

IN VIEW OF THE END

BY B. G. ECHOLS

The realization that "the end of all things is at hand" lay across the thinking of the first Christians. It was with this background that Peter exhorted Christians on godly living. Sober prayerfulness and fervent love have validity until the last hour of recorded time (1 Pet. 4:7, 8).

But the apostle has more to say in view of "the end." "Using hospitality one to another without murmuring: according as each hath received a gift, ministering it among yourselves, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God; if any man speaketh, speaking as it were oracles of God; if any man ministereth, ministering as of the strength which God supplieth: that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, whose is the glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." (1 Pet. 4:9-11).

Hospitality was much stressed in the early church. Only private homes of Christians could provide suitable association for travelers in those days. With persecutions, many would be driven from their homes into a hostile world. Christians must help their fellow saints. Some Christians might become afraid to open their homes to preachers who traveled to strengthen the brethren for such hospitality might increase the probability of persecution. The need for hospitality may not be as great in our time, but it is not totally lacking (Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2).

"Without murmuring" means no venting an expression of displeasure secretly or openly. Hospitality takes some expense, but is to be discharged without complaint (2 Cor. 9:7). We should never do anything just because it is commanded, but because of our love for God and Christ. No command of God can be properly obeyed while grumbling. It is often true that a good deed is destroyed by the resentful attitude on the part of the performer (1 Cor. 13:3). It is not costly display that Peter recommends. Such is often a sinful waste as people entertain and feed, not because the guest is one of need, but because the host or hostess wants to im-

press others. What most often happens is a contest to see who can out perform the other in presenting the most lavish spread. Not only is that not hospitality, it is caused by a spirit totally foreign to Christ.

As "gift" is the same word used in 1 Cor. 12 in references to miraculous gifts of the Spirit received by the laying on of the apostles' hands, it is possible such are under consideration. Spiritual gifts of a miraculous sort are more readily seen to be from God's grace, and therefore the property of another to be used as a stewardship. Nevertheless, the principle of their use will apply to all our natural gifts and talents. God's rule of responsibility has always been "as each hath received." God does not expect us to perform beyond our ability for that would be unfair, but He does expect us to come up to our ability. Do not seek to copy others, but find out what you are fit to do and do it. Be content to use your gift as you have received it. There are many vessels in God's house, but all have a use.

Whatever gifts we have are to be shared with others in the church. There is too much "me firstism" in the church. We are stewards of our gifts, and many of our natural talents are unused. Manifold is God's grace to us. It is God's grace that we are blessed with gifts. Just as manifold should be our usage of His gifts. This suggests he is referring especially to the miraculous gifts prevalent in the early church. Every gift conferred on us by God is for use, not for our own enjoyment or enrichment, but for service (1 Cor. 12:7).

God never blesses man for his own sake (Gen. 12:2). He blesses us that we may become a blessing. It is easy to believe that Peter remembers some words spoken to him by the Lord (Lk. 12:41-48). Every Christian is a minister according to his gifts and opportunities. Everyone should be faithful to his stewardship. Peter gives two illustrations, but the principles apply to all gifts. Keep God in mind and purpose. If we all really believed that we are

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stewards, not owners, of what God has given, the whole face of the church would change. There would be men and funds to do the Lord's work as never before. The work of the church will be successful only when each of us contributes what he can, not just money, but time, talent, etc.

Peter gives two specifics which illustrate verse 10. Every speaker must speak with the care necessary for God's spokesmen. "Oracles" are divine utterances delivered through recognized agents of God, the apostles, prophets, and Spirit-guided teachers. There must be the authority of God behind what we say; not guesses, inferences, or theories, but truth. Any gift of speech must be used in harmony with God's will. Have we recognized that the word of the gospel has been given to us that we might spread it?

To minister is to serve. What Peter had in mind was service requiring the exercise of the gifts of the time. They had to be mindful of the strength God supplied. While we do not have the miraculous gifts, we need to remember that what we have is ours because of God's goodness and provision. We should serve accordingly. Every Christian is a minister of whatever gifts he has from God. Do you realize how exciting it would be to be part of a church in which each member took this fact seriously? That is the kind of church God desires.

The purpose of all this instruction is "that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ." The ultimate purpose of all our efforts is not to exalt ourselves or the church, but the Lord. These words designate the design of the proper exercise of the gifts mentioned — that God be glorified through Christ (Mt. 5:16; 1 Cor. 10:31). Man's chief purpose is to glorify God and to enjoy His favor. Life is never right until we reach that point. Haunted by the shadow of our mortality, let us seek to glorify God. To "glorify" is to praise, ascribe honor, and to acknowledge God. If God is to be glorified in our actions, we must forget ourselves. If the Christian is called upon to behave as these verses teach as he nears the end, why not every day? If he doesn't, is he the Christian he claims to be? It is unclear whether the last of the verse applies to God or to Jesus Christ. It matters little for the glory of one is that of the other.

CONSIDER THIS:

In Acts chapter seventeen we read the account of Paul's visit to the city of Athens. He took advantage of an opportunity to speak the

Word of God, and He was quickly encountered by the philosophers. Among those who "called his hand" were the Epicureans. They were disciples of Epicurus who lived about 300 years before Christ came. They gave token acknowledgment of God in their words, but they denied that God created the world and they did not believe in His providence and superintendence over the world.

The Epicureans were certain that men were not under the oversight of a God of justice. Therefore, they gave themselves over to the indulgence of all their passions. It is said they devoted themselves to a life of gaiety and sensuality, and sought their happiness in indolence, effeminacy and voluptuousness. They thought the soul was material and that it was annihilated at death. Thus, their view of life was, "eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow you may die." There are many today who hold the Epicurean view. They don't believe they are accountable to God and, therefore, they will never be called to justice for their deeds. Their main objective in life is to fulfill the propensities of the flesh and that is the way they live.

The apostle Peter wrote about those who reason: *the Lord hasn't come*, therefore, *He will never come*. "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts," And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men" (2 Peter 3:3-7).

WILL THERE REALLY BE A DAY OF JUDGMENT?

1. The people before the flood didn't think so. They all perished in the flood. Noah and his family did believe it and they were saved from the flood (Genesis 6-9).

2. The citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah didn't think so and they perished in fire and brimstone. Only Lot, who believed, and a few of his family escaped (Genesis 19).

It is imperative that we listen to Divine admonition. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). The judgment day may or may not be a long way in the future, nobody knows, but death is not far from any of us. Death is like the judgment in the sense that no further preparation can be made.

There will be an accounting, you may be sure. **Are you ready?**

— W. R. Jones