

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Beautiful In Its Time

The Old Testament is a collection of 39 books given to man by our God. These books vary in style from the impassioned preaching of the prophets to the reflective wisdom of Solomon.

Ecclesiastes begins with the elusive phrase, "Vanities of vanities." It means "absurdity, frustration, futility or nonsense." The point the writer makes throughout the book is that life is utterly futile without God. In the first two chapters we take a tour with Solomon in his quest for happiness, but we return empty handed.

In the third chapter we read: "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; A time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace." (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8).

We have no control over most of the events listed in these verses. The time for planting and harvesting depends upon the changing of the seasons. Our "time to weep" is usually associated with another's "time to die." If it were up to most of us, there would never be a "time of war." Immediately after showing there is "a time for every purpose under heaven," he informs us God has "made everything beautiful in its time" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). But how could death, war or weeping ever be beautiful?

One of our problems is we are often desperately nearsighted; we look at the events of the moment and forget their relation to the greater scheme of things. We can never stand back far enough to view things as our Creator does. Our God declares "the end from the

beginning" (Isaiah 46:10). God sees the beauty of the changing scenes of life. Let us notice a few of the beautiful times which often escape our attention.

The Beauty of Parenting

It is amazing how fast our children grow up! We need to enjoy them while we can. We will never regret the time we spend with our children; it is an investment in the future. Are you too busy to enjoy your children?

One of the most haunting secular songs I have ever heard is *Cats In The Cradle*. It tells the story of a little boy who keeps asking his father to spend time with him. The father keeps putting him off. The boy keeps telling his father he wants to be like him when he grows up. Finally the little boy is a full grown man who has no time for his father. Like father like son.

The values that will guide our children throughout life will be learned in our homes. What values are your children learning?

Some parents are so busy trying to "make a living" they forget to "make a life." What good is the money we earn if we can not enjoy it? Solomon reminds us "that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor; it is the gift of God" (Ecclesiastes 3:13).

Husbands and Wives

Sociologists claim that one reason for the increasing divorce rate among middle age couples is they have built their entire lives around their children—then the children leave home. Each spouse is then left in an empty house with a stranger. Husbands and wives must learn to enjoy time together.

In the first seven chapters of Proverbs, Solomon admonishes the young man about the dangers of fornication. As a way of avoiding sexual sin, the young man is told to "drink water from your own cistern, and running water from your own well" (Proverbs 5:15). These words simply mean the sexual desires were to be fulfilled in the marital relationship. Solomon also said, "Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love. For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman, and be embraced in the arms of a seductress?" (Proverbs 5:18-20).

Children need good parents, but they also need to see a good example of a husband and wife. The children need to know that their parents are madly in love with each other. Where else will they find a proper example to pattern their marriage after?

Christians Must Grow

When one obeys the gospel, he is considered a "babe" in Christ (1 Peter 2:1). God expects his children to grow up! There is a time to be a babe in Christ, and a time to be a mature Christian. One of the qualifications of elders is that they not be a "novice" (1 Timothy 3:6). A man can be 65 years old and still considered a "novice."

While studying with a "babe in Christ," I can exercise all of the patience in the world. However, when I find those who have been Christians for 30 years and still behaving like children, my patience wears a bit thin.

Conclusion

Though our lives are constantly changing, let us learn to see the beauty in each stage. Let us pray God will "teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12).

- David Padfield

GOD'S GRACE IN KINDNESS TOWARD THOSE IN CHRIST JESUS

By inspiration, the apostle Paul wrote this "God-breathed" statement to Christians in Ephesus from a Roman prison in about A.D. 62-64: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Among the wonderful gifts that God has provided for us, and they are many, the gifts that are shown in this passage are indeed precious and worthy of our thanksgiving. God has provided everything we need to bless us with salvation. It is the greatest blessing to mankind, but unrecognized by most. It is the greatest blessing to mankind, but let us never forget that the wonderful provision was given to bring praise and glory to the God of heaven (Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14).

What God has done in Christ demonstrates something significant about His purpose: "so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2:7). Can you see what God will show in the people who belong to Him, when Christ is revealed and we are revealed with Him in glory

(Colossians 3:4)? (Contemplate: believers raised from spiritual death to sit with Christ in the heavenly realms! What surpassing riches of His grace! What an inheritance is prepared for the faithful!)

What else do we know? Without God's salvation provision we could not be saved. Without God's grace we could not be saved. (There is so much comprising the grace of God that it cannot be covered adequately by this short writing.) His grace "has appeared ... to all men" instructing us to take action (Titus 2:11), but many do not receive God's grace, which must be received through faith, the right kind of faith (Ephesians 2:8; cf. 2 Corinthians 6:1). (There is so much comprising faith, a comprehensive term, that it cannot be covered adequately by this short writing. I trust it is sufficient to say that "faith" summarizes man's acceptable response to God's gracious offer. In spite of popular opinion, it is not "faith alone" or "faith only." If you have been taught that it is, see James 2:24.) Without God's providing the walk of acceptance of His gift, the walk of faith, we could not be saved. It is not possible for any man to devise a walk that will result in salvation (Ephesians 2:8). A walk that attempts to earn or merit salvation is not the right walk because the result is boasting on the part of man; man could claim that God owed salvation to him (Ephesians 2:9). Such detracts from the praise and glory that is due God. But the walk of faith, a walk expressing faith by God-designed action, is required in order to receive the gracious gift of salvation (John 3:36; cf. Romans 1:5; 16:26; Matthew 7:21. Be careful that you do not ignore the action which demonstrates true faith: Hebrews 11.).

But notice further what is said of those who walk in faith: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10). We are HIS workmanship, not our own. We are created in Christ Jesus by HIS wonderful plan, not our own. We are created in Christ Jesus for HIS glorious purpose, walking in good works, not a purpose of our own imagination. The walk of faith for those who have been saved from the horrible consequences of their sins by God's plan in providing forgiveness by grace through faith demonstrates the "in Christ" characteristics of spiritual life: good deeds, "faith working through love." (Galatians 5:6).

In writing to Titus, Paul declared: "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, ... This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men." (Titus 3:5, 8). All of the glory in regard of man's salvation belongs to God, not to man for any reason, including human works. But the saved must continue in the walk of faith, walking in good works that are described in His word. New life in Christ has divinely described

characteristics. Resolving to live this way is the renewed lifestyle that heaven has planned for God's redeemed.

How wonderful is "the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

- Gary Smalley

* "He who walks with God will be out of step with the world!"

* "Tragedy can make you bitter or better!"

* "True character is unveiled in misfortune!"

* "Never borrow sorrow from tomorrow!"

* "A temperamental person is easy glum, easy glow!"

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)