

"God's Plan for Anxiety-free Living"

Text: 1 Corinthians 7:29-35

May you know and experience God's undeserved love continually, and without doubt, through Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Dear Fellow Representative of our Triune God:

What sort of time-frame would you formulate in your mind if you heard someone say that **"the time has grown very short"**? Depends on who said it and under what circumstances, doesn't it? In the world of a mosquito, for example (assuming mosquitoes would be capable of rational thought and speech) it would mean something much different than it would mean in the world of, say, a bristlecone pine tree. A mosquito has a life-expectancy of 1-2 weeks, while the oldest bristlecone pine tree is said to be over 4,800 years old.

Since such logical reasoning falls under the heading of common sense, it is somewhat surprising when Christians read the opening words of our text for this morning and assume that the Apostle Paul was mistaken when he said that **"the appointed time has grown very short."** In fact some use this statement as evidence that both the Bible and its writers are both fallible and outdated. They then go on to assume that since Paul was wrong about the end of the world, he could also therefore be wrong about everything else that he wrote – including his views on homosexuality, fornication, marriage, and so on.

Some also then carry that thought forward and assume that if Paul could be wrong about *anything* that he wrote, *everything* is called into question - which would call into question not only social and moral issues, but the very gospel itself. Again, if a holy writer is wrong about one thing, he could be wrong about *everything*. They then conclude that it is up to them to decide which of Paul's teachings are right and which are wrong. The deciding factor, the "judge" that rules whether a Bible passage is true or false, then becomes their own passion or desire. In other words, if they desire something that Paul has forbidden, their ruling is invariably that that particular teaching is one of those things about which Paul must have been wrong.

The basic, underlying point here is that the identification of just one error in the Bible renders the whole of the Bible worthless and destroys any and all claims to moral authority.

This is a perfect example of why every single word of Scripture is vitally important and must be defended with loving tenacity from every attack. In the case of Paul's inspired words that **"the appointed time has grown very short,"** all questions or imagined problems disappear when we remember that the Author of these words is actually the Holy Spirit, and all apparent errors evaporate the moment we look closely at the words themselves to determine exactly what the Holy Spirit said.

So it is that again this morning we give careful study to God's Word. Our goal is not only better understanding, but the myriad of blessings our God intends to give to us. This morning we focus on God's Word found recorded in the Seventh Chapter of Paul's First Letter to the Church in Corinth:

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 7:29-35** *This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, ³⁰ and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, ³¹ and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away. ³² ¶ I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. ³³ But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, ³⁴ and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. ³⁵ I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.*

So far the very words of our God. Confident that God will keep his promise to visit us with his power, comfort, strength, and wisdom whenever we come to him in his Word, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Bible critics have long held that Paul wrongly believed that Christ would return in judgment already during his lifetime. First of all, Christians have never claimed that *Paul* was infallible. What we teach is that Paul's writings, as preserved in the Canon of the Sacred Scriptures, were and are infallible. Paul, the sinful human being, never claimed to be without fault – referring to himself as a "wretched man." He cast no

such doubt on what the Holy Spirit communicated by inspiration through him.

Did Paul believe that Christ would return during his lifetime? Maybe. The fact is we don't know and it doesn't matter. Do you believe that Christ will return in *your* lifetime? I believe he well might, but if he doesn't, that in no way makes false the truths that I share with you from God's Word.

God used sinful human beings to record the Bible. He was obviously fully capable of having his writers record always and only truth – no matter what sort of errors or misconceptions *might* have found their way into the personal belief systems of his writers. Not one error escaped God's notice and found its way into his recorded Word.

With this understanding, we return to Paul's statement in our text that **"the appointed time has grown very short"** and we find that his words actually give no evidence one way or the other as to what Paul personally believed about our Lord's return – other than the fact that it would one day happen. The word the Holy Spirit chose here (translated in our text as **"has grown very short"**) literally means *"drawn together," "limited," "condensed," "shortened."* The word is used only one other time in the New Testament, in Acts 5:6, where it described the young men *"bundling up"* Ananias after he had died lying to Peter about his church contribution. In your mind's eye you can picture the young men drawing together the sheet in which they wrapped the body of Ananias before they carried him out. What the Holy Spirit is therefore telling us in our text is that God has determined not to allow earth's future to go on indefinitely. Earth's time of grace has been limited, compacted, shortened. When God tells us such things, we have no idea how to reckon such words in terms of time or years. God does not mark time the way we do. The Holy Spirit through Peter explained it this way: **"But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."** (2 Peter 3:8-9.) Jesus himself explained it this way: **"For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. ²² And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short."** (Matthew 24:21-22.)

Jesus, Peter, and Paul are all conveying the same message: *"Earth's days are mercifully drawing to a close. Direct your life and your work accordingly!"*

How exactly does any of this relate to the theme of this morning's sermon (*"God's Plan for Anxiety-free Living"*)? The answer is that God wants us to evaluate all things on the basis of eternity, not time. *Most of the things that cause us so much stress and anxiety are those things that are passing away. More often than not, they are the "little things" in life that do not matter. God's counsel in our text: Do not allow these "passing away things" a greater place in your life than they deserve.*

The longer a Christian lives, the more obvious it becomes that the problem with stress and anxiety is not that God has given us no plan to avoid or deal with it, it is that our sinful flesh is reluctant to accept, embrace, and implement his plan. What is God's plan? He laid it out for us in our text: **"From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away."**

I am reminded of God's plan every time I drive a rental car or stay in a motel room. As Christians, we take care of such things as if they were our own, but we have no deep love or abiding allegiance to them. They are means to achieve an end. Each was a blessing from God to advance God's plan for me. Once I dropped off or checked out, I never gave them another thought.

That's exactly how God wants us to regard everything in our material existence. Everything in this life should be treated like a means toward a greater end or goal. Everything in life is therefore either an aid or a distraction from our life in Christ. Does that mean it's wrong or sinful to appreciate and enjoy God's material blessings? Of course not. Psalm 103:1-2: **"Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! ² Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."** The problem comes whenever we cross the line from *owning* to *being owned by*. Whenever material things become more than a means to a higher goal, and become instead the goal itself, that's typically how and where the unnecessary stress and anxiety begin, and therefore also evidence that we need to make changes.

Some are troubled here by the fact that Paul includes spouses in this list: **"From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none."** Paul made it obvious in the context exactly what the Holy Spirit's message is here - that even marriage and family were never

intended by God to distract or detract from the central focus of our lives. Spouses are to share in that focus, that walk, but never to be the focus itself and never to draw us away from that "one thing needful." That's why Paul went on in our text to write: **"I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord."** Nor are we ever supposed to be seduced into believing that certain things in life trump or can take priority over our calling as Christian ambassadors – as though it is acceptable to lose our eternal focus if the object of the distraction itself is not sinful, as in the case of spouse and family.

Again, the point here is that God has given all mankind a compacted, limited time to carry out his work. When that time is up, only our kingdom work will survive into eternity. Knowing that, it is remarkable how much stress, depression, and anxiety just melts away when we accept everything that is of this world as just "rented stuff." The alternative is to continue to torment ourselves with frustration and anxiety that really is of our own manufacture; to torment ourselves over little, relatively unimportant things in life that we are powerless to change. The alternative is to continue to make ourselves miserable over things that *might* happen, or to convince ourselves that reality is far worse than it actually is. Paul in our text says simply: **"I want you to be free from anxieties."**

God's plan to accomplish this is, therefore, first of all, to evaluate everything on the basis of eternity, not time. *"This may seem like a big deal to me now, but how important will it be on Judgment Day?"* Second, focus on the win that is already yours, and on the power of our God to seal and preserve that victory in his children until his Son returns or our Father calls us home. Our forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ is not a gift that will one day be given. It is gift that has already been earned in full by our Savior. It is a declaration that has already been made by God the Father: the full payment for all sin has been made by Jesus Christ. Believing, it is yours. The truth is not, therefore, that you will one day be forgiven. The truth is you are, even now, fully and completely holy in God's sight. Finally, hear again these great words of comfort and certainty from Paul in Philippians 1:6: **"I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."** What better or more effective stress and anxiety relief could anyone ever offer than God's own promise that not only have we been brought to faith by his power, we will also be preserved in that faith by that same divine power until the day he carries us home. Our God, who loved us enough to send his Son to suffer in our place, will never now withhold any good thing from us. He will spare no effort to complete the work he has begun in us. This is God's plan to carry us safely and peacefully through this veil of

tears. Allow his plan to provide for you the peace and contentment he is offering. Amen.

Scripture Readings

ESV **Jonah 3:1-5, 10** Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, ² "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you." ³ So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth. ⁴ Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" ⁵ And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. ¹⁰ When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

ESV **Mark 1:14-20** Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." ¹⁶ ¶ Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." ¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰ And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

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The Third Sunday after Epiphany – January 24, 2021

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 5 (Red Hymnal)

"Lord, Open Thou My Heart to Hear"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Jonah 3:1-5,10) God sent Jonah to prophesy to Nineveh ("that great and wicked city") concerning the destruction God would visit upon them unless they repented. Miraculously they *did* repent, and God spared them. This lesson ought to remind us of two things: First, God's will is repentance and salvation, not destruction. Second, that we should never prejudge the effect of our witnessing. We are to speak God's Word and to leave the rest to God.

Psalm 146 (Supplement page 41)

The Second Lesson: (Mark 1:14-20) Jesus continues to gather his band of Apostles. Here He calls some of His key men: Peter (Simon) and Andrew, James and John (the sons of Zebedee). Note the reaction of these men when they were called. Once they found Jesus, He immediately became the greatest thing in their lives. They were willing to abandon all material things if they could but know and follow Jesus. Pray God for this same attitude and devotion.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 517 (Red Hymnal)

"The Will of God Is Always Best"

The Sermon – Text: 1 Corinthians 7:29-35 (Printed on the back page)

"God's Plan for Anxiety-free Living"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 311 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus Christ Our Blessed Savior"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 401 (Red Hymnal)

"Praise to Thee and Adoration"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!
To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (31) Average (30)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Mark Tiefel is considering the call to Redeemer of Cheyenne. The CLC Call Committee for Educational Institutions has called Pastor David Schaller to fill the pending vacancy at Immanuel Lutheran College. Teacher Neil Bernthal has returned the call to Faith of Markesan. That congregation has now called Teacher Ross Kok. Teachers Kyle Ochsner and Sherman Carstensen have resigned their teaching calls at Immanuel of Mankato. Teacher Meagan Goodwin has resigned her call at Immanuel of Winter Haven, FL.

Care Package – Instead of the traditional gift box, the Women's Fellowship is planning to send a gift card to our only out-of-town member-student this year. Those who would like to participate can drop their contributions into the mailbox of the Women's Fellowship Financial Secretary, Angela Pfennig. The gift card will be purchased and sent in two weeks. For more information, please see WF President Cindy Ollenburger.