

By This They Will Know That You Are My Disciples

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The sun had set and the meal was finished. The Messiah turns to the disciple that would betray Him and says, *“What you do, do quickly.”* No one quite understands what has taken place; none but two. His disciples shrug the exchange off as something trivial; perhaps He has asked him to buy the supplies for the feast or give money to the poor. No one knew of the plot to take their Savior’s life; none but two. With the thoughts of His betrayal fresh in His mind, He now turns to His faithful disciples, *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another”* (John 13:33-35).

The defining quality of Christ’s disciples would be the love they had for one another. This would be something that would set them apart from every other person on the face of the earth. Love is one, if not the most, sought after things on this earth and it would be the difference between Christ’s disciples and Satan’s. How does one know if they have true love? What is love?

It must be understood that love is of God, as John states: *“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God... God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him”* (I John 4:7, 16). God is the embodiment of love; love in its purest form. By becoming godly, we will naturally be exhibiting love. Love is more than the “warm feeling” we have when we are around people we like. Love is deeper than that. It certainly includes those feelings but it is selling love short of what it truly is to confine love into such a small box dependent on our emotions.

If we fulfill the commandments of God we are said to have love (II John 6). God has done so much for us, *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16). If there were ever a demonstration of love that would be it! *“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”* (I John 4:10). In the gift of His Son, God showed us how to love. Christ’s death was a fulfillment of prophecy, and an example of someone willing to pay the ultimate price for a people that were undeserving. Christ did not die for humanity when it wanted to follow Him. He died when one of His own had betrayed Him, the other disciples denied Him, and while His own people called for His crucifixion in blind hatred! He prayed that *“this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will”* (Matthew 26:39). His love caused Him to die for us! His love caused Him to be an obedient Son! His love opened the door of grace and mercy that we now enter through to be saved! His love was much more than lip service and warm feelings.

Now we know what is love. Love is a fulfillment of God's law, motivated by our care for God and others. Now the question must be asked, do WE have love? If someone were to come in among us, would they leave knowing they had been in the presence of love? Christ spent hours and hours of His day while on earth with His disciples. The three or so years that He ministered, were spent in large part with His disciples. In the closing days before His death, He shared almost every moment with them teaching and comforting them for what would come. That is what love does. Paul writes in his letter to the Corinthians, "*Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails*" (I Corinthians 13:4-8). Is this how we describe ourselves? Do we "*suffer long*" with our brethren or do we head for the door after the worship service is over? Do we "*behave rudely*" and "*seek our own*" amongst ourselves? Love does not do these things. Love bears its brothers' and sisters' burdens. Love is not provoked to anger, despite the inconvenience it may be put through. Love never fails.

Before we can change the world and convert the lost, we must fix ourselves. This includes us as individuals and us as a group. God loves us and calls us through His love. If we love Him as He loved us, we will keep His commandments and we will enjoy His love for all eternity. Oh what a day that will be, when He comes in His Glory! We close now with a psalm written to God in praise: "*Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; Let such as love Your salvation say continually, The LORD be magnified!*" (Psalms 40:16). AMEN.

By the Ladies

For the past three months we have been running a series of articles called "By the Ladies." It has come to our attention that this section might be violating scriptures such as I Timothy 2:11-12. It has never been our intention to place a stumbling block in any of our brothers or sisters way. There are many questions that come to mind in regards to this section of our magazine and the above scriptures: Is writing a form of public teaching equal to in all ways as teaching a bible class and if a woman writes an article addressing a public, mixed audience, is she usurping authority?

To make sure that we do not violate anyone's conscience in this matter, the staff at the Gospel Fire have decided to no longer run this section of our magazine. We appreciate all the contributions to our magazine done by our lady readers and we are currently trying to come up with new ideas to involve you once again that will not cause a stumbling block for our readers. We thank everyone for your continued support and contributions to this magazine.

We Are the Ones We've Been Waiting For

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"We are the ones we've been waiting for."

The statement makes a great foundation for a political speech. It is a call to action. It seems that every generation somehow is waiting for some sort of deliverance-- some great hero, someone who will stand up, correct what is wrong, and bring hope and renewal. Those who wait for such persons are more often disappointed than not. Time goes by, wrongs are not righted, and hope and renewal seem as far away as ever before.

Nothing takes place until action is decided and accomplished. The old adage has it that the road to hell is paved with good intentions; to this we can add "waiting for change." Generations can come and go, and if people are just waiting and watching, nothing will occur. The tragic irony is that most of the time, the very people who wait and watch are the ones who could make the changes themselves, if only they realized that they were the ones they were waiting for!

Political change is nebulous, of course, and never something upon which we can rely. Nevertheless, the statement and the concept behind it fit neatly in spiritual terms.

All too often people become part of Christ and then wait. They wait perhaps for guidance or instruction; sadly, too many wait to find someone else who will be their spiritual hero. Churches dwindle in number because the members wait for the preacher to get the message out to bring new people to Christ. Christians sit and feel too inadequate in skill to do the work God expects, and look to others to perform such critical tasks. This is especially true for Christians who are younger in age; many feel that they will be able to serve God only when they "grow up," and thus wait on "older Christians" to do the tasks that God has commanded. Perhaps it is high time for all of us to realize that we are the ones for whom we've been looking.

Once we put on Christ in baptism, we are as much a Christian as anyone else who has obeyed Christ (Galatians 3:27-28). Yes, we must grow in the faith-- the just baptized Christian is compared to an infant, and like an infant must grow to maturity (John 3:5, Romans 6:3-7, 1 Peter 2:1, Hebrews 5:12-6:4). Notice how a Christian is expected to reach maturity:

But solid food is for fullgrown men, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern good and evil (Hebrews 5:14).

Christians do not mature by merely sitting in pews and soaking up information. Christians do not even mature by just watching more experienced Christians at work. Christians mature by doing. Christians mature by working to obey their Lord! We cannot sit back and think we can learn only from watching others-- after all, we are the ones for whom we've been waiting.

Consider for a moment those who were truly waiting. We read in the Bible of the great heroes of faith in the Old Testament, men like Abraham, Isaac, Moses, David, and many others. How many times have we marveled at their faith and the works which they were

able to accomplish for God? How many times do we wish that we could have people having the same faith as they in our own midst? Yet it is written:

And these all, having had witness borne to them through their faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect (Hebrews 11:39-40).

As great in faith as Abraham, Isaac, Moses, David, and others were, they did not receive the promise. They were not perfected without us. They, in fact, were waiting for us: the inheritors of the fulfilled promises of God in Christ Jesus. The Hebrew author's conclusion is apt:

Therefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:1-2).

We, after all, are the ones for whom we've been waiting. We are the ones who can take up the mantle of the faith and run the race set before us, having every confidence that those who came before us will cheer us on to the finish.

Let us consider ourselves. When we walk into assemblies of the saints and despair at how few there are of us, let us remember that we are the ones for whom we've been waiting, and let us strive to promote the Gospel to all men. When we consider the sinfulness of the world and the despair which sin has brought to many, let us remember that we are the ones for whom we've been waiting, and let us strive to shine the light of Christ in all the dark corners of sin. When we dwell upon how weak we are, or how much further we have to go in the faith, let us remember that we are the ones for whom we've been waiting, and that maturity only comes as the fruit of patience and diligence in hope. When we dream about the future, and wonder how it will be, let us remember that we are the ones for whom we've been waiting, and it is our time to take our stand and advance the cause of God's Kingdom.

Just a Few More Minutes

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When I was growing up, every Sunday morning (or any day of the week when we didn't have school) my father would come into my room and begin the long process/battle of trying to get me out of bed. He would start by opening the curtains and turning off the fan (if it was hot) or ripping off my covers (if it was cold). He would let me suffer in those conditions for a little while, and then return with his second wave of attacks. Dad would head over to the stereo and blare the music on some obnoxious radio station. In my stubbornness to stay in bed, I would curl up into a little ball and hold the pillow over my face and ears. As my father pulled at my feet and began to literally lift me out of bed, I would make one final cry of desperation: "Just a few more minutes!"

Life is continually changing. Just when we start getting comfortable with our surroundings and our routine, that's when something happens that totally remaps our direction. We graduate, we move to a new town, we start a new job, we lose our current job, we get married, we have kids, our kids move out, we become sick or we lose someone we love. Nothing in this life stays the same forever. In Psalms 90:12, Moses writes, *"Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."* By realizing how quickly our life passes, we can develop a better understanding of our purpose and our direction on this earth.

Just as in sports, when the clock runs out, the game is over. There are no extensions or additions of time (except in soccer). The only difference is that in the game of life, none of us know how much time is left on the clock. There is one thing, however, we can be certain of: life is short! Our time on this earth is described as a *"breath"* and *"a passing shadow"* (Psalms 144:4). Even if we live to be a 110 years old, our years are nothing when compared to the eternal presence of the great I AM. Very few of us will ever find our names written in a history book or our faces etched onto the side of a coin. Instead, most of us find our place as described in the psalms: *"For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more"* (Psalms 103:13-16).

When we reach the end of our lives, there will be no more second chances. We won't be able to ask for "just a few more minutes" or a few more days. There will be no extensions or requests for more time. That's why it is imperative for each one of us to use the time God has given us wisely. Ephesians 5:15-16 says, *"See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil."* Some versions actually render the verse, *"Be careful how you walk!"* We only get one shot at this life. It's easy to think that we have plenty of time to get our life together and start living for God. Thirty seems like forever away (for most of you), forty is way out of sight, and fifty is just something you tease your parents about. But in the end our life is but a *"vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away"* (James 4:14).

When we see our life as the Lord does, as something that is extremely short and very limited, it should help us establish our priorities and place emphasis on the things that matter most. Even in the first century, Peter warned the early Christians about the end of this earth and the importance of godly conduct: *"But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers"* (1 Peter 4:7). Are we taking time to speak to our Father in prayer? Are we spending time in the Word, preparing ourselves to *"give a defense...for the hope that is in (us)"* (1 Peter 5:9)? If we just keep waiting until next month or next year to start making changes, we are never going to find *"a convenient time"* (Acts 24:25) to give ourselves wholly and completely to the Lord.

Let us live our lives in such a way so that when our clock finally does run out, instead of asking for more time, *"we may boldly say: The LORD is my helper; I will not fear"* (Hebrews 13:6).

The Voice of Experience

Senior Life Sketches

Compiled by Warren E. Berkley

Brief introductions to good old people!

Derrel Shaw

LIFE BEFORE BAPTISM -- My parents and grandparents were not spiritually strong, but they were Christians so I "grew up in the church," as we put it. We lived in the country at Tascosa, Texas, a ghost town where Billy the Kid often visited (a few years before my time). Occasionally we drove forty miles to Amarillo to worship. Usually my parents and I, with my two sisters, worshipped at home. At age 12 I was immersed, but was not serious about it, so later in life I started over by repenting and being baptized into Christ.

LIFE AFTER BAPTISM -- The only reading material I had other than the Bible was the Firm Foundation (that paper was still pretty "firm" in my teenage years [1940-1947]). I was influenced by good preachers like Luther Roberts and Hoyt Houchen, but did not get into commentaries and reference works until I decided to go to the old Abilene Christian College in 1951 (it too was reasonably "firm" at that time). Lois and I had married in 1949. We moved to Abilene and started out with no money and no way to make any money, but with determination to be a good preacher and a good preacher's wife. After twelve months at ACC I had the opportunity to be the preacher for the church in Girard, Texas. In the 55 years since, we have lived and I have preached in Groom, Texas; Borger, Texas; El Dorado, Kansas; Dumas, Texas; Dalhart, Texas; and Houston, Texas (I am in my 29th year with the Norhill church in Houston). All through the years I have fought the battle against liberalism and institutionalism among churches of Christ. Lois and I had two sons: David, who is a faithful saint (he and his wife Ruth and their son Justin worship with the CyFair church in Houston); and Byron, who died with cancer two years ago.

LIFE; MY COUNSEL TO YOUNGER CHRISTIANS -- Be sure the Lord is your Shepherd (Acts 2:22-47), and be faithful no matter what the consequences (1 Cor. 15:58). Satan will not cease trying to attract you to looseness and coarseness in speech and action. Resist him with the Word of Truth (he runs from it), and "keep thyself pure." My generation was not bombarded with drugs and illicit sex, so we may not sympathize with you as much as we should. But God's Truth is Truth, no matter when or where we live. If you will stand for the Savior He will stand with you, and He will bless you to the end of life (Heb. 13:5). Then we can all see Him and share in His glory as we

join the angels in forever singing God's praise and serving Him. If there is any way I can assist you to be true, I am at your command. My address is 5927 Spruce Forest Dr., Houston, TX 77092. My email is derloshaw@sbcglobal.net

{See the online collection of bro. Shaw's Old Testament outlines at:
<http://www.geocities.com/soundchurch/OTouts.htm>}