***The Age of the Church, No. 3  
  
DS8B***

This is segment number 16 in our series of studies on the dispensations. We have seen that the dispensation of the church has now run almost 2,000 years, and for many reasons, it seems to be nearing its end. At the close of the church age, a very distinct and unique body of believers will have been formed, and in God's plan for the ages, they will be removed from this earth. Christians today are in full time service for the Lord in one way or another. They have all been called to be His priests. They have all been called to be His ambassadors. So we have two very vital callings in the age of grace. We are the Lord's priests. We are His ambassadors.

Now you know very well, and I hope I have reminded you of this sufficiently, that Satan and his demons are constantly on the prowl attacking the Christian who is positive to doctrine and who is moving into spiritual maturity. The demons are not particularly interested in the Christian who is not attending church. Satan and his demons are not at all interested in the Christians who are attending some church where the Word of God is not really being explained to people. He is not concerned with the Christian who is indifferent or negative to the Word because you will not be any problem to him. You will, as a matter of fact, be a help to him because you will be creating human good, and this helps his cause of trying to establish a perfect society on this earth.

But if you are a believer who is moving on with the Lord, you may anticipate that the demonic world is well aware of what you're doing, and that you are getting personal attention from the forces of evil. Their work, of course, is to seek to delay the final defeat of Satan by seeking to delay your accomplishments in building up the body of Christ. With every hour that goes by; with every person which is won to the Lord; and, with every Christian who is strengthened in the faith and moved out to performing the Lord's work, Satan's final moments are drawn closer to him. Satan in his role as an angel of light, consequently, is easily deceiving many uninformed Christians today. This is because they expect him to operate only as an angel of darkness. Currently, he is creating the illusion that that's the only kind of angel he is--an angel of darkness. So when people see something that they consider good, it never occurs to them that Satan is behind it.

So to cope with such a person, and the demonic force that he possesses, God has provided for you and me in the church age a unique and adequate resource of protection. You and I must guard against indifference to the Word. We must avoid the status of carnality. We must beware of permitting emotions to control our souls, instead of letting our minds control our souls. We must be on guard against slipping back into reversionism. We must maintain, consequently, our spiritual maturity in a good condition.

There are, consequently, specific resources that the Lord has provided. There are two commands that have been given to us as believers in the age of grace. These are two commands for the Christian life. Command number one is to be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). To be filled with the Spirit means that God the Holy Spirit is to control our life. The purpose of this is to give us protection against Satan and his game plan. The second command in the age of grace is to grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have this in 2 Peter 3:18. Being filled with the Spirit means being a spiritual Christian. As the result of being a spiritual Christian, you may build spiritual maturity into your soul. This is the result of feeding upon the Word of God. God rejects human good production but He provides a means to enable us to produce His divine good.

So these are the two commands that God has given each of us. These commands are to be well understood by you, and they are to be of utmost daily concern. Whatever else you may think the Lord wants you to do, this is number one. First, he wants you to be filled with the Spirit. Secondly, you are to grow into a spiritually mature Christian. Now this is not optional. This is not an invitation. This is a command of the Word of God. You see to it that you are filled with the Spirit. Therefore keep your sins confessed. You see to it that you grow into spiritual maturity. Therefore, take in the Word of God on a daily basis.

Therefore, spirituality in the church age has a distinctive meaning. It means to be controlled by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Spirituality is an absolute concept. At this moment, every believer is either spiritual or he is carnal. He is not half in and half out. It's an absolute at any moment (Galatians 5:16-17). Spirituality does not depend on who and what the believer is, but it depends on who and what the Holy Spirit is. Spirituality is something that He provides for us.

Now the problem is that spirituality is often confused in this age with spiritual maturity. Obviously, there is a great variety of spiritual maturity among believers. People are at various stages. Some are at babyhood; some are adolescent in the faith; and, some are really mature grown-up Christians. But that is something different than spirituality. When a Christian is spiritual, God's power is working and functioning through Him, and God gets the credit for what is done. When we get to heaven, the Lord is going to reward us on the basis of what we allow His Holy Spirit to do through us. The means of being filled with the Holy Spirit, of course, is biblical confession (1 John 1:9).

**The Benefits of Spirituality**

There are certain benefits that come to us as the result of this condition of spirituality--not of spiritual maturity, but of the condition of spirituality. Spirituality is true of you no matter what your stage of spiritual maturity and development is. Here are some of the benefits of spirituality in the church age.

1. **God's Character**

First of all, it brings out God's character in the believer (2 Peter 1:3-4). When you are a spiritual Christian, you will be reflecting the fruit of the spirit, and that is the only way in this age that you can reflect the fruit of the spirit. Galatians 5:22-23 represents the ideal of the Christian character for this age. There is no way that we can accomplish that. It is only as the Holy Spirit provides it.

1. **Imitate God**

The second benefit of spirituality is that it enables the Christian to imitate God (Ephesians 5:1), and this is not a matter of trying to follow in His steps. Someone wrote a book one time, and the title of the book was In His Steps, and it was about a man who asked, "What would life be like if everything that I did, I would try to walk just like Jesus Christ walked? I would walk in His steps." It is not a matter of walking in the steps of the Lord Jesus. It is a matter of Christ walking through us. He does the walking. So this spirituality brings out the fact that we are able to follow in His steps. We are able to imitate him. Consequently, a spiritual Christian will act; he will feel; and, he will think just the way the Lord does. However, he will do this without some studied effort on his part (Galatians 4:19, Galatians 5:22-23). It is important that we understand that spirituality enables you, as you take in the Word of God, to reflect the character of Christ--to imitate Him. We do this because the Spirit of God does it through us--not because of our effort.

1. **Glorifying Christ**

Thirdly, Christ is glorified by the Spirit-filled Christian. He is honored (John 7:39, John 16:14, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

1. **Fulfilling God's Righteousness**

Fourth, the Christian fulfills the law standards of righteousness (Romans 8:2-4).

All of this is because he is a spiritual person.

**The Results of Spirituality**

Consequently, as a spiritual person, there will be certain results in our lives. We're speaking of things that are only true in this age. No other saint in any other age could say any of this that we've been saying here. We have certain results.

1. **Christ is Magnified**

Christ is magnified in the inner life of the Christian (Philippians 1:20-21).

1. **Understand Doctrine**

We're able to understand doctrine (1 Corinthians 2:9-16). You will never understand doctrine unless you are in a status of spirituality. That's why, before a service, we say to confess your sins biblically. Check yourself out. Otherwise you will not learn what is being explained.

1. **Witnessing**

You will be able to witness effectively (Acts 1:8). You cannot witness effectively unless you are a spiritual Christian.

1. **Guidance and Assurance**

You will receive guidance and assurance in your life (Romans 8:14-16).

1. **Worship**

You will enter into true worship (John 4:24, Philippians 3:3). A great deal of worship is not done in a spiritual way. It is mere ritual.

1. **Answered Prayers**

Your prayers will be granted. You cannot have prayers answered unless you are praying as a spiritual Christian (Ephesians 6:18, James 5:16b).

1. **Help Others**

You can help others to be spiritual Christians if you yourself are spiritual (Galatians 6:1).

1. **Divine Good Works**

You will produce divine good works (1 Corinthians 3:12-14).

The spiritual growth that results from spirituality is something that comes by grace. Spirituality is the means to spiritual maturity. There are degrees of spiritual maturity. As we have indicated, you may be a baby Christian; you may be an adolescent; or, you may be an adult. It all depends on your attitude and intake of doctrine. All stages are equally spiritual. The Christian life is always in motion. You're either going toward spiritual maturity, or you're sliding back. That's why you cannot take a vacation from the things of the Lord. Sooner or later, all of us have the experience where we stopped coming to church or we were not very active. We're not very involved. We have cut out, and during that time, there was one thing that you will realize. That is that you did not stay in the status quo spiritually. You will discover that your maturity began to deteriorate, and the longer you were out of church, the farther you went backwards toward reversionism. You cannot stand still in the Christian life.

You also noticed that when you got back into fellowship with the Lord; back into the church operation; and, back in instruction, that the direction reversed. Then you started going in the other direction and, depending on how far back you have slipped, you've got that much ground to recoup. So you can keep going forward, or you will be going backward. Forward progress comes from functioning under the grace system of perceiving spiritual things and being positive to doctrine. If you're indifferent to learning doctrine or you're negative to doctrine, that leads to callouses on the soul and that leads to the emotions taking over and dominating the soul. Then it can also even lead to physical death (1 John 5:16).

However, while you're alive, no matter how far you may have moved backward, you can start moving forward once more (Revelation 3:15-20). When you complete the spiritual maturity structure, God says that you can come to an overflowing grace. Now it is amazing that we are treated by grace in this age. People in the Old Testament didn't have that; and, as if that isn't enough, God says, "I'll give you a super grace blessing as well." This is an overflowing abundant grace at a certain point in your spiritual maturity (Philippians 4:12-13, James 4:6). When you're at the super grace level, you can maintain that by continuing to take in of doctrine (Hebrews 4:12).

It is important to realize that even the Lord Jesus Christ operated as a human being. When He was a boy, He had to come to the point where He had to develop spiritual maturity just like anyone else. He came to the super grace life. It seems that, perhaps, He came to that life very early. As a matter of fact, there is the story that's told about when He was 12 years old and He was at the temple. We have strong reason to believe that that story reflects to us the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ, as a 12-year-old boy, had reached super grace level, and He was functioning on that level of spiritual maturity. It seems He could hardly have been a match for the doctors of the law and the doctors of the Bible that he spoke with, had He not been at that level. It wasn't only the answers and what He knew about the Bible that impressed them. It was the fact that they sensed something of spiritual discernment in this youngster that they did not find in most adults that they dealt with.

So the Lord Jesus, in Luke 2:40 and 52, tells us that He had to build a spiritual maturity structure. He had to learn how to pray, for example, under all circumstances. He had to pray under pressure (Luke 6:12, Luke 22:41-42). This is one of the things we sometimes do not appreciate about the dispensation of the church age--the age of grace. That is that we have constant access to God directly. Have you had the experience of sometimes coming and saying, "Oh, I don't feel like praying. I just don't feel like talking to the Lord," because you're under pressure. The Lord had to learn also to pray under prosperity (Luke 5:15-16). Have you ever had the experience of suddenly realizing, "You know, I haven't talked to the Lord for a long time. I've gone through the whole day, and I haven't prayed once." Frequently it's when we become prosperous that we don't have to talk to the Lord. This is true of anybody.

I've observed that there are three dangerous factors in the life of a minister that can lead him into a place where his own spiritual effectiveness is weakened. One is when he has a church that has a large membership. A minister who comes from a place where he has a modest membership, and he moves to a place where he has a large membership is in a very dangerous position. The second dangerous factor is when the minister comes to the place where he has adequate funds with which to operate his local church ministry. That is a dangerous position relative to maintaining a spiritual relationship to the Lord.

Thirdly is when he gains prestige out in the Christian world, particularly if you write a book. This is one of the easiest ways to gain prestige. You write a book, and it's one that is significant that people buy, and you get a name. Any minister who gets a large congregation; who gets adequate money to pay his bills; and, who gains prestige is in very great danger of losing his spiritual orientation. Do you know why? Because when you've got a lot of people; you've got a lot of money; and, you've got a name with some personal fame, you don't need the Lord anymore to help you do things. You've got the money to do anything you want to do. You've got the personnel to do what you want to do. You've got some prestige to do what you want to do. We may thank God that that, so far, is not our problem here at Berean Church. So relax.

However, I have seen ministers who had an effective voice and an effective outreach, and when they got that threefold combination, they got in trouble. They could no longer persist in a simple easy relaxed way with the same definitiveness in what they were teaching as they once did before. They get out there into contact with groups who are doctrinally false, and they can relate to these as human beings, and a social camaraderie can develop. This is just like you do with your unsaved friends sometimes. Pretty soon, you find you have a good relationship with somebody with whom you have no relationships whatsoever spiritually.

That can go so far with groups that are doctrinally disoriented in a relationship with a preacher that he begins to discover that he doesn't want to say certain things. He doesn't want to declare certain things because he wants to keep good public relations with the people who have been so nice to him. There is nothing that makes it so tough to be a proclaimer of the Word of God in all truth and integrity as when people are nice to you. When people are not nice to you as a minister, it is much easier to proclaim the truth. It is getting harder to proclaim it around here all the time because you're getting nicer all the time. However, it's an occupational hazard. As people develop and grow spiritually, they become nicer, so what are you going to do? Hope for the best.

The Lord Jesus Christ had to know how to operate in expressing thanksgiving (Luke 9:16). He had to maintain His communion with the Father (Luke 9:29) just like all the rest of us do. He operated as a human being. As a human being, He was obedient to authority. Luke 2:51 tells us how He obeyed His parents. One of the greatest things a young person can do is to obey his parents. It also tells us that He obeyed God, His heavenly Father (Philippians 2:8, Hebrews 5:8). God comes first, and your parents second, but you obey your parents and you obey God. Believers in the church age can spiritually do what Jesus Christ did. He has told us that the great things He did, we would do, and even greater than these (John 14:12, Colossians 3:20, 1 John 3:22). Now that is a very fantastic declaration, and you can search the Bible and you will find it in no other age. It is distinctive of the age of grace.

**The Goal of the Church Age**

The goal of the church age is to be able to say, with Paul, that which he said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:7-8: "I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all of them also that love his appearing." That is the whole goal of this age--that we should move to the point where the time is going to come when you realize that your days are up.

The time is going to come when God says, "Now I'm going to take you to heaven." And it is going to come for you. I care not how young you are. It is going to come. And at that point, it will be suddenly all over. And it may come just unexpectedly. Bang. Maybe you will realize that it has arrived, and maybe you won't. But it would be tragic for you to look back and not be able to say, "I've done a good job of using my priesthood and of using my ambassadorship. I'm ready to report to the front office. I'm ready to check in with the Lord." Paul could say, "I've fought a good fight. I've finished the course. I've kept the faith." There are some of us that haven't even begun the course--let alone to say that we have finished it. There are some of us that have never really entered into the faith--let alone to say that we have kept the faith. But if you have, there is laid up for you a crown of reward which the Lord is going to give to all those of you who have met your opportunity in the age of the church. Now, realize that you are unique. You are something special.

**The Rapture**

Well, this dispensation of the church is going to come to an end, and we call that the rapture. Now the details of this time and the execution are known only to God. It's a private event. It's only true for those who are church age saints. The bodies of the believers at this time are going to be propelled through space into heaven. There'll be no training necessary for you to make the trip. There'll be no mishaps along the way. No one will be left on the launching pad. When you arrive in heaven, God the Father is going to be there waiting to greet you. When John was told about this as he wrote the book of the Revelation, at the end of the book in Revelation 22:20, he got so excited over the event, he said, "Let's go." He said, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." And that's what he meant: "Let's go."

However, the rapture has been delayed. It is God's plan that many in the church age should be brought into glory. Hebrews 2:9-10 tell us that God intends to bring many believers into heaven during this age. Hebrews 2:9 says, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."

So we have here an indication that one of the reasons the Lord has delayed His return is because he is bringing many children into glory. Now these, of course, are Jews and Gentiles all over the world who are becoming Christians (John 1:12, Galatians 3:26, 1 Corinthians 12:13). These Christians who do receive him as their Savior become His temple here on this earth until the rapture. So we have in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 a clean-cut declaration as to where God dwells in this age: "What? Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have of God, and you are not your own. For you are bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's." The Lord is bringing many children into the body of Christ. For that reason, the rapture has not yet taken place. The Christian is also being built into a structure, the temple of God, as living stones (1 Peter 2:5). This is the church universal which is being built. It is not complete, but the Word of God tells us that it is constantly growing each day (Ephesians 2:15-22). The way the church body grows is through the knowledge of the Word of God.

So we have Paul saying in Ephesians 4:15, "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, who is the head, even Christ." Another reason the rapture may be delayed is that the church universal is viewed as the body of Christ with the Lord as the head, and all the parts are being added to that body to make it complete. Now that addition is something that takes place day-by-day. We have this in Ephesians 1:22-23 and Ephesians 5:23.

So why is the rapture delayed? Because God plans to bring many into glory, so He is bringing many children into glory. He is building a church universal out of living stones, so the stones are being won and placed into that body. He is viewing the body of Christ as something that is not completed. He is not only building a temple with living stones, but He is building the body of Christ, and the body has many parts. Everybody who is saved fits in in some way to a part. In the fourth century, one of the most outstanding church fathers was a man named Augustine. Augustine suggested that there would be as many Christians born again during the age of the church as there were demons who rebelled against God. This is an assumption on Augustine's part, and maybe it's true, and maybe it isn't. But there are millions and millions of demons, and if there is to be one Christian for every demon, then there are going to be millions and millions and millions of believers who must come into the body of Christ.

Well, there is a specific number, whatever it is, and the rapture is being delayed until that specific number for that body has been completed. Nevertheless, the rapture is imminent. Someone may say, "Well how can you say that the rapture is imminent if we have so many that have to be won?" Well, overnight, the Spirit of God could move upon the world, or in a short time He could win all those people. So it is imminent; that is, that it's imminent in the sense that there is nothing that needs to be done before He can arrive.

This catching away is the final removal of the church. We use the word "rapture" to describe this. The word "rapture" is not a word that is found in the Bible. It is one of the words that we have invented for the purpose of conveying a Biblical concept. For example, the word "atonement" is not in the Bible, but it's a meaningful theological word. The word "Trinity" is not in the Bible, but it's a meaningful theological term. The words "reversionism" or "backsliding" are not in the Bible, but they are meaningful terms that describe a certain principle or a certain concept. So we have this word "rapture" which, while it is not found in the Word, does describe certain words that are found in the Bible.

For example, in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, we have the words "caught up," and that's what rapture means. It means to be snatched away. Also in Hebrews 11:5, we have the word "translated," which again means to be transferred from one place to another. So what this is simply saying is that here, on the surface of the earth, are all of these various individual Christians. Suddenly, there is going to come a time when the Lord Jesus Christ comes on a cloud and all of these believers are caught up to meet Him. The bodies of some of these believers are underground. They too will be caught up to meet Him. The rapture is simply a word to describe the snatching away of Christians on the face of this earth. Now that's what's going to happen. That's how the church is removed from the earth into heaven itself.

We have this rapture event described by certain words. For example, in Titus 2:13, it is called "the blessed hope." In 1 Peter 1:3, it's called "a living hope." In 1 John 3:3, it's called "a purifying hope." The word "hope" here means "absolute confidence," something that we know is going to take place. So the time is going to come when you will experience this. Some of you will experience it topside on earth. Some of your bodies will experience it from underground. But all of you will experience it.

Now here are the mechanics of this event. This is how the dispensation of the church is going to be closed down one day. The Father is going to turn to his Son who is seated at His right hand on the throne--sharing the Father's throne. This is one of the things that Bishop Pike said that he did not believe in. He said he certainly didn't envision Jesus Christ as a person sitting someplace on the right hand of God the Father in heaven. This was the Bishop Pike, as you know, who got into spiritualism and who got into communication with the demon world, thinking he was communicating with his son.

He apparently went so far as a clergyman, and he dignified speaking to the demonic world, that he experienced exactly what he was making fun of in the Old Testament. When it was pointed out to Bishop Pike that the Old Testament applied the death penalty to anybody who spoke with the demonic world or who spoke with the dead (that's what he thought he was doing), that anybody who practiced necromancy was executed, he said, "Well that applied to a previous ignorant age. It does not apply to the enlightened age that we have today." And you know what happened to Bishop Pike. He went out into the desert in Palestine and he wandered off the road and died there, apparently experiencing the sin unto death.

The Lord Jesus Christ is at the Father's right hand no matter what Bishop Pike said, and Bishop Pike knows a whole lot better now. I hope you won't make that mistake. It would be wiser for you to simply accept what the Word of God says, but I suspect that he is sweating it out pretty badly. But in any case, the Lord Jesus Christ is going to be told to leave the Father's throne. He is going to get up and He's going to step out of heaven and a cloud is going to have risen, and He's going to step on that cloud. He's going to push the down button, and the cloud is going to start moving down toward the earth (1 Thessalonians 4:16a). He will descend to the earth on this cloud. This will be a very large cloud, for with Him will be all the spirits and the souls of Christians who have died. It will be one huge massive elevator such as you have never seen (1 Thessalonians 4:14). Some of you are going to be up there riding it down. Some of us will only ride it up. Some of you will ride it both down and up, one of the rewards for having died before the rapture.

So, in any case, He will descend to the earth with the body of saints who have died. However, these are church age saints only--not Old Testament saints. They are not included. He will descend towards the earth as 1 Thessalonians 4:14 tells us. Then there will be an audible command that He will give. He will give this command, and all dead and living Christians will hear it on earth (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Only Christians will hear this audible command. Then the archangel will call out, and a trumpet will sound--all to the purpose of rallying the Christians to a rendezvous point in space (1 Thessalonians 4:17). When the archangel makes his call and the trumpet is sounded, all of the believers, living and dead, will move out to space immediately to a rendezvous point. In a moment, the bodies of the dead believers will be reunited with their spirits and souls. The bodies of these dead believers will leap from their graves first, and they will be reunited with their souls and spirits which are on the cloud.

Now they will be there in their physical bodies. Then those of us who are alive will also leap into the air, and we will meet them with the Lord on that cloud (1 Thessalonians 4:16b-17a). Then, in a moment, these bodies will be transformed (1 Corinthians 5:51b-52); that is, we will be transformed into the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). The old sin nature will in that moment be forever removed. Our mortal bodies will be changed into immortal bodies like the resurrection body of Christ (Philippians 3:20-21), which means that we will never be able to die again. We'll have bodies that cannot experience death. We will retain our present appearance. You will look exactly as you look now. You will be recognizable. People will recognize you. There may be a change in your age level. We trust that if you have died as a baby, that we will not be stuck with all those babies in heaven--that that condition will improve. And if you have gone out of this life a doddering old 90-year-old man, that you will have your age reduced to a level where you have considerably more capacity and energies. There will probably be some nice median age--something like maybe 35 or 40--that sort of age might be about right.

However, you will retain your appearance, but you won't be subject to more ills. There'll be no more pain; no more fatigue; no more sorrow; and, no more aging. You will no longer be subject to the laws of nature. You will be able to soar through space with the greatest of ease without a trapeze. You will go through solid objects like a warm knife through butter. You will probably be able to travel at the speed of light (Matthew 28:6, John 20:6-7, John 20:19). Well, of course, there's no end to the speculation as to what's going to happen back on earth when this happens. When all of this thing takes place, there's going to be chaos on earth, and I'll leave you to figure out and to speculate what's going to happen there.

Well, the age of the dispensation of the Jews as you know will then resume. Church age believers, because they have been taken up to the third heaven at the rapture, will not be here on earth for the tribulation period. Revelation 3:10 very clearly says that we will be preserved from this hour of tribulation. The Holy Spirit leaves the earth. When the Christians go, He leaves with us, so that there is no more a restraining power on the old sin nature (2 Thessalonians 2:7). You can imagine what kind of an earth this is going to be when the Holy Spirit is no longer restraining evil as He is doing today. The tribulation is then going to prove indeed to be a hell on earth (Matthew 24:21).

So the Christians during this time consequently are in heaven during humanity's darkest hour when it's a nightmare of evil all over the world. 1 John 2:28 is a verse that preachers love to use to scare Christians, and I'm going to see if I can scare you with it. 1 John 2:28 says, "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at his coming." Now of course, this coming is at any moment. We don't know when it's going to be. Preachers love to use this verse and say, "Are you going to go someplace that you're going to be ashamed to be caught when the rapture takes place? Are you going to be doing something that you're going to be ashamed for all eternity for what you were doing when the rapture took place? Can you imagine yourself? (And I've sat in church and heard it like this.) Can you imagine yourself when people come up to you and say, 'What were you doing when the Rapture took place?'"

I can think of a lot of things that I'd hate to be telling them that I was doing when the rapture took place, and they aren't all bad either. "Where were you when the rapture took place? Wouldn't you hate to say that you were down there in the local saloon? You went to heaven with a glass of beer in your hand? Won't you be ashamed of that?" Now this would make you nervous if you think that that's what the shame here is about.

It's like the other night we had this Berean Youth Club event, and we had a big fair with all these tests of skill in these booths. The hot dogs were being sold, so I went up to one of our youth and I said, "What do you want me to do tonight?" He said, "Well, have you ever been to Las Vegas?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Do you know about those fellows walking around there, the security guards who keep things in order and watch for cheating?" I said, "Yes." He said, "That's what I want you to do. Just walk around. If you get any drunks causing trouble, throw the drunks out and watch for cheating." So all evening, I walked around here watching for drunks and cheating and stuff like that. I didn't see anything. Now what if the Lord had come right then? And during all of eternity, they're going to ask me, "What were you doing when the rapture took place?" I'll have to reply, "Well, I was watching for drunks at one of our Berean Youth Club events. I was watching for cheating at the skill games."

No, that isn't what that verse means, and don't let anybody put you in a panic with that kind of ridiculous talk. This is not a warning of something that you're doing or someplace that you're going to be. Nobody is going to be left behind because of where you were or what you were doing. Nobody's going to be embarrassed because you're going to get to heaven and they're going to have a big exposure of where you were or what you were doing at the point of the rapture. All that we may have guilt over and all that is sin has been completely covered by God through His Son.

That's why we are happy to read in 1 John 1:7: "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." Verse nine says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So on one point, we have salvation through the death of Christ that He has covered completely. There is nothing that God can hold against us. On the other hand, we have the confession of sin that has only to do with our reward; our service; and, our divine good production. However, it has nothing to do with the moment of the rapture. When it comes, we're going to go.

The thing that we are to be concerned about being ashamed of that 1 John 2:28 is referring to is that you, who have been redeemed by the death of Christ, should then so use your life that you come into heaven and find that you were unproductive spiritually; that you prostituted your priesthood; that you prostituted your ambassadorship; and, that instead of God being able to reward you, you have to be ashamed as you are told that there is very little reward for you. That's the shame at the appearance of Christ that we are to be concerned about. That shame is dealt with by our being careful to maintain our intake of the Word and being positive to it.

So make your time on earth count simply because you love the Lord, and simply because you have been called to serve Him and you're delighted to do it. Make your time on earth count and you'll have nothing to cause any hesitancy when the rapture takes place. Titus 2:12-13 says, "Teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present age (the dispensation of the church), looking for that blessed hope, even the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ." Once the rapture takes place, it's all over. Once the rapture takes place, you will not be able to shout, "Lord, wait. I've changed my mind. I want to go too." Only those who are believers will even hear the call. Only they will respond. The rest will be left behind.

So we must caution you that while we who are believers look forward with great joy to this event which is going to close out our magnificent age of grace, we look forward to it, but we can look forward to it because we have believed Acts 16:31. We have believed in our Lord Jesus Christ. We have believed John 3:16. We have taken the everlasting life that is offered to us in order that we should not perish. If you have not received Him, then you will be left behind, but you will not be able to change your mind at that point. Today is the accepted day of salvation. The age of the church is soon to end. We have signs on every side that we can interpret in terms of the tribulation. These are not in terms of the rapture, but in terms of the tribulation. We can see the conditions of the tribulation shaping up. Therefore, we know that the rapture must be near.

If you are not in the family of God, we do beseech you by His grace that you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, recognizing that He died for you and He gave His spiritual life in order to pay the price of sin which is spiritual death, so that you might live forever. He will take your sin and give you His righteousness. If you will accept that, if you believe that, you too will someday hear the archangels call, and you will hear the trumpet calling to that rallying point out in space. And you too will be there as we enter heaven with God the Father waiting to greet you. That can be your destiny.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1971

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