



SPECIAL EDITION

A defense of the expectation of the body of Christ, Part 1:

THE PRESENT ERA

WARNING: The following is a critique of an article written by our brother Clyde Pilkington. For those over-sensitive saints who can't handle conflict, or who just want everyone to "get along," or who would jettison their faith simply because people disagree, then please do not read the following article. I have respected your weakness and warned you. For those wanting truth at any cost, the following is worthy of your careful consideration, for this is a topic of utmost importance. If it weren't, I would not have spent the time critiquing Clyde's article and mailing this special edition in the middle of the week. Thank you. —Martin Zender



It is no fun refuting friends, but such is the nature of the job. When consequential truth is at stake, I do not shy away from this. This is not about personalities, but about truth. It is about defending the truth. When proving or disproving truth, we must use the brains God gave us and make every attempt to be logical. "Logical" is not the opposite of "spiritual." The opposite of spiritual is soulish, that is, emotional. Many times, it is emotions that oppose logic. It is easy to make an emotional plea for something one believes, based simply on the fact that one believes it. That's nice that people

have beliefs, but upon what are these beliefs founded? Thinking people want evidence. Without evidence, anyone's position is sunk—including mine. The great thing about debates such as this is that the evidence is put before you, the reader, and you can decide for yourself. On a personal note, you can rest your vexed and weary hearts knowing that Clyde and I will always love each other. Okay? Now buck up, and may the spirit of God help you see the truth in this case of the limited era.

In the following article, Clyde is responding to a series of articles I wrote ("The Era is Limited") in which I made the point that Paul encourages us to live as though the snatching away of the body of Christ were imminent. I believe that Paul set forth the snatching away of the body of Christ *as* imminent because he thought it *was* imminent. That it did not occur then, and has not yet occurred, does not eliminate the truth that, because there are no signs set forth to announce the proximity of this great event, we are always to anticipate it. Expecting it is meant to always be a comfort to us. Clyde is trying to prove here that we are *not* to look for the snatching away, and that, if we are looking forward to it, then we are "wasting [our] time" by doing so, and not only this, but we are making "a costly mistake."

Here are our respective premises:

Zender: (paraphrased) We should look forward to the snatching away of the body of Christ.

Pilkington: (paraphrased) We should *not* look forward to the snatching away. To do so would be a waste of time and a costly mistake. In fact, there *is* no such thing as the snatching away of the body of Christ.

Folks, this is a serious enough disagreement about a consequential-enough truth so as to warrant discussion, don't you agree?

The table is set. Let's go!

The Current Era Is Limitless

by Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

... the era is limited ... (I Corinthians 7:29, CV)
(From *Bible Student's Notebook*, #488)

Paul said that the previous era was limited. However, this current era, which began when he revealed the pinnacle of his revelation found in his latter epistles, is limitless.

I have a problem right off the bat. Paul did not say “the *previous* era is limited,” he said “the era is limited.” Clyde has added the word “previous.” To Clyde it is previous, but what if we can find Scripture proving that we are still in the era Paul spoke of? Already, Clyde is assuming the point he claims to be proving. Secondly, he states that “this current era” began when Paul “revealed the pinnacle of his revelation found in his latter epistles.” When was this, specifically? In the letter to the Ephesians? The letter to the Colossians? In Acts 28:28? No evidence is offered. The statement is then made that this current era—defined by Clyde rather than Scripture—is “limitless.” As if he has thus far proven every point, Clyde now offers a dictionary definition of the meaning of “limitless”:

Limitless is defined as “vast” and “seemingly boundless.” These are appropriate descriptions of unadulterated grace. The very nature of pure grace makes it so. After all, “where sin abounds grace does much more abound.” The sin of Israel’s fall ushered in the expansive reign of God’s grace.

But Paul was not describing grace. Grace may indeed be limitless, but this has no bearing on the passage. What we need to determine is what era Paul was talking about when he said, “the era is limited.” Clyde insists that the era Paul referred to is past, and that we now live in a different era whose chief characteristic—in contrast to the era before it—is limitless grace. According to Clyde, this different, present era began “when [Paul] revealed the pinnacle of his revelation found in his latter epistles,” referring to Paul’s so-called prison epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon. If Clyde is correct, then we should find no limitless grace in any of Paul’s earlier epistles. Is this the case? Far from it.

We need only one passage to disprove Clyde’s claim that not only a new era but limitless grace began at “Israel’s fall” in Acts 28:28. That passage is 1 Timothy 1:13-

16. I agree with Clyde that “where sin abounds grace does much more abound” (Romans 5:20), but the fall of Israel falls significantly short of defining the apex of either sin or God’s answering grace. I’ll let Paul himself tell you about it. Here is 1 Timothy 1:13-16—

I, who formerly was a calumniator and a persecutor and an outrager: but I was shown mercy, seeing that I do it being ignorant, in unbelief. Yet the *grace* of our Lord overwhelms, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all welcome, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, *foremost of whom am I*. But therefore was I shown mercy, that in me, the foremost, Jesus Christ should be displaying *all His patience*, for a pattern of those who are about to be believing on Him for life eonian.

In the case of Paul, we have already seen limitless grace on parade. With Paul, Jesus Christ displayed “*all His patience*.” Why did Paul require *all* of Jesus Christ’s patience? Because Paul was, by his own testimony, the foremost sinner. The Damascus road set the bar for grace, and we have yet to see a greater display. When did this occur? It occurred before Paul had penned a single letter. Paul *wrote* about such grace in 2 Corinthians 9:8 (an early letter), “Now God is able to lavish *all* grace on you,” but he had already *lived* it years before.

Here are other verses testifying to limitless grace before Paul’s “prison epistles”—

► 2 Corinthians 9:14, “... because of the transcendent grace of God on you.”

► Romans 5:20, “Yet law came in by the way, that the offense should be increasing. Yet where sin increases, grace superexceeds.”

► Romans 12:6, “... now, having graces excelling, in accord with the grace which is given to us ...”

► Romans 7:25, “A wretched man am I! What will rescue me out of this body of death? Grace!”

► 1 Corinthians 1:7, “... so that you are not deficient in any grace, awaiting the unveiling of our Lord Jesus Christ ...”

► 1 Corinthians 15:10, “Yet, in the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace, which is in me, did not come to be for naught, but more exceedingly than all of them toil I -- yet not I, but the grace of God which is with me.”

► Galatians 2:21, “I am not repudiating the grace of God, for if righteousness is through law, consequently Christ died gratuitously.”

While Paul anticipated the era of the Acts period to wrap up quickly with the Coming of Jesus Christ, “the hope of Israel” was placed in abeyance, superseded by a previously unrevealed immensity of unparalleled grace. The Coming of Christ graciously has continued to remain in abeyance for centuries now.

Where does any verse say that Paul anticipated the era of the Acts period to wrap up quickly? Clyde must believe that Paul’s “the era is limited” statement does this duty, but here again he assumes a point he has failed to prove. I will prove that the era Paul claimed to be limited is the very era we live in, and that this era is always limited in the sense that “the fashion of this world” (1 Corinthians 7:31) is always “passing by.”

Again Clyde suggests that “a previously unrevealed immensity of unparalleled grace” did not begin until Acts 28:28, when Israel was officially “placed in abeyance.” Yet I have shown that this era of grace began at the call of Paul in Acts chapter 9. Like Charles Welch, Clyde claims that Paul’s ministry altered dramatically at Acts 28:28.

Is Time Really Short?

What an economy Grace has been! What else would we expect from the pure grace of God? It has, indeed, been vast and seemingly boundless. It has spanned nearly two millennia, which pales in comparison to Paul’s previous profession that “time is short” (1 Corinthians 7:29).

Paul did not say “the time is short,” but rather “the era is limited.” Twice now Clyde has tampered with this verse, first claiming Paul to have said, “the *previous* era was limited,” and now claiming him to have said, “the time is short.” I will continue to consistently insist upon what Paul actually said, which is, “the era is limited.” The only way to make headway on this topic is to keep this phrase—and precisely this phrase—in mind.

As I related in a previous article, the word translated “limited” in the *Concordant Version* is the Greek word *sunstello*, whose English elements are TOGETHER-PUT. Luke used the word in Acts 5:6 to describe the wrapping of a corpse, translated by the CV as “enshroud” and by the KJV as, “wind up.” The idea is to tie up loose ends. I actually like the translation “wind up.” Paul is not saying that the era is short, but that it is winding up. It is on its way out. I insist that it has been consistently “winding up,” and that it has been “on its way out” from Paul’s time

to this, and that “the chief men of this eon are being discarded” (1 Corinthians 2:6) just as much today as they were then. The 2,000 years since Paul’s day to this day has not changed the nature of this era at all. While it has gotten worse, its nature has not changed. As I will show shortly, it is the same era.

You can see, then, the false dichotomy Clyde constructs between “the time is short” (which Paul did not say), and the two millennia which have passed since the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. Paul said two-thousand years ago that the era was winding up and on its way out, with its chiefs being discarded. This is as true now as it was then. Paul never said the time was short.

“I will continue, with Paul, to announce this era as passing away. The 2,000 years since Paul has not altered the era one bit.”

The Law spanned just over 1,500 years. If the Law which caused sin to increase lasted some 15 centuries, does it not make divine sense that Grace would abound long past such a period? Grace now stands at nearly 20 centuries. Is it nearly over? Is Grace about to cease by our appearing with Christ in Glory? Or, has Grace another 5 centuries? Or, perhaps another 10 centuries to double the duration of the Law? Or, even well beyond that? What kind of show will God make of this great attribute of His? None of us should dare to be so presumptuous as to estimate the end of the era of His Grace!

No one is estimating the end of the era of grace. But I, for one, am insisting that this era is limited. I will continue, with Paul, to announce it as passing away. I will not, with Clyde, claim it to be, relatively, just getting started. No one knows when this era will close, but we are supposed to live in accord with the thought that it is passing away, not being elongated. I refuse to say or even think that this era has “another five centuries.” This disturbing thought is antithetical to how Paul would have us think of this era. I will go with Paul here. From me you will hear that this era will last, “another five *minutes*”

but never “another five *centuries*.” Supposing that the era of grace will be double the duration of the era of Law is just that: supposition. It is not God’s plan to show His great attributes of grace in *this* era (as Clyde contends), but rather in the oncoming eons:

That, in the oncoming eons, He should be displaying the transcendent riches of His grace in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus. —Ephesians 2:7

The above verse allows *this* era, which *supposedly* shows the transcendent riches of His grace (but doesn’t) to end any time, so that even more transcendent riches of grace than those witnessed at Paul’s conversion can come. I predict that this era will end five minutes from now. With this prediction, I am much nearer to the spirit and intention of Paul than to suppose, with Clyde, that it will end in five hundred or a thousand years. Both Clyde and myself are supposing. I am supposing in accord with Paul.

I reject the Law/Grace time theory. In Scripture, grace is most often played against sin, not law (see Romans 5:16). Sin has been around since Adam—long before Sinai. If we want to play with numbers and eras, it is far more likely that God compares the era of humanity’s reign on Earth with the era of the reign of His Son. This is a legitimate, Scriptural comparison. Hebrews calls the coming millennium the Sabbath rest of God’s people. Hebrews 4:8-10—

For if Joshua causes them to stop, He would not have spoken concerning another day after these things. Consequently a sabbatism is left for the people of God. For he who is entering into His stopping, he also stops from his works even as God from His own.

Following the sixth days of creation, God ceased from His works. On the seventh day, He stopped. The writer of Hebrews cites this as an example of the rest awaiting God’s people, namely, the millennial kingdom. This kingdom is said to be a thousand years in duration (Revelation 20:5-6). I therefore believe that a correlation exists between the six days of creation and the six thousand years of man, and between the seventh day of stopping and the millennial kingdom. Since the Millennium is a thousand years long, would it not “make divine sense”—as Clyde says—for the length of the reign of man to be six-thousand years in duration? The six-thousand years of man lead to the one-thousand years of

God’s stopping. We need to think bigger. There is likely more correlation here than between the coming of the law of Moses and Acts 28:28.

According to intelligent calculations I will publish later, the year 2028 marks six thousand years since Adam. If this year is true, then the days of the indignation of God would begin in 2021—a mere six years from this writing. F.H. Baader, compiler of *The Dabbar Translation*, authored a detailed book called, *Chronology in the Bible*, making a compelling case for the year 2028 as the dawn of the Millennium. I plan to master this topic and bring you more information. Am I setting a date for the snatching away? Of course not. No one can do that. The snatching away of the body of Christ has no time peg. It is unrelated to the coming of Christ to Israel. The coming of Christ for Israel, on the other hand, is loaded with time pegs and signs. At the birth of Christ, three men from the East read the stars and found Him. Israel’s own Scripture foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. At Christ’s

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dedication at the temple, Simeon and Anna were waiting for Him, having discerned from the prophesies of Daniel, via the holy spirit, the season of the Coming One. No man can know the hour of Christ’s return for Israel, but we make a huge mistake to suppose that the immediate season will not be known. We make a huge mistake to mock those who *do* know and *will* know the times and seasons of Israel commensurate with Christ’s glorious second appearance to that nation.

Prophetic prognosticators are ignorant of God’s current unprophesied dealings with man. They use Scriptures addressed to Israel, as well as Paul’s earlier epistles, to promote the idea of an “imminent” coming of Christ (or “Rapture”). As a result, their hearers are encouraged to adjust their lifestyles unnaturally for this impending event. One passage from Paul’s Acts-period letters that is sometimes used to advocate such an adjustment is:

“This I say, brethren, the time is short: it remains, that both they that have wives be as though they had none (I Corinthians 7:29).”

“This I am averring, brethren, the era is limited; that, furthermore, those also having wives may be as not having them (CV).”

Nowhere does Paul say that the return of Christ is imminent, but rather that the era is limited, that is, being wrapped up; passing away. Paul does say, however, in Romans 13:11, “[be] aware of the era, that it is already the hour for us to be roused out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believe.” Paul is always presenting salvation as nearer, not father away. In the prison epistles, where Paul is supposed to have given up on the limited era and resigned himself to an interminable slog, he writes to the Ephesians about being “pre-expectant in the Christ” (Ephesians 1:12). In another prison epistle, he writes to the Colossians in 1:23—

... since surely you are persisting in the faith, grounded and settled and are not being removed from the expectation of the evangel which you hear which is being heralded in the entire creation which is under heaven of which I, Paul, became the dispenser.

In verse 27 of this letter he writes,

... to whom God wills to make known what are the glorious riches of this secret among the nations, which is: Christ among you, the expectation of glory ...

It is true that Paul makes no mention of imminence here, but neither does he make mention of distance. I believe that if the event were known to be far away, Paul would have said as much to the saints. He simply does not know when the snatching away will happen. Neither do we. But what he does know for sure is that the saints are to live expecting it. They are not to be removed from a continual expectation of it. What Paul encourages is this very thing that Clyde *discourages*, telling us at the end of his BSN article, “don’t waste your time imagining that you will be ‘raptured’ (i.e., delivered away) from your divine training ground.” This is a direct quote. *What?* My goodness, I have never read anything like that from Paul. It is hard to believe that I am reading it from Clyde. (It is in the last paragraph of his article, I will be commenting upon it in detail later.) Being delivered away from our divine training ground is precisely what God plans for us. We don’t have to imagine it because God has promised to do it.

Paul: “We ourselves also, are awaiting the sonship, *the deliverance of our body*” (Romans 8:23).

Clyde: “Don’t waste your time imagining that you will be delivered away from your divine training ground.”

Paul: “That we should be for the laud of His glory, who are *pre-expectant in the Christ*, in Whom you also—on hearing the word of truth, the evangel of your salvation— in Whom on believing also, you are sealed with the holy spirit of *promise*, which is an earnest of the enjoyment of our allotment, *to the deliverance of that which has been procured*, for the laud of His glory! (Ephesians 1:12-14)

Clyde: “Don’t waste your time imagining that you will be delivered away from your divine training ground.”

Paul: “And do not be causing sorrow to the holy spirit of God by which you are sealed *for the day of deliverance*” (Ephesians 4:30).

Clyde: “Don’t waste your time imagining that you will be delivered away from your divine training ground.”

Paul: Who gives Himself for our sins, so that He might *extricate us out of the present wicked eon*, according to the will of our God and Father (Galatians 1:4).

Clyde: “Don’t waste your time imagining that you will be delivered away from your divine training ground.”

Paul: “For they are reporting concerning us, what kind of an entrance we have had to you, and how you turn back to God from idols, to be slaving for the living and true God, *and to be waiting for His Son out of the heavens*, Whom He rouses from among the dead, Jesus, *our Rescuer out of the coming indignation*. (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10).

Clyde: “Don’t waste your time imagining that you will be delivered away from your divine training ground.”

Why *wouldn’t* we expect to be delivered from our divine training ground when God promises that this very thing will happen? The opposite of this is *not* to expect it. The opposite is to think that the divine training ground will last forever. Don’t let anyone rob you of your expectation. This is exactly what Paul meant when he said in Colossians 1:23, “[do not be] removed from the expectation of the evangel which you hear which is being heralded in the entire creation which is under heaven of which I, Paul, became the dispenser.” Paul is

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actually warning us against advice such as we are now hearing from Clyde. If I may piece together two pieces from Paul’s two prison letters—the verse above and verse 27 from the same chapter—Paul exhorts the saints, “Do not be removed from the expectation of glory.” Clyde, on the other hand, exhorts the saints, *Do not waste your time expecting glory. It’s all about your divine training ground.*

It is? No, it isn’t. Romans 15:13—

Now may the God of expectation be filling you with all joy and peace in believing, for you to be super-abounding in expectation, in the power of holy spirit.

Nothing there about focusing on our divine training ground. This divine training ground is necessary, but it’s not our expectation. It’s not mine, anyway. I don’t want it to be yours. Our divine training is coming to an end; it’s as limited as this era. We’re getting *out* of this hardness and pain, people! Expect it any day now. Refuse to be robbed of the joy of thinking it could be today. Not only are we to be expecting our change, but according to Paul, we are to be “super-abounding in expectation.”

We have dealt previously in the Bible Student’s Notebook with the dispensational context of I Corinthians. An approach to life based on this passage from a previous economy would be a dishonor to God and contrary to His present purpose as revealed through Paul’s further advanced revelations found in his latter epistles. As a result, it will also wreak unnecessary havoc in one’s personal and domestic life, bringing added sorrow to the heart and disgrace to the message of His Grace. A husband who erroneously attempts to conduct his life today as though he had no wife, most likely will find himself actually not having one!

Again without proof, Clyde calls Paul’s writings before Acts 28:28 “a previous economy.” An economy is an administration. Paul’s administration was the grace of God. As early as 1 Corinthians 9:17, Paul writes, “I

have been trusted with an administration.” What is this administration? Ephesians 3:2, “Since you surely hear of the administration of the grace of God that is given to me for you.” The Ephesians would have surely heard of it, because it was old. Question: When was the administration Paul writes of in Ephesians 3:2 given to him? It was given to him at his calling en route to Damascus. When did he testify to it? He testified to it in 1 Corinthians 9:17, a pre-prison epistle. Question: Is the administration described in Ephesians 3:2, a prison epistle, the same administration Paul testified concerning in 1 Corinthians 9:17, a pre-prison epistle? Yes. Between 1 Corinthians and Ephesians, there is no new administration, or economy. The truths of the administration are gradually revealed and further elaborated upon by its administrator, yes, but the administration itself and its appointed administrator stay the same. In 1 Timothy 1:4, a pre-prison epistle, Paul writes about “*God’s administration*, which is in faith.” In Colossians 1:25, a prison epistle, Paul writes concerning, “the ecclesia of which I became a dispenser, in accord with *the administration of God*, which is granted to me for you, to complete the word of God.” Is “God’s administration” the same as “the administration of God?” Yes. It is Paul’s administration of grace. It has several aspects, but it is the same administration.

LET’S TALK ABOUT THE ERA

Clyde argues that Paul’s advice in 1 Corinthians 7:29-31 is obsolete. Not only is it obsolete, but anyone attempting to actually do what Paul recommends here will “wreak unnecessary havoc in one’s personal and domestic life, bringing added sorrow to the heart and disgrace to the message of His grace.” This is a fantastic claim accompanied by a dire warning. The only way Clyde can make this case is if the “era” Paul refers to in verse 29 has given way to a new and completely different era. The only proof he offers is that “rather than prompting singleness and a weaning of domestic life as he had done previously in I Corinthians 7, he tell us [in Ephesians] that domestic life now has a paramount place in spirituality.”

Let’s consider Paul’s advice of 1 Corinthians 7:29-31—

29 Now this I am averring, brethren, the era is limited; that, furthermore, those also having wives may be as not having them, 30 and those lamenting as not lamenting, and those rejoicing as not rejoicing,

and those buying as not retaining, 31 and those using this world as not using it up. For the fashion of this world is passing by.

Clyde focuses on domestic life, but as we shall see, this is his argument's Achilles heel.

The "for" of verse 31, "for the fashion of this world is passing by" relates us to something that went before. What went before is, "the era is limited." That the fashion of this world is passing by is Paul's explanation of why the era is limited. Maybe better to say that a hallmark of an era that is winding up is the passing away of its fashion. By this, Paul relates the era to the world. The era (*kairos*) is the season, while the world (*kosmos*) is the system in which the season operates.

Are we now living in a different era than what Paul describes here? Another way to ask this question would be: Is the fashion of this world no longer passing by? Is it now to be considered permanent?

Let's look at other uses of the word "era"—

► Romans 8:18— "For I am reckoning that *the sufferings of the current era* do not deserve the glory about to be revealed for us."

► Romans 13:11— "This, also, do, *being aware of the era*, that it is already the hour for us to be roused out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believe."

The following two passages are especially important, as they occur in Paul's prison epistles:

► Ephesians 5:15-16— "Be observing accurately, then, brethren, how you are walking, not as unwise, but as wise, *reclaiming the era*, for the days are wicked."

► Colossians 4:5— "In wisdom be walking toward those outside, *reclaiming the era*."

The word "era" (Greek *kairos*) is a generic term that can refer to any season or period of time, long or short. I find one common denominator in all these uses of the word "era," including the context we're especially examining: the era is wicked. It is opposed to the things of God. This is the era of our suffering (Romans 8:18). It is an era out of which we must be roused and saved (Romans 13:11). In Ephesians 5:16, it is an era that is distinctly called "wicked." In 1 Corinthians 7:29, it is said to be limited and destined to "pass by" with the *kosmos*.

In Colossians 4:5 and Ephesians 5:15-16, the saints are told to "reclaim the era." The word "reclaim" is trans-

lated from the Greek *exagorazo*, whose English elements are OUT-BUY. The idea here is that we are supposed to make the best of a bad situation. Frugal people reclaim metal, that is, they take their old junk to a dealer and get money through "scrap to cash" programs: OUT-BUY. I am relating the old junk to this era. Instead of wasting it, we are to use it for the glory of God. We are to use it as a foil against which to give God a good name via our wise behavior.

What do Paul's mention of the word "era" in 1 Corinthians, Ephesians and Colossians all have in common? In every case, the era is wicked. The era stands against the things of God. One era is not graceless, while the other era showers us with unlimited favor, as Clyde contends. This is why I reject Clyde's teaching that the era

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has changed. He thinks the eras have to do with grace—one being void of grace, the other suffused with it. The problem with this view is that there is no "grace line." The wicked era continues. The grace begun with Paul continues. The era Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians is the same as the era he speaks of in Ephesians and Colossians. The era is consistently wicked. It is the same era.

In all cases the saints are instructed, not how to love the era, but how to deal with it. In Ephesians and Colossians, we are told to reclaim it, that is, behave properly in the shadow of its wickedness so that God might receive an "opportunity" to look good. Paul doesn't use the word "reclaim" in 1 Corinthians, but here in 1 Corinthians we get the extra special good news that the era is winding up, that it is limited. In light of this, we are to hold loosely to everything of this world. Why wouldn't this be the advice to those in a world whose fashion is passing by? The advice of 1 Corinthians and Ephesians and Colossians concerning this current era is consistent. We are to behave well during it (Ephesians and Colossians), but are not to worry about it (1 Corinthians) because it is limited and passing by.

A.E. Knoch comments beautifully upon this in his *Concordant Commentary on the New Testament*:

The transient, fleeting character of all of this world's relationships and experiences should warn us not to let them take an undue hold upon our hearts. We cannot but use the world to a limited extent. Its joys and sorrows affect us, whether we will or no. If it were a permanent system instead of a temporary stage in the process of God's plan, our attitude would be different. In the semi-permanent millennial system, the saints will not be restrained from the full use of the world of that day. But the present system is distinctly hostile to God and occupation with it is calculated to interfere with our fellowship with God and the enjoyment of His permanent purpose.

The era of 1 Corinthians 7 is the same era of Romans, Ephesians, and Colossians. It is the hard, death-filled, wicked era in which we live, which is passing by.

Our Focus During this Era

Ephesians represents the pinnacle of Paul's revelation. Here he lays forth the Secret Economy in which we now live today. In this epistle, rather than prompting singleness and a weaning of domestic life as he had done previously in I Corinthians 7, he tells us that domestic life now has a paramount place in spirituality.

Clyde assumes that, with the supposed epic change in eras, singleness is no longer ideal, and domestic life now has a paramount place in spirituality. This should come as bad news to those who are single. Clyde also subtly assumes here that a loose hold upon this world and its ties necessarily weans away one's love for and dedication to those ties. Stephen Hill makes this same mistaken assumption, writing in Volume 487 of *Bible Student's Notebook*:

When Paul instructed married believers to live as though they were not married and unmarried believers to remain single as he was, it was because he believed that Christ would be returning very soon. Paul's advice was appropriate for the time, but two thousand years later, after the event did not take place, that advice is no longer relevant or applicable. This is why, in Ephesians 5, Paul gave very different advice to husbands and wives. Rather than live as though they were

single, he urged them to live in love with their focus firmly on one another. This is also why Paul instructed Timothy that those seeking eldership in the ecclesia must first demonstrate their leadership abilities as a husband and father (I Timothy 3).

See how Stephen creates a false dichotomy by pitting "be as not having wives" against "live in love with their focus firmly on one another," as though these were mutually exclusive concepts. In doing this, he and Clyde both miss Paul's point.

I am the father of three sons, and I love them dearly. Even when I was raising them, I held them loosely. I realized that, ultimately, they belonged to God, not me. Even though I enjoyed them, I did not make my sons the primary source of my happiness. As a test I would always ask myself, "Would I want the Lord to delay

"If ever we should desire Christ to delay His appearing because of a worldly want or possession, it is because that want or possession has taken an undue hold upon our hearts."

His coming just so that I can watch my boys grow up?" That was always a sobering question. It is a question one should always ask oneself concerning every worldly want and possession. If ever we should desire Christ to delay His appearing because of a worldly want or possession, human or otherwise, I suggest it is because that worldly want or possession has, according to the sobering words of A.E. Knoch, "taken an undue hold upon our hearts."

In my heart, then, I would loosen my grip—just a little bit—upon my sons. This was ultimately healthy—spiritually healthy for me, domestically healthy for the peace of my household, and personally healthy for my boys. They loved that I was not a possessive parent. Today, my firm but un-strangling child-rearing technique has made my sons and me best friends. I cannot say this for the kids of parents who smothered them with what they thought was love. As Paul says, I "used" my kids, but did not "use them up." To suggest that, during this

wonderful spiritual process of divine loosening, my love for my sons was somehow compromised, is ludicrous, even offensive. It is a terrible suggestion, and I repudiate it.

As if, in 1 Corinthians—even if Paul did believe the return of Christ was imminent—he would recommend any compromise of love. “Stop loving your family! Stop paying attention to them! Christ might return on Thursday!” Again, the very suggestion is spiritually repugnant. For those with eyes to see, the advice of 1 Corinthians 7 gels perfectly with the advice of Ephesians 5. It is still advisable to be single. For those who can’t handle being single, it is still advisable to marry. For those who are married, it is still advisable to hold onto one another loosely. These other human beings ultimately belong to God, not us. A loose hold upon loved ones in no way compromises one’s love for the loved ones. Rather, it demonstrates it. Why is this so difficult to grasp? I think some people are obsessed with family relationships because they find their identity there. To each their own; just please do not twist Scripture to justify it and try to force it on the rest of us.

In the last two chapters of this unparalleled revelation, we are entreated not to be “foolish” in our domestic lives by making the mistake of thinking that these heavenly truths should somehow make us distant or disassociated from domestic life. He desired that we should understand what the Lord’s will is for us today, and he leaves no doubts as to what that will is:

- (1) that we are filled full with His spirit (5:18) and,
- (2) that we become focused on and dedicated to domestic life.

In Ephesians 5:17-6:9 Paul plainly lays forth what it means to be filled with God’s spirit:

–It enables us, from melodious hearts, to be an encouragement to ourselves and others (5:19).

–It enables us to be thankful always for all things (5:20).

–It enables wives to be better wives (5:22-24, 33).

–It enables husbands to be better husbands (5:25-33).

–It enables children to be better children (6:1-3).

–It enables fathers to be better fathers (6:4)

–It enables servants to be better servants (6:5-8)

–It enables masters to be better masters (6:9)

No one is promoting foolishness in our domestic lives. Only those missing Paul’s overall point imagine that a life anticipating Christ leads to unloving distance

or disassociation from domestic responsibilities. We all want to be better husbands, fathers, and all the rest. No one would deny this. Paul’s advice in 1 Corinthians, however, will prevent us from being unbalanced husbands and fathers who draw their every waking satisfaction from familial ties rather than from God, and who would gladly delay Christ’s appearing to indulge their cravings for human companionship.

In my recent ZWTF series, “The Era is Limited,” I anticipated the flak I would receive by highlighting Paul’s seemingly radical statement that those having wives should be as not having them. Even though this was but one of Paul’s five suggestions of the context, I

“A loose hold upon loved ones in no way compromises one’s love for the loved ones. Rather, it demonstrates it.”

knew that this one would stir the pot and raise the steam. I did not intend for it, I just knew it would happen, and it did. We live in an era ruled by emotion. People are not used to hearing such advice concerning other people. If I told someone to hold loosely to his new car, no objections would come. But if I said, “Hold loosely to your new wife,” then out come the claws and the accusations that *Zender is so unloving*. Yet, in 1 Corinthians 7:29-31, the apostle puts new cars and new wives in the same category. I’m sorry but, yes, he does. In verse 29 he talks about holding loosely to people, and in verse 30 about holding loosely to things. Both are to be held loosely in comparison to Christ. Don’t shoot the messenger.

And yet out come the guns. People tend to be too sensitive and emotionally volatile to calmly hear what Paul is saying. Perhaps they’re too in love with a passing era. Perhaps they’re too apt to make the care and love of others their identity.

Aren’t we to love people, especially wives? If we, though married, encourage ourselves and others to live as though not married, doesn’t that prove that what we *really* want is to live a single lifestyle, to head off into the sunset to bars and clubs for soulish, beer-fueled flings? Doesn’t it mean that what we *really* want is to ignore our wives and watch football all day so that we may wreak as much domestic strife as possible? Such objections only prove the objectors to be still oblivious of Paul’s point. I

wish such objectors would read A.E. Knoch's commentary of this passage once a day for thirty days. Perhaps on the thirtieth day light would dawn and the soulish, selfish suppositions would give way to a spiritual realization.

Even believers are in love with the world. Indeed, it is this single recommendation of Paul's (one out of five; the recommendation concerning marriage) that my friends Clyde Pilkington and Stephen Hill run up a flagpole and shoot at, deeming it anachronistic. Even now they cannot imagine how one could still love a wife that one at the same time holds loosely to in relation to Christ. Rather than strain to understand how this could be, they relegate the instruction to another era, claiming that anyone still hearing and heeding the ancient Paul and his errant advice from "way back there" in Corinthians "[wreaks] unnecessary havoc in one's personal and domestic life, bringing added sorrow to the heart and disgrace to the message of His grace." That's a lot of bad stuff to happen to a poor person taking the simple advice of Paul to love Christ and His appearing more than people and things.

The Achilles heel of this argument is that both Clyde and Stephen ignore Paul's other four points. How can they not? To apply their reversal to Paul's other four points unravels their entire premise. Let's apply Clyde Pilkington's above quote to Paul's other four recommendations and see what happens:

- ▶ "[let] those lamenting [be] as not lamenting"
- ▶ "and those rejoicing as not rejoicing"
- ▶ "and those buying as not retaining"
- ▶ "and those using this world as not using it up"

If Clyde's contention is actually true that the era of 1 Corinthians 7:29 has passed away and that Paul's marriage advice is now obsolete and to be reversed, then we must expect these other instructions, in the same context as the marriage instruction, to also be obsolete and reversed. This would not be a far-fetched expectation, as all five pieces of Paul's advice relate to the same principle. Yet where is this advice from my friends? This advice is not given, because it is impossible to give. It would wreck their position. Otherwise, Clyde and Stephen would have to say that, since the era is no longer limited and we're in for a long slog of perhaps five hundred years, we ought now to be lamenting as the rest of the world who have no expectation (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Wouldn't this be consistent with the reversal of Paul's marriage advice? Instead of modifying our rejoicing, we ought to watch *The Price is Right* and learn how

to jump up and down and scream through our tonsils whenever something good happens to us. Instead of buying stuff and holding loosely to it, we ought to now stare at the stuff we buy, touch it often, maybe even kiss it when we can, and guard it continually. For sure we should pet it.

Now that the era is no longer limited and the fashion of this world is here to stay, those used to buying one pizza ought to buy three—topped with everything, including anchovies. Where is the advice to stop merely using this world and start using it up? Let these opponents of Paul's simple truth be consistent. Instead of spending two nights at a vacation hotel, we ought to spend twelve. Why buy a used car when new ones wait to be enjoyed during the elongated era and permanent fashion? Anyone who does *not* buy three pizzas instead of one will bring added sorrow to their heart. Anyone *not* crying uncontrollably

“It is those who become comfortable and indulgent in this passing, limited era who will be the ones wreaking the unnecessary havoc.”

at funerals will bring disgrace to the message of God's grace. Anyone *not* washing and waxing one's new vehicle in a loving, possessive fashion wreaks unnecessary havoc in his or her personal and domestic life.

My friends would never advise the above. Their "thing" is patriarchy and so this is the only thing they care to protect and defend—damn Paul's other four recommendations, damn the context, damn the truth of the context. The contention of my friends is untenable. The fashion of this world is *still* passing by. The era is *still* wicked, and it is *still* limited. It's the same era Paul tells us to reclaim in Ephesians and Colossians. It is those who become comfortable and indulgent in this passing, limited era who will, in fact, be the ones wreaking the unnecessary havoc in personal and domestic lives, bringing added sorrow to the heart and disgracing the message of God's grace by assuming its absence in a supposedly bygone, love-void era.

Religion has its own list of what it suggests are the effects of a spirit-filled life; but here Paul lets us see exactly what spiritual life looks like in our day. Unlike Paul's earlier instruction, domestic life has now

moved front-and-center. The focus of our era is marriage, parenting and employment, all done from melodious hearts always giving thanks for all things.

“The focus of our era is marriage, parenting and employment.”

MARRIAGE, PARENTING AND EMPLOYMENT,
OH MY!

This should come as very bad news to unmarried people with no children who are out of work.

This is what a spirit-filled life *could* look like, but not what it necessarily *must* look like. Otherwise, single, childless people can't do it. I know what Clyde is *trying* to say; I just wish he would be more careful figuring out how to say it. Whether he intends to or not, he makes domestic life the be-all, end-all of spirituality. Are marriage, parenting and employment really to be the *focus* of this era for believers? That's what the man says. This is either poor wording, or poor truth. Either way, it misleads innocent hearts. The focus of this era is to be Christ and His appearing. The focus of this era is to be “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may be giving you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the realization of Him, the eyes of your heart having been enlightened, for you to perceive what is the expectation of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of the enjoyment of His allotment among the saints, and what the transcendent greatness of His power for us who are believing, in accord with the operation of the might of His strength” (Ephesians 1:17-19).

Paul's exhortation to married people, parents and employees in Ephesians chapter five and six is merely the kind of behavior he expected of people who *happened* to be married with children, whose focus and expectation was Christ and His appearing. Ephesians 5 is the caboose on the engine of Ephesians 1-4. Marriage, parenting and employment are certainly not to be “front and center”; “the focus of our era”; “what it *means* to be filled with God's spirit.” A single, homeless, childless man sleeping on the street who believes God can just as easily and certainly represent what it *means* to be filled God's spirit.

As I said earlier, Paul's exhortation from 1 Corinthians that single is better than married carries on through Ephesians and beyond. Anyone can see why: marriage and parenthood are complicated and time-consuming; full of problems. This is true in any era. It is easy to become distracted. Besides, these things (marriage and parenthood) are to be abolished in the coming eon. Paul would have anyone who could handle it to be single-minded toward Christ: no wives, no kids, no pets. Few people can han-

dle the single life, however. Paul realizes this, and for these people the apostle recommends marriage. Marriage never was to be “the focus of our era.” Why would something that is passing away (marriage) be the focus of our era? It may be the focus for someone whose “thing” is marriage and patriarchy, but this passion must not be thrust upon others as though their spirituality were somehow compromised due to their single, childless station. Truth be known, it is the unmarried and childless, such as Paul, who have the greatest capacity for service to Christ.

Paul told Timothy to let no one despise his youth. I now tell you to let no one despise your single, childless, petless life. You may very well be more spiritual than the rest of us combined.

According to Paul, this is the advanced will of our Lord for today. So much so, that single women are instructed to “marry, bear children and guide the house” (I Timothy 5:14).

No, marriage and parenting and employment are not the “advanced will of our Lord” for today. In fact, the opposite is true. If one wants to *really* be advanced, one will never get married, never have children, and dedicate oneself fully to the service of Christ. *That* is advanced. *That* was the station of our great apostle. Aren't you glad that Paul didn't have to worry about remembering his wife's birthday, figure out how to put his kids in braces,

“It is the unmarried and childless, such as Paul, who have the greatest capacity for service to Christ. This is the ‘advanced will’ of God.”

or pay for his dog's boarding every time he went on a missionary journey? Had Paul been married with children, he may not have had *time* to write the book of Ephesians. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:7, “For I want all humans to be as I myself also, but each has his own gracious gift from God.” Do you think this somehow miraculously changed after Acts 28:28? After Acts 28:28, would Paul have suddenly said, “You know, I am actually *disadvantaged* not to have a wife, kids, a factory job and a German shepherd. I wish everyone was *not* like me.”

WIDOWS

Let's look at the entire context of 1 Timothy 5:3-15, for Clyde's use of the term "single women" is not only absent from the passage, but misleading as to the truth—as though Paul were now recommending marriage to every single woman and thus contradicting his recommendations of 1 Corinthians—

Widows be honoring, who are really widows. Now if any widow has children or descendants, let them learn to be devoted to their own household first and reciprocate by paying their progenitors, for this is welcome in God's sight. Now one really a widow, and alone, relies on God and is remaining in petitions and prayers night and day. Yet she who is a prodigal, though living, is dead. These things also, charge, that they may be irreprehensible. Now if anyone is not providing for his own, and especially his family, he has disowned the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever. Let no widow be listed of less than sixty years, having been the wife of one man, attested by ideal acts: if she nourishes children, if she is hospitable, if she washes the saints' feet, if she relieves the afflicted, if she follows up with every good work. Yet the younger widows refuse, for whenever they should be restive against Christ, they are wanting to marry; having judgment seeing that they repudiate their first faith. Yet at the same time they are learning to be idle also, wandering about the homes. Yet not only are they idle, but gossips also, and meddlers, speaking what they must not. I am intending, then, that younger widows are to be marrying, bearing children, managing the household, giving an opposer nothing as an incentive favoring reviling, for already some were turned aside after Satan.

There was a problem in the early ecclesias. Paul praised widows who were "really" widows, that is, who were content in their widowhood and relied on God with continual petitions and prayers to Him. These widows (those above sixty years of age) were worthy of support. Paul did not recommend that they marry. But there were many younger widows who were, in Paul's estimation not "really" widows who, in their youth and without a responsible head, became restive against Christ and who also "are wanting to marry." Here, Paul is actually *blaming* these widows for wanting to marry, for their desire was not pure, but rather a result of their restiveness (impatience) against Christ. Paul actually predicts judgment against such women, for they marry

out of a repudiation of their first faith. He calls such women prodigals. But that's not all.

The younger widows, rebelling against their first love, tended to be idle. Nothing bugged Paul more. These prodigal women wandered around to other people's homes, becoming gossips, busybodies, meddlers.

So now we get to the *whole* truth, in context: "I am intending, *then*, that younger widows are to be marrying, bearing children, managing the household, giving an opposer nothing as an incentive favoring reviling, for already some were turned aside after Satan."

The importance of the word "then" ought to be clear. Paul is not recommending marriage, wholesale, to all single women. He only recommends it to young widows on the heels of learning ("I am intending, *then* ...") that these single women were becoming worthless gossips accomplishing nothing other than providing opposers with every excuse to revile the truth and turn to Satan. In light of this ugly possibility *only* does Paul recommend marriage. To him, it is the lesser of two unfortunate possibilities. Clearly, from his first statements in verses 3-5, Paul would prefer widows to remain single. The fact that the

“Paul was actually blaming these widows for wanting to marry, for their desire was not pure, but rather a result of their restiveness against Christ.”

elderly widow "relies on God" is another way for Paul to say that she is not relying on a husband. This is perfectly consistent with his advice in 1 Corinthians. Nothing is amiss here. But apparently, in that day, only the elderly widows stood a chance of being single and sane simultaneously.

Moreover, ideal family life is made a prerequisite to taking care of the ecclesia, for "if anyone is not aware how to control his own household, how will he care for the ecclesia of God?" (1 Timothy 3:5). Even service to the Body of Christ is predicated on ideal household service from which one is "procuring for themselves an ideal rank ... in the faith" (1 Timothy 3:12-13).

I find it strange that Clyde puts so much weight on how business is to be conducted in the early ecclesias of 1 Timothy when he wrote an entire book (*The Church in Ruins*) dedicated to the proposition that the ecclesias of 1 Timothy that were once “the pillar and base of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15) were destroyed by apostasy (thus the title of Clyde’s book) in Paul’s own day, and replaced by individual men and women seeking God on their own, apart from the organized assembly. I don’t have a copy of *The Church in Ruins* on hand to quote from, but here is a promotional paragraph from studyshef.com—

This brief survey of Paul’s last epistle will reveal that while almost 2000 years have transpired, the condition of the church has remained the same, and indeed has worsened in accordance with Paul’s warning to Timothy. This book is not a call for a re-awakening of “the church,” because it is apparent that this is not Father’s plan. Rather, it is a call to individual men – men whose place in the Christian religious system has left them empty, stagnant, and restless – to awaken to Father’s call to be His faithful servant and stand outside of that system to look for other faithful men as well.

If, according to Clyde himself, the ecclesias of 1 Timothy no longer exist and the hierarchies of these ecclesias have been replaced by “individual men,” how could Clyde possibly still be promoting patriarchy as a modern standard for an “ideal rank” in a non-existent assembly? Is service to Christ *still* “predicated on ideal household service,” or is faithful adherence to the Word of God by faithful men now the standard of service? Read Clyde’s book *The Church in Ruins* to find out, but do not expect it to correspond with his teaching in *Bible Student’s Notebook #488*.

Life matters. The details of life matter. The details of life are strategically designed by God to have meaning and purpose. Don’t waste your time imagining that you will be “raptured” (i.e., delivered away) from your divine training ground. It will be a costly mistake. Father is getting you ready for something bigger. Don’t come up short in your experience for celestial service.

This, to me, is the most disturbing paragraph of all. In fact, it may be the most disturbing paragraph of Clyde’s I have ever read. To survive this paragraph, I have to pretend that Clyde didn’t write it. As though I, or anyone else living with a daily expectation of the coming of Christ, would ever make the claim that neither life, nor the details of this life, matter. As though a daily expectation of bodily

deliverance *necessarily* denies the grand truth that all of life’s details are strategically designed by God “to have meaning and purpose.” As though my daily expectation of glory could somehow derail God’s plans for my life, causing me to “come up short” in my “experience for celestial service.” As though God’s plans for my life could be wrecked by my hope that today will be the day of my deliverance. As though *hoping* for deliverance, today, means that I am choosing my will over God’s.

As though Christ comes when I want Him to anyway. As though I will one day stand at the dais of Christ and hear my Savior say, “Zender, you wanted out of your trials so badly that I went ahead and rescued the body of Christ two years ahead of schedule. Way to go, Zender. Not only did you ruin your chance at two more delicious years of divine training on planet Earth—which would have, by the way, given you a much bigger and grander celestial position—but you have also wrecked things for all other members of the body of Christ. Do you see all these people glaring at you, Zender? *You have ruined it for all of them!*”

If no one minds, I think I will keep making the “costly mistake” of expecting my deliverance. I will simply nourish the bold confidence that God’s plans for my life have been set in stone, and that—in spite of my deep desire to see Jesus Christ and be delivered from my body of humiliation *today*—that somehow the God of all power and might will manage to ensure that every single trial I need to experience on this earthly training ground will be accomplished. Even if I make the “costly mistake” of expecting a deliverance I am told everywhere in Scripture to expect, I will have to trust that God will avoid the even costlier mistake of cutting short His future servant’s necessary experience.

Won’t you join me in this colossal “waste of time”?
—MZ

“If no one minds, I think I will keep making the ‘costly mistake’ of expecting my deliverance.”

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That Happy Expectation

"For the saving grace of God made its advent to all humanity, training us that, disowning irreverence and worldly desires, we should be living sanely and justly and devoutly in the current eon, anticipating that happy expectation, even the advent of the glory of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ..." Titus 2:11-14

Aaron Welch defends the truth of the snatching away of the body of Christ.



Aaron Welch with his wife Chrissy and daughter Miriam.

Unbeknownst to me, while I was preparing my defense of the truth of the snatching away of the body of Christ and of the limited era, Aaron Welch was refuting the same series of articles from Clyde Pilkington and Stephen Hill on his blog, "That Happy Expectation."

Aaron and his family live in South Carolina. I first met Aaron and Chrissy at the May, 2014 Birmingham, Alabama conference. He walked up to me in a hotel lobby and said, "Hey, Zender!" I knew from fellowshiping with him that he was an intelligent young man, but I had no idea what a student of the Scriptures he was—until my sister Kelly sent me these blog articles.

In the following article, Aaron refutes Clyde Pilkington's article, "'The Hope of Israel' Vs. 'That Blessed Hope.'" I had also commented upon that article in the Q & A sections of ZWTF volume 4, Issues 15 & 16 (links below), though I did not mention Clyde by name.

Here is Aaron's respectful refutation of the aforementioned article:

<http://thathappyexpectation.blogspot.com/2015/04/a-response-to-hope-of-israel-vs-that.html>

At the following link, Aaron refutes Stephen Hill's article, "Right Division Includes Paul":

<http://thathappyexpectation.blogspot.com/2015/04/wrongly-dividing-paul-response-to-right.html>

In case the link I published in last Sunday's ZWTF did not work for you, here is Aaron's brilliant exposure of Rick Farwell's "Open Theism" article:

<http://thathappyexpectation.blogspot.com/2015/03/sin-is-still-sin-and-god-is-still-good.html>

Aaron and I have worked independently. We have not conferred with one another. As I said, I didn't even know he was writing. This should tell you the importance of this truth. Aaron loves Clyde and Stephen, as do I, but he feels just as strongly about getting Paul's gospel right. If this were not important, don't you think we'd simply be ignoring it? That would be the easiest path. ■