

The Old Paths

Volume 10, Issue 44

December 28, 2003

“The Swiftmess Of Time”

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Soon this year will be over, and with it all that we have accomplished, all that we have planned to do, and all that we have failed to do! This year sure has gone by quickly, hasn't it? As one year passes, we realize how swiftly time marches on.

On several occasions, the Bible talks about how swift time is. Job stated, “*My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope*” (Job 7:6). David said, “*For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away*” (Ps. 90:9-10). The apostle Paul talked about our time upon this earth. He said, “*See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil*” (Eph. 5:15-16). It is foolish not to make the most of the time we have!

As we look back on 2003, has our time been spent in favor of God or man? Let us ask some soul-searching questions and see how well we did in 2003.

Did We Serve God Acceptably In 2003?

I have often heard brethren pray that we will live in such a way that we serve God acceptably. This certainly is a great thing, for the

Bible teaches that our actions must be acceptable to God (Heb. 12:28). We must do all “*in the name of the Lord*” (Col. 3:17).

Yet, in considering our “everyday” lives, after such prayers, did we actually serve God acceptably in 2003? Serving God acceptably was first and foremost on the Hebrew writer's mind (Heb. 12:23-29). Where is it on your list of priorities?

Jesus said, “*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon*” (Matt. 6:24). In Luke's account, Christ said, “*He that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth*” (Lk. 22:26-27). Were you served or did you serve in 2003?

We need to think sincerely about this matter of whether or not we served God acceptably. Our soul will be judged by the things we did in 2003, good or bad! Solomon wrote, “*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil*” (Ecc. 12:13-14). “*If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour*” is what Jesus said in John 12:26.

Did We Murmur At God's Commands In 2003?

Paul said, “*Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world*” (Phil. 2:14-15). According to Paul, the reason that we should do all things without murmurings and disputing is two-fold: 1) That we may be blameless and harmless. 2) That we may shine as lights in the world. Remember brethren, Philippians 2:14-15 is not just a good idea or a suggestion. This is a command!! Seeing that this is true, when we find our life is not in harmony with the Scriptures, we are not to gripe and complain, but change (Jas. 1:22-25)!!!

Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for God's people to murmur and complain. The Old Testament is filled with accounts of God's people complaining against Him (Examples: Ex. 12, 16; Num. 14, 16, 17). Why did God cause some to be destroyed in the Old Testament? It is because they were guilty of murmuring against Him (I Cor. 10:10)!! “*Murmuring against divine disposals and commands is a sin that greatly provokes, especially when it grows to such a head as to issue in apostasy, and a revolt from Him and His good ways*” (Matthew Henry Commentary, Vol. 6, p. 447).

Are we guilty of murmuring against God? Murmuring against God takes place when we complain, grumble, or when we try to excuse our behavior as right when we know it is in contradiction to God's word. The end result is disobedience!

Seeing that God destroyed His own people in the Old Testament for murmuring, why do we think we are exempt from His wrath when we murmur and complain against Him?

Did We Follow God In 2003?

We know that many followed their own lusts and desires in 2003. Did you do this, or did you follow God? How do we follow God? By obeying His word.

Ephesians 5:1-11 shows the Ephesians (and those who are Christians today) that they are the saints of God and need to act like it. In verses 3-7, we see that they were not to be engaged in sinful actions, or sinful words, and were warned not to be deceived by those speaking "vain words."

In verses 8-11, Paul says Christians are instead to "walk as children of light." They (and we) were also to "(Prove) what is acceptable to the Lord" and "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."

Paul wrote the Corinthians and told them to be "followers" or imitators of him as he followed Christ (I Cor. 4:16, 11:1). When we study God's word, we will know how Paul was, and we will know how we are supposed to live.

Looking to God's Word as our standard, will we follow God in 2004?

Did We Grow And Improve In 2003?

The command to grow spiritually is something that we cannot overlook. Just as young children grow physically, God expects His children to grow out of the "infant" stage to spiritual adulthood. Peter, on two occasions, wrote about Christians growing. He wrote in I Peter 1:24-2:2, "For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you laying aside all malice, ... guile, and hypocrisies,

and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby."

He then says in II Peter 3:17-18, "Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen."

Seeing that spiritual growth is something we can control (unlike physical growth), God condemns some for their "stunted growth." In Hebrews 5:12-14, we read about Christians who had not grown as they ought. "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, and told them that they were still babes in Christ. This is because they were not "spiritual," but "carnal." They were still "babes in Christ" and were guilty of "envying, and strife, and division ... and walk (ed) as men." (I

Cor. 3:1-3).

By growing and developing spiritually, we can provide help, comfort, and guidance to others who are babes in Christ. There is no sin in being a "babe in Christ"! Just as a parent expects his child to grow and mature physically, so also God expects His children to grow and mature spiritually! Think of how terrible it would be if God's people refused to grow like they were supposed to!!

Paul made a distinction between the "babe in Christ" and one who was "spiritual" (i.e. spiritually minded, and not carnally minded, I Cor. 3:1). In Galatians 6:1, Paul says that restoring a brother overtaken in a fault was something that a mature Christian would do. What if we have not grown and are not mature Christians like we ought to be?? Who will be helping to restore those who have left the Lord? In II Timothy 2:15, Paul talked about one who handles God's word aright as a "workMAN." As Hebrews 5:12-14 says, some cannot handle God's word because they are not of "full age" yet. How much did you grow in 2003? How much did I grow in 2003?

Conclusion

2003 is ending. Let us determine now to work and better ourselves in 2004. Let us take time to examine ourselves, see where our life needs improvement, and improve! How have we done in 2003??

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