

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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The Present Distress

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians and included this statement: "I think then that this is good in view 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 released. Are you released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you." (1 Cor. 7:26-28).

Paul certainly taught the doctrine of Christ, and in this letter appears to be answering questions that the Corinthians had submitted to him (Should we desire marriage or avoid it; should the marriage be ended if one becomes a believer and the spouse does not; should one remain a celibate or virgin, preferring this state over marriage; should widows remarry?).

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul discusses basic principles of marriage. But notice here that the desire for marriage was, at that time, to be considered in view of a prevailing or impending state of great physical or mental strain and stress, some great trouble for which some additional suffering would become an added trial for those getting married. That distress could be avoided by not getting married; the single would be better advised to remain single.

Paul is not telling them that it would be sinful for them to marry (1 Cor. 7:36), but that they would be facing an excessive amount of tribulation if they did. We are not told exactly what the distress was, but we do know that believers in Corinth faced persecution from the Jews living there, the heathen, and Roman persecution was increasing. Marriage in those circumstances would prove to be a burden for them as they not only had to care for themselves, but for new spouses and children. During those times of trial it would be better not to marry (1 Cor. 7:38). Paul's wisdom would even be valuable today when applied in situations of heavy financial burdens, serious illness, or family responsibilities. To draw the conclusion that these conditions would cement his judgment as a permanent

directive to refrain from marriage would be incorrect. It applied to the “present distress” of that day.

Although he gave his judgment, which was proper for those prevailing circumstances, he was certainly guided by the Holy Spirit in what he taught (1 Cor. 2:13). Paul never contradicted the will of God (cf. 1 Cor. 7:40). Nor was he teaching that those who desired to terminate their marriages would be justified under the “present distress” umbrella (v. 27). And certainly whenever one chooses to marry, that marriage should never interfere with any duty which is owed to God. Christians owe their primary allegiance to the Lord, not their mates (cf. Luke 14:26). Christians should be supremely faithful to the Lord whether single or married.

Presently, the pandemic virus certainly can be called a “present distress.” The seriousness of the threat has prompted government officials and health care experts to call on the general public to change their thinking and behavior, to act prudently, with good judgment, following their recommended guidelines designed to stop the transmission of the deadly virus. Many Americans have complied. Churches have complied by refraining from the “holy kiss” and gathering in assemblies. The present distress will alter our expression of faith, but not our devotion in faith.

Recall that in Leviticus 13, one who had an “infection” was to appear before the priest and could be placed in isolation for seven days, which then could become seven more days, which then could become even longer. He would live alone outside the camp (Lev. 13:4-5, 45-46). That person could not be among God’s people. To such a person, was it a “present distress?”

Recall that when the Jerusalem church started on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ it was a time when the people who had traveled to Jerusalem would be preparing to return to their homes. Their time in Jerusalem was now extended for those who became Christians as their excitement and desire was to hear all that the apostles were preaching day by day. As they continued in the apostles’ doctrine their travel funds were depleted. They needed to eat, but had exhausted their expense money. Were they in a “present distress?”

Fortunately, other Christians came to their rescue: “For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles’ feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.” (Acts 4:34-35). Could there be a lesson for us in this response from other Christians?

No man knows the future. We do not have the answers as to when this pandemic will end or what people's situation will be if and when it does end. But the Christian knows this: our God is in control:

“Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (2 Cor. 4:16–5:1).

The Christian also knows to live life looking for opportunities to serve others, as did those Christians in Acts 4. When the world is hoarding, we can share. When the world is “looking out for number one,” we can sacrifice for others. Our God will never leave us or forsake us! May our God watch over you, my dear brethren.

- Gary Smalley

Faith Is Like That

On a trip to the mountains of the American west we decided to cross a pass that was above 10,000 feet. We could see the summit in the distance and started on the designated route, following markings the map told us would take us there. There were times the summit was obscured by trees and turns in the road. There were a series of difficult switchbacks and dangerous curves that called for caution. Sometimes it seemed the grade was downhill, away from the summit, or even carrying us back where we came from. An occasional car was disabled along the way and we wondered if that might happen to us. Someone would ask how much further it was and we wondered if it was worth the effort.

We reached the top and felt the joy of achievement. We paused and beheld the beauties we could not see from below. From this vantage point we could see for miles, whereas below we were limited by distance and obstructions. We saw the road we had traveled and from the top it didn't look near that difficult and long; it now had a beauty we could not appreciate as we traveled it. The journey up was well worth the effort for the joy we now had.

Walking by faith is like that. God in His word gives us just a glimpse of the summit, enough that we long to be there, a place of rest and beauty beyond imagination. We may not fully

understand until we reach the end but it will be worth it. The fact that others “break down” will not stop us. The difficulties of “switch-backs” and “dangerous curves” do not frighten us. God has set up “guard rails” and “sign posts” for our protection and guidance. Though we be weary and wonder if it be worthwhile, and how much longer we must climb, “we faint not ... our... inward man is renewed ... our light affliction worketh for us ... an eternal weight of glory.” To attain “a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens ... we walk by faith and not by sight: we are of good courage ... we make it our aim to be well pleasing in His sight” (2 Cor 4:16-5:9)... That’s what walking by faith is all about.

- Morris D. Norman

Correct Me, O Lord

“I know, O LORD, that a man’s way is not in himself, nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23).

We are simply not capable of navigating our own way through life. God is the potter, we are the clay, and we desperately need Him to mold us (Jer. 18:1-6). Trying to take control of our own lives has just ruined the original beauty that God had envisioned for us. “All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way...” (Isa. 53:6). God had a safe path plotted out for us, but we refused to listen to His guidance. We have rejected the narrow way for an easier road of our own devising. With the world cheering us on all around, we rush headlong toward destruction (Matt. 7:13-14).

Yet, trusting our own instincts we are often blissfully unaware of the danger we are in. “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death!” (Prov. 14:12). We convince ourselves that we have it all under control. Stop and ask for directions? Never! In our certainty we forget the warning of Jeremiah. “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9). Is it possible that our heart is deceiving us? Is it possible that we are mistaken? Maybe we don’t have it all figured out and under control. Maybe we need help.

Recognizing we cannot direct our own steps, we must cry out with the prayer of Jeremiah: “Correct me, O LORD, but with justice; not with Your anger, or You will bring me to nothing” (Jer. 10:24). Yes, we need correction. We need God to show us where we are deceiving ourselves. With His help we can stop covering up and minimizing our faults. We can rather expose and address them.

This process is not quick and painless. It is very difficult to see ourselves the way God sees us and constantly grapple with our insufficiencies. Yet, this struggle is exactly what we should expect traveling along the narrow way. And we can find comfort in God's grace. He does not correct us in anger, but in love. He is always there to pick us up when we fall and strengthen us to press on to higher ground. Though we continually fall short of His perfect character, He has made a way for us to bridge the gap through Jesus (Rom. 3:23-24).

The important thing is that we never harden our heart to His correction. It's when we are most at ease in our faith that we are most at danger (1 Cor. 10:13). We must allow God's word to function as a mirror, showing us what corrections need to be made (James 1:23-25). We must allow it to function as a scalpel, opening up the innermost thoughts of our hearts (Heb. 4:12). Like Jeremiah, we must pray for and welcome God's correction at all times, because there is no doubt we need it.

- Grady Huggins

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- > Ask your preacher where the Bible says join the church of your choice. Compare his answer with Acts 2:47!
 - > "If a man's conscience is as comfortable as his mattress, he should have no trouble getting a good night's sleep!"
 - > "The pleasures of youth often make the pains of old age!"
 - > "Many people borrow trouble and return it with interest!"
 - > "Some people want religion simply as a kind of fire escape!"
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What Must I Do To Be Saved?

HEAR THE GOSPEL

(Romans 10:14-17; John 20:30-31; Romans 1:15-17)

BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST

(Acts 8:37; John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6)

REPENT OF PAST SINS

(Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30)

CONFESS CHRIST

(Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37)

BE BAPTIZED

(Romans 6:3-4; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-39; 1 Peter 3:21)

LIVE A FAITHFUL LIFE

(Revelation 2:10; 2 Peter 1:5-11; John 15:1-8; Hebrews 10:23-25)