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Grace-Energized Men Cling to the Promises of God



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Open with me to [James 4:14](#). As we enter this first Sunday of the New Year, we should each pause and reflect upon the brevity of our life; and how God wants us to live each day. "... whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away."

Two months ago I was doing that very thing as I stood with a group of Bible students at one of the most sobering spots in all of the Holy Land.

We had climbed up the artificial mountain built by Herod the Great as his tomb. That spot, called the Herodion, had hidden the exact burial place of Herod for 2,000 years—until May 7th, 2007; when an Israeli archaeologist's persistent thirty-five years of diggings finally found the spot.

King Herod, infamous for his murderous reaction to Christ's birth, had gained the whole world in his day. He was a trusted and rewarded friend of Augustus Caesar; and he was a world-wonder builder, still holding world records in architectural accomplishments. He was fabulously wealthy, held absolute power of life and death over his people—and did just about anything he wanted to do for his 69 years of life on earth.

But at his death, what did he take with him? Nothing.

Clinging to God's Promises

Death strips everything away from us except one thing—the promises of God to which we cling by faith. Nothing else stays with us. Our bodies are taken by death. All of our friends, family and possessions are left behind—and we hurtle out into eternity with nothing, except the promises of God.

I asked each of those Bible students standing on the dust and rubble of Herod's Tomb, "What promises of God are you holding onto today? What promises of God have you made your own by faith?" And, "Which ones would you cling to as you leave this life?"

You see as we get older, or when we get sick, or if we get terribly hurt in an accident and lay in a hospital bed somewhere, nearly everything is taken away. Health, strength, mobility, freedom all are gone for the moment. It is often then that we realize how frail, weak, and fragile we are. It is then, as we think through our life that we feel around for what we are really holding onto.

Don't wait for the doctor's office, or the emergency room, or the ambulance. Why not pause today at the start of 2008 and ask your self what promises of God's Word YOU are holding onto.

Here is the handful of promises that I personally cling to by faith:

- [John 3:16](#) why not say that one with me now ...
- [Psalm 23:4](#), 6 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. ⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.
- [Hebrews 13:5](#) ... For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

- **I John 1:7**: and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin
- **Psalm 16:11** You will show me the path of life; In Your presence *is* fullness of joy; At Your right hand *are* pleasures forevermore.

How do you get a collection of promises to hold onto? Two ways: trust others and use theirs or find them for yourself. And that brings us to Titus 2 and the grace-energized, Word-filled life God wants each of us to live.

Titus 2 Discipleship

Titus 2 is all about discipleship—learning to live the way God wants us to live, taught by men and women who seek out and mentor other believers by godly example and personal nurture times.

This morning we continue our look at the third element of a grace-energized disciple of Christ; as described in Titus 2—they are a sober, reverent, and temperate man who as a disciple who follows Jesus, is learning to live by Christ's wisdom.

Titus 2:1-2 But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: 2 that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; NKJV

Do you remember the first two we have learned?

1. **Grace-energized Men are Sober disciples of Christ: MAINTAINING A BALANCED LIFE IN AN OBSESSIVE-COMPLUSIVE WORLD**

v. 2a “sober” (nephalios): God wants matured, godly older men to model the life God wants, to encourage younger men; and challenge them to abandon the temptations of youth such as reckless living, impatience with decision making, thoughtless communication, and the unreliability that often characterizes young people.

2. **Grace-energized Men are Reverent disciples of Christ: GETTING SERIOUS ABOUT GOD IN AN AMUSED WORLD**

v.2b “reverent” (semnos): God wants older men who model what its like to live life seriously. This man lives a life that is never entertained by sensuality, and never amused by vulgarity, and doesn't treat life superficially.

Then, we started on the third element grace-energized men learn.

3. **Grace-energized Men are Temperate disciples of Christ: LIVING WISELY IN A FOOLISH WORLD**

v.2c “temperate”: God wants older men who are wise in behavior, meaning their lives are yielded to His control. This man's life is characterized by the Greek word **sophronas** which means, “self-controlled, restored to senses, earnest”.

And what does God's wisdom, when followed by His obedient Titus 2 grace-energized disciples look like?

First, Wise in His View of this World

One whole area that these temperate men get disciplined in is the growing list of unbiblical beliefs, and the post-Christian rules by which America now lives. Just to name a few:

1. **Wise men see our Foolish world is characterized by NARCISSISM or self-centeredness.** Foolish people live for themselves. Remember Christ's story about the rich fool (**Luke 12:13-21**)? Foolish decision making always starts with a premise of “what is best for me?” Wisdom from God leads us to start all decision making with the desire of, “What is best for God?”
2. **Wise men see our Foolish world is also characterized by PLURALISM or the belief in non-absolutes** (**Judges 17:6**; 21:25). Foolish people think that there really isn't any ultimate truth. Wisdom from God causes us to start with God as the source of Ultimate Truth (**John 14:6**).
3. **Wise men see our Foolish world is also characterized by HEDONISM or a “pleasure first” priority in life.** For foolish people, the pursuit of pleasure becomes the meaning of their existence. Wisdom from God starts with “seek first the kingdom of God” (**Mat. 6:33**) and ends with “you are not your own... therefore glorify God with your body” (**I Cor. 6:19-20**). Christ's supremacy over life, pleasures, and even needs is truth.
4. **Wise men see our Foolish world is also characterized by SECULARISM or the practice of compartmentalizing life into boxes that have no impact upon each other.** A foolish person believes that sacred things belong in church and that the rest of life is secular. For a foolish person seeking God's will and direction through prayer and God's Word is no longer practiced—that is for church not life. Wisdom from God teaches us that “of Him, through Him, and to Him” are all things (**Rom. 11:36**). We seek the gracious Lordship of Christ to invade all of our life.
5. **Wise men see our Foolish world is also characterized by MATERIALISM or living for stuff.** A foolish person measures their life by what they own, where they live, what they wear, where they go, and what they drive. A foolish person lives to gain more stuff, and ACCUMULATION has become their theme song of life. Wisdom from God teaches us that our life is a vapor, and that nothing material can be taken to Heaven, only sent ahead. A wise person

realizes that happiness is a byproduct of obeying God and that greed is idolatry (Col. 3:5) in God's sight. Jesus told us that it is far better to give and inherit eternal possessions (Mat. 19:28-29) than to grasp onto getting as much as we can—and losing it all (Matthew 16:25-26). That is wisdom!

6. **Wise men see our Foolish world is also characterized by RELATIVISM or ignoring essential differences.** A foolish person believes there are no absolutes, and that everyone should be allowed to be their own authority. To a foolish person whatever works, feels good, or satisfies is okay; and so all the old rules are gone. And we form our own rules in the now as we go through life. Wisdom from God seeks out the "old paths" as God told Jeremiah (6:16). And as Christ's parable of the house upon the sand illustrates (Matthew 7:24-26), the wise man build his life upon the Rock of God's Word and His truth that is sure (Psalm 19:7).

Second, Wise in His Estimation of Himself

Romans 12:3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but **to think soberly**, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. NKJV

To capture the sense of this verse it helps to put in the word 'estimate' then it would say: "Don't overestimate yourself (**hyperphroneo** 'super-think') beyond a true estimate, but estimate yourself with a proper estimate".

The godly older man cultivates a proper view of self that is honest and accurate. He has a realistic and Biblical view of his strengths, weaknesses, his God-given talents, and all his human deficiencies. After coming to an accurate appraisal of who he is and how God made him, he sees his place and purpose in God's program. This man avoids the two extremes, he neither thinks he is better (pride and conceit) or worse (self-depreciation).

Rather he thinks with wisdom from God above, through His Spirit within.

- **2 Corinthians 5:13** For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are **of sound mind**, it is for you. NKJV;
- **1 Peter 4:7** But the end of all things is at hand; therefore **be serious** and watchful in your prayers. NKJV

Finally, Wise in the Investment of His Time

There was a fascinating book *Bowling Alone* written by Robert D. Putnam (Simon & Schuster 2000) which documents the erosion in the past few decades of American societal fabric. Putnam says this was caused by the diminishment of social groups, close associations, personal connectivity, chosen social support groups, and even close personal friendships. He goes on to war that we have increasingly become a nation of 'disconnected, isolated, lonely individuals'.

When we look around we see how true his conclusions really are. And if we ponder the ramifications we can see that this is especially bad news for the church of Jesus Christ. We have been called of God to bond together in local assemblies that share an intimate fellowship. In Christ we are to become closer to one another than what exists in most ordinary family groups.

For the church of today, the old American saying "united we stand, divided we fall" is especially relevant. The more rapidly our culture and American society fall apart, the more important it is for us as Christians to take vigorous steps in the opposite direction from the cultural trends of disconnectivity! Paul told Titus to have each man work on the microcosm of his individual life being under God's control; and then we can leave the repair of the macrocosm of both the American church and culture to God.

"In reading the letters of the Apostle Paul one can't help note the very large number of Christian brothers the Apostle knew, prayed for, and cared for—even though they were scattered about all over the Roman Empire. They were all "family." We see Paul frequently stopping to pray for them or send them greetings though they lived hundreds of miles apart. It was not exactly as if he had nothing else to do! Today it is not likely we have any clue about our Christians in other congregations even when neighboring churches are just down the block. And next door neighbors? Many of us have no clue about them at all.

When the collective spiritual standards of a local church slowly slip away, the flame in individual hearts dies as well. There is a cure to this situation of gradual decline in the Christian community, but it depends on individuals who will resist the status quo, begin repenting on behalf of the rest of all of us, and renewing our own close daily walk with God by rearranging our priorities.

*God has not given us Christians a plot of land, a temple, an earthly inheritance—things He did give to Israel in perpetuity. But He has given each of us a spiritual sphere of influence—the kingdom of our individual lives. Our invisible influence amongst our families, our friends, at church, at work, thrives only when we place ourselves under the authority and rule of Jesus, the King of kings. When Jesus rules in and through us, living His endless life through us, a lasting legacy is laid up for us in heaven—even though our position in the present world system may be obscure or unknown (*Hebrews 11:32-40*). [1][1]*

The Most Important Investment You Can Make

Wisdom comes from God.

God speaks through His Word.
His Word is the only place to get His promises.
All we can cling to when we die are the promises of God—so what would be the most important investment we could make in 2008?
How about 80 hours of your life, totally given to God?

Since it only takes eighty hours to read the entire Bible, let me ask you this: Can you invest 15 minutes per day to cultivate the mind of Christ while living in this foolish world?

How about giving the Lord your promise of fifteen minutes to read His Word through this year, looking for your own set of promises to cling to through life?

THE BIBLE		TOTAL HOURS	DAILY MINUTES
• OLD TESTAMENT	77%	62	10
• NEW TESTAMENT	23%	18	5
TIME TO READ BIBLE		80	15

Fifteen minutes reading per day makes it through the Bible once a year, and a half-hour equals two times.

On a CD or tape, listening to the complete Bible in a year requires the same amount of time.

Isn't God worth it?

[1][1] Lambert Dolphin email NL#80, 10/27/07.

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