

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“. . . Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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THE SUNSET YEARS

(NO. 1)

By Robert R. Taylor Jr.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Brother Robert R. Taylor for decades has been one of the most talented and prolific writers in the Lord's church. He is a dedicated soldier of the cross and the truth of God's word. He and his lovely and gifted wife, Irene, continue to serve the cause of Christ unselfishly and tirelessly. We are honored that he has given permission to **FCGN** to reprint these articles on "The Sunset Years" for the benefit of our reading audience.

Many of our readers are in their sunset years. We publish this series of articles in your honor and to challenge you to continue to be a force for the salvation of souls and the faithfulness of the Lord's people, as long as God gives you breath and ability to serve Him. - Ted J. Clarke]

Human ages are variously determined. In a vein of humor, someone has said there are three ages of man - youth, middle age and "My but you are looking well!!" The third category is becoming increasingly more and more my placement! Seasons are variously employed to describe man's pilgrimage on earth. There is the spring or youth of life. There is the summer of life when early adulthood is attained. There is the autumn of life with later adulthood and the ripening of wisdom and seasoned judgment. There is the winter of life with advancing years, a slowdown and ultimately the certain coming of death.

Solomon, in Ecclesiastes 12:1-7, traces man from youth to old age and finally death. There is the vibrancy of youth portrayed in verses 1 and 2, the proper time to remember God. Verses 3,4 and part of 5 describe advancing age

with amazing accuracy. The arms (keepers of the house) tremble, the legs (strong men) bend and bow with accompanying feebleness, the teeth (grinders) cease to grind due to the loss of them, and the window of gazers (the eyes) do not see clearly as was once the case. There is less and less going about as the shut-in years approach. Sleep is not as sound as it formerly was and most any little noise affects it. The hearing becomes impaired and sound seems much more distant than it formerly did. High places are feared and dangers lurk in the way that formerly went unnoticed. The hair becomes silvery; burdens, even light, are lifted with far greater effort. Physical desires no longer dominate or pressure the person for fulfillment for they have now failed and are rapidly fading. Death is then portrayed as man's going to his long home with mourners grieving his passing. Verse 6 is expressive with intense imageries. The silver cord is loosed, the golden bowl is broken, the pitcher is broken at the fountain, the wheel is broken at the cistern. Verse 7 is a dual description of man's demise. The body, at death, returns to dust, its original ingredient. The spirit, man's immortal portion, returns to God its giver.

Usage of the sun is also employed. Sunrise refers to one's birth and early life. The sun in its full zenith refers to man's prime. The sunset is the latter part of man's pilgrimage on earth. This shall be our employed imagery in this series of lessons.

A QUARTET OF VALIANT VERSES

The closing four verses of Psalm 92:12-15 read, "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall

flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing: To show that the Lord is upright: he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him." Note the tone and tenor in verb usage. It is not past as though all usefulness is past. It is future tense built on present involvement and current dedication to keep right on living and working for the Lord.

ABRAHAM AND SARAH

There is something saintly and serene relative to this patriarchal prince and princess. We can trace Abraham's life from the time he was about seventy to seventy-five until his death a full century later. We can trace Sarah's life from about the time she was sixty until her death at one hundred twenty-seven. Incidentally, she is the **only** woman in the Bible whose age at death is recorded. The fairer part of the race has always been age conscious and many are reluctant to reveal age. Perhaps the Holy Spirit respected that well known characteristic of wonderful womanhood! Abraham and Sarah traveled well the route of righteousness. Faith was their fortune from the Ur to Haran to Canaan. In Canaan, Abraham lived for about a full century and Sarah for some sixty years plus. There was a brief and almost disastrous sojourn in Egypt (Gen. 12:10-20). There was a time when they grew impatient and ran ahead of God in the Hagar-Ishmael incident. But time deepened their confidence in the surety of the Abrahamic promises. The advancing years found them growing in faith, hope and love. They grew old gracefully and graciously. Saintly and serenely describe their sunset years - not sourness and stubbornness. Faith flowered for them; it did not flounder and fail. Hope for them was heavenly, not

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hollow. Love maintained loyalty to the Lord; it was not lost by bitterness of spirit and despicability of disposition. Of both, Inspiration affirms that they **died** in faith (Heb. 11:13). This was made possible due to their having **lived** in faith. People do not die **in** the faith who have lived **outside** the faith all of their lives. Living outside the Lord makes impossible a death in the Lord. Abraham and Sarah are worthy of our emulation as we all face the sunset years.

THE SUNSET YEARS**[NO.2]**

Some people **get** old; others **grow** old. The latter continue to grow in the loveliest of Christian graces. They grow sweeter, not more sour. They become more beautiful in character, not bitter in disposition. They become more saintly and serene. Graduation time into glory is nearer their threshold. They grow gracefully and generously, faithfully and fervently: lovingly and loyally.

YEARS OF FAITHFULNESS - NOT FAITHLESSNESS

Faith, hope and love are the abiding graces according to Paul

in First Corinthians 13:13. They should be the abiding graces in the life of every Christian man and woman. The sunset years should witness a deepening of faith, hope and love. Faith should be fuller; hope should be more heavenward; love should be more loyal and lavish. Faith in the Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) should be deeper. Faith in the Bible should be more fervent. Faith in the reality of heaven should be more meaningful and majestic. Faith in God's Son constitutes the appointed way to overcome the world (1 John 5:4-5). There should be a deepening of one's faith in Christianity as God's only appointed religion between Calvary and the Lord's second coming. How wonderful to behold the growing faith of great and godly veterans who have borne the burden and heat of the day. What a powerful portrayal they paint for those of us who face the sunset years.

YEARS OF HEAVENLY HOPE - NOT HOPELESS FUTILITY

Hope is allied with faith in First Corinthians 13:13 and in numerous places within Holy Writ. Salvation is by hope (Rom. 8:24). Hope is linked with love (1 Cor. 13:7, 13). It composes one of the seven unique unities in Ephesians 4:4-6. Hope is expectation, desire and anticipation. It looks forward to the heavenly hereafter. This is its tremendous thrust. Heaven reached will be its full fruition of reward. Hope forms the anchor that connects heaven and earth for the devout disciple of Deity (Heb. 6:18-20). Hope keeps us going when the way is rough, the temptations are many and the discouragements are constant. One's Christianity is a building. The foundation is faith, the walls are love, the roof is hope. We build on faith, line up with love and look up to hope. As the sunset years approach and the end is in sight, the golden glow of heaven should be brighter and more blessed for every sunset saint.

William Jennings Bryan once

wrote in a book, *Seven Questions in Dispute*, relative to the resurrection and the reality attached to it. He portrayed an aged couple who were devout believers in the Bible. The man is blind; the woman still retains her precious eyesight. She is reading the beautiful and beloved Bible to him. His hands are crossed on his cane, his chin rests upon his feeble hands, his sightless eyes are directed toward space. He requested she read again the precious passage of where Jesus affirmed Himself to be "the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me though he were dead, yet shall he live . . . (John 11:25).

In marked contrast to the foregoing stands the reported story of John Stuart Mill, renowned English philosopher and a man who enjoyed world-wide acclaim, who once said, in essence, "I would give all I have and all I ever hope to have if for one hour of the day I could look up to the beautiful blue sky and call it heaven as I did while a boy." How utterly futile when one faces the sunset years either with a hope that has died in skepticism as with Mill, or a hope that was never achieved and maintained as with lifetime infidels. The sunset years mean the grave is near at hand. How empty if the grave is all man faces at life's demise.

YEARS OF LOVE - NOT LOVELESS YEARS

Love is the greatest, grandest and most glorious of all emotions. God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). When we pattern our love habits after the holy habits of His love, we are close kin to Deity. The loveless person knows nothing of this kingly kinship. Paul styles love as being greater than faith and hope (1 Cor. 13:13). Love is not restricted to just one age or season of life. The young couple in the realm of romance who have just married may think their love is as deep and meaningful as it can ever be. Long married couples whose love has been tried and tested a thousand ways know better. The same is true for one

who has long been a tried, true and tested Christian. One's veteran and valiant service of love to God above and man below will yield a concept of love that the novice in faith will not experience for years. Love is inexhaustible. It should grow, flourish and prosper till dying breath. [To be continued.]

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DESIRE TO KNOW GOD'S WORD

by Clovis Ragsdale

The apostle Peter, speaking of those who had been converted to Christianity, exhorts, yes commands, them to "as new born babes in Christ, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2). As the growth of a child born into this world is wholly dependent upon the amount of milk it is able to receive and digest, so also the growth of the young Christian depends upon the amount of God's word he is able to learn and put into practice. Notice that Peter stated that it is first necessary to "desire" the word. Therefore, the first step in acquiring Bible knowledge is for the individual to create in his or her heart a burning desire to know and understand the word of God.

Surveys concerning Bible questions, which have been taken by pollsters, show an appalling lack of Bible knowledge exists in America today. This in a country where practically every home has a Bible and where almost all persons are able to read. People are spending much more time seeking after pleasures and the things of this world than in meditation of God's Word, because they desire and enjoy the things of the world more than things spiritual. Christians can not pursue this course and expect to grow spiritually, and for a Christian to fail to grow is fatal. God expects his children to keep moving onward and upward, striving toward perfection. David opened the Psalms by stating, "Blessed is the man that walketh

not in the council of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful, but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night" (Psalm 1:1,2). Things in which we delight, we desire. Most people have little difficulty understanding even the smallest details concerning things in which they are most interested, but when it comes to studying and understanding the Bible, they haven't the desire to put much time in studying and searching the Scriptures. Instead, many have accepted the teachings of other men without doing as the Bereans mentioned by Paul in Acts 17:11. "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they recieved the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so."

In the world today there are many contradicting religious doctrines being taught in pulpits, over the radio, and through the printed pages. Certainly the Bible is not a book of contradictions; then these many different ideas and beliefs must be of men and not of God. Because of these many winds of doctrine, the need of every individual to study his Bible more and more becomes apparent, in order that we be not misled and fall into a condition best described in Matthew 15:14. "Let them alone, they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."

Christians are told in 1 Peter 3:15, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." We learn from this passage that we are ever to be able to explain why we are followers of Christ and what it means to have that blessed hope that some day we can live with God and Christ in the great beyond.

God exhorts Titus to teach leaders to be, "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the

gainsayer." We need to be familiar with God's word, that we not only will know how we ought to live, but also to be able to lead others to Christ. Unless we are versed in the Scriptures, we are handicapped as we try to gain our neighbors and friends, and often those who are near and dear unto us, for Christ.

Some would say that the Bible is so written that it is hard to understand. True, there are many mysteries in God's word that men have been unable to solve; but the things which are essential to salvation are simple and plain and leaves us with no excuse for not understanding what God would have us do. By earnest study and by rightly dividing the word men are able to grow in the knowledge of the word which enables them to reap a bountiful harvest for the Lord.

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"TOO LATE! NO TIME, NO ..."

by Ted J. Clarke

Those words were the last words heard on the cockpit recorder of the French Concorde supersonic jet airplane that crashed in Paris on July 25, killing all on board and several people on the ground. In all, 113 people died. On take-off the plane had hit a piece of metal on the runway that punctured a tire. The tire flew apart and hit an engine and fuel tank on the plane, causing an explosive fire that brought the plane down only 90 seconds into its flight. When made aware of the emergency situation the pilot said he would land at a nearby airport. However, a few seconds later he said, "Too late. No time, no" and then there was silence. One can only imagine the horror of the passengers, the screams and shrieks and exclamations of terror as they heard the noise of the accident, saw the flames and felt the plane plunging to the earth. For all on board and those few on the ground it was **too late**, there was **no time** left. Their eternal destinies were sealed.

We cringe at the thoughts and feelings of the last seconds of those who lost their lives in this tragic accident, **and yet, none of us know that we are not living under the same possible urgency.** At any moment, the same sort of freak accident could happen to us. A heart attack, a stroke, a ruptured aorta, an explosion, a head-on car crash, a slip in the bathtub, choking on food - literally thousands of things can happen to end one's life on earth. James 1:14 says, "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." First Peter 1:24 says, "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." When these times come, one's eternal destiny is set. It is "too late" to change it! There is "no time" left.

The suddenness with which death can come is also illustrated by the Lord's teaching on the rich fool (Luke 12:13-21) and the account of Lazarus and the Rich Man (Luke 16:19-31). The time to be concerned about one's eternal destiny is now, while you are alive and have time to obey the gospel or be restored to God's grace! Also, Jesus repeatedly reminded us that we do not know the hour of His return, which also seals one's destiny (Matthew 24:35-44). Matthew 25 is all about living in such a way to be prepared to meet the Lord. Our death or His second coming will place us before Him. Are you ready?

ARTICLES BY FORMER EDITORS

With this issue we begin what we call "memories," or, to use present day slang, "a blast from the past." **Fulton County Gospel News** has a rich history in its nearly continuous publication since 1953. **FCGN** likely would not have begun nor continued its course without the editorship and co-editorship of Clovis Ragsdale. Brother Ragsdale was in on the planning stages of **FCGN** and was co-editor with brother Boyd

Morgan for some time. He also served as editor and co-editor at other times during the paper's history. We are truly thankful for his insight and involvement with **FCGN** over the years. We here include the first article brother Ragsdale wrote for the first issue of **FCGN** in January of 1953. It is as timely today as when it was first published.

Future issues of **FCGN** will carry articles by other editors of the paper. In cases where these men are still living, we include their present address, as we do for all our authors. It would please us much and I'm sure it would thrill these dedicated and thoughtful men if you would drop them a line and tell them how thankful you are for their involvement in the work of **FCGN** over the years. We could not be doing the work with the paper we are doing today if it were not for the previous work of these noble men. [Editor]

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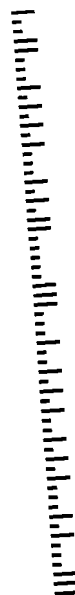


GOD'S AUTHORIZED WORSHIP - COLOSSIANS 3:17

- LORD'S SUPPER** - The New Testament and early church history record that Christians met on the first day of every week (Sunday) to worship God and remember Christ (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 11:23-34; 16:1-2).
- PRAYERS** - (Acts 2:42; Philippians 4:6-7; I Thessalonians 5:17-18).
- SINGING** - God's word authorizes only vocal music and specifically singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12). The New Testament shows no use of mechanical instruments of music in worship to God by the church Christ established. Church history notes no such use for nearly 700 years after the New Testament was completed. It is an innovation of men, not of God.
- GIVING** - Free-willed, cheerful, generous, and every week (Acts 20:35; I Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9).
- PREACHING OF THE WORD** - The gospel of Christ, not men's doctrines nor entertainment, saves and strengthens us (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Romans 10:17; I Corinthians 1:18-23).

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