here and there that the Apostle Paul was never in good health.

I have seen people speculate, mostly in fictional accounts of his life that draw upon the scripture, and they invariably picture him as a small person, actually kind of frail, and with bad eyes so that he could barely see. In fact it is pretty apparent that he did not literally write the epistles. There is one where he said he did it "with his own hand," but it might have been a real push for him to do those things.

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He had a "thorn in his flesh"—whatever that was. It was something that kept him constantly debilitated so that he had to cry out to God probably every day for the strength he needed to carry on. And yet, here he is saying that he is striving with all of his might. Who knows? He may have had migraine headaches every day, and there was no Anacin, no Aspirin, no Aleve, no Tylenol—nothing that we might find at a corner drugstore to relieve it. I do not know that, but we know that their technology and pharmaceuticals were just not as advanced to what we have now. Probably were not as deadly either.

But they did not have the means of relief available to them, and this is the kind of man God called to glorify Himself in, and this is the man who wrote "My God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Jesus Christ." He could say that with confidence because God had done it for him—perhaps physically every day. How often do we just gaily-gad around, barely getting ourselves out of bed in the morning, and instead of charging off to work, we practically crawl out.

I am not trying to demean anybody in what I say. It is just human nature to do those things, and Paul would not accept what human nature dealt out to him, but he challenged it all along the way using prayer to God, asking for help. When you add to what I said what Paul said in II Corinthians about all those things he suffered—the beatings he took, being left for dead, and probably was dead, and resurrected that one time—he has every right to tell us how to do it. The right comes from his own experiences, and knowing that God had done it for him.

In verse 25 he tells us to exercise self-control, and that we are to apply ourselves to the advance of our spiritual life as one who is engaged in a race and competing for a prize.

It is interesting where he says, "I beat my body and bring it into subjection." That literally means, "I give my body a black eye." He did it himself kind of thing. He is just showing us how strenuous he was at disciplining himself to do what he felt needed to be done to please and to glorify God.

We are now going to go to Philippians 3:7. The book of Philippians is the third of his prison epistles. It was written somewhere around 62-64 AD.

**Philippians 3:7-17** But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which

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is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule let us be of the same mind. Brethren, join in following **my** example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.

Again, he makes it abundantly clear that his pre-conversion life, as far as he was concerned, was absolutely useless in terms of salvation. He does not mean that those things he named were evil. In fact they were gifts of God, but as far as earning salvation, they were of no help to him whatever. Indeed, they could have been very dangerous, depending on how Paul valued them.

The same is true of our pre-conversion life, including our job, our education, family life, and we might call it "pedigree." A young person growing up in the church, and having a fairly good Christian upbringing and family life can find that actually, even though it is a blessing, to be a difficult detriment if he trusts them for his salvation.

Paul called the relative spiritual value of those things "refuse." Instead, he left them behind in terms of salvation and pressed forward toward the resurrection on the basis of his life in Christ, because now that was the only thing that mattered.

Paul actually gives us a formula for success here in verses 12 and 13. We see, there, his frame of mind. He did not feel as though he had it made. He kept going, always pushing forward. He said, "This one thing I do." He concentrated on one objective, and that was the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus. What this required of him was to obliterate his past as being of any substantial value.

In verse 14, he gives us the next step. He did not permit himself to lose sight of the prize. He kept his eye on the goal despite the sacrifices required. He then urges us to follow his example so that we too can share life in the kingdom with each other. There

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are undoubtedly many things that one might point out that drove Paul so that he could honestly say that he worked harder than they all, as he does in I Corinthians.

Do you know that Paul himself gives the answer as to what it was? This was written just a bit after I Corinthians, just actually months later.

**II Corinthians 5:11-12** Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences. For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have an answer for those who boast in appearance and not in heart.

There was a controversy in the Corinthian congregation, and there were those who were really down on Paul, so he was writing to those who were *not* down on Paul, and encouraging them.

**II Corinthians 5:13-15** For if we are beside ourselves [in other words, "crazy"], it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ compels [constrains] us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

Paul tells us what drove him on. It was the love of Christ. The word "constrains" in verse 14 means controlled, urges, impels, pushes, drives. That word indicates internal motivation for the action that one sees on the outside. It was the love of Christ that **drove** him. Notice what I said. It was the love **of** Christ. It was not merely love **for** Christ. It was a little bit more than that. It was the love **of** Christ. This is a love that began with the Father, who in turn gave the Son. The Son, out of love, gave Himself.

We are given the love of God by means of the Holy Spirit, and thus we are enabled to return the love by giving ourselves in submission to them. In other words, Paul was so appreciative of what Christ had done *for* him, and was continuing to do *in* him, and through him, that he felt he could not do enough in return, so he constantly drove himself to do as much as he could. Yes, he loved Christ, but he was attributing that love and that drive to the gift that God gave him.

I bring these things to your attention because, brethren, we have the same gift, but are we making use of it? Do we really appreciate Christ so that we are able to give

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ourselves to Him unreservedly like the Apostle Paul did, every day asking God to supply the need that we might return to Him the love that started with Him, through Christ, onto us, into us, and back out to Him? It was a loving appreciation. It was a full-blown loving gratitude that compelled him, that built in him a loving obligation to do whatever demands arose in the meeting of his responsibility regardless of the sacrifice involved. This brethren, is something we all need to ask God to build in us, and if we have it there, there will be no doubt about us being in the resurrection.

In summary, what we saw in Paul's writings is that he went all out dedicating himself unreservedly to his calling regardless of whether he thought the time was long or short. He then urges us to do the same, because we do not know the time of Christ's return. He also urges us, because the goal is so great, it is best not to take any chance whatever losing out on any part of it. If we follow Paul's advice, we will not be one who is beating the fellow-servants. We will not be one whose lamp is empty. We will be prepared.