

The Nemesis of Community

By George Davis

Standing in a field, overlooking a busy highway, with a somewhat bewildered look on his face, an old Quaker stood leaning on his hoe. His eyes were trained on a blur of speeding steel coming and going at high velocity. Finally one of the cars, he had noticed going the other way only moments before, was now returning. And then, experiencing difficulty, it pulled over to the edge of the road. The old Quaker walked down to the edge of the field near the stalled vehicle. And, leaning over the fence he asked the driver, "Where is everybody going?"

It is a sad thing indeed, that when on their deathbed, millions survey their lives, and can find nothing of a legacy of lasting quality and impact. Their eulogy should rightly read, "They came, They went, They died." Like the rabbit in Alice in wonderland, they were always "late for a very important date." They were running, running, running, only to arrive in the end, at something about as important as an unbirthday party. Speeding right on by the things that were really important, neglecting family and friends, as they hydroplaned through life.

It is this fever pitch of activity, which disorients one from the true values of life. Resulting in a strange addiction to a lifestyle characterized by constant activity. It is an attempt by the enemy of our souls to distract us from the quiet and solitude required for depth of relationship with God, and our fellow believer. Relationships cannot be built on the fly. It takes time to build them, and many simply don't have that kind of time.

America is insulated against relationships. I would venture to say that in most of the larger cities of our nation, precious few people know their neighbors, and about the same number actually want to. It is simply not a priority. But most sad indeed is the fact that this pervading attitude is also characteristic of the community of God. A relationally dysfunctional generation of believers, who prioritize activity over their relationship to Jesus and their brothers and sisters, has generally become the sad and sub-par environment of Christ's *ekklesia*. Characterized by a general state of anxiety, disorientation and confusion. Deprived of that which is relational and devotional, their lives are charged with tension. "Quiet time," what is that?

The idolatry of "Time is Money"

Many today view their time purely in terms of wage earning potential. They view idleness as a terrible waste. And even Christians, bring this unwholesome wholesale dynamic to the gathering of the Ecclesia. So by measuring time invested, by the volume of the yield, they are insulated against expensive, and time consuming relationships. And should you drop in, to pay them a visit, there is a haunting sense that you are imposing, and you catch yourself apologizing for requiring only a few moments of their time. When the Rolex and Rolodex dictate our priorities, time is a precious commodity indeed.

There is nothing we can take to the grave, but the love and affection of those we deemed worthy of our time. It will cost to invest in the restoration of Christ's *ekklesia*.

For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. (1 Timothy 6:7-9)

And so the world, like a high-pressure salesman is intent on making us discontent, for the purpose of enticing us onto the illusory treadmill of the pursuit of wealth. However in order to take on this goal you must sacrifice true wealth. And like the proverbial carrot dangled before our eyes, we are led away from that which is dearest to our heavenly Father's heart. And accordingly, the lord has a hard time leading us because our life is already ordered. It is already planed out. Our docket is full. We already have a "master," and that master is "mammon."

Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven. (Proverbs 23:4-5)

He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him. (Proverbs 28:22)

Time is not money. It is only money to those who are mammon minded, those who view life as the span of time given for the accumulation of wealth--to see how much they can get before they die. The one accumulating the most before drawing their last breath, is the winner. Or are they? O why do we value our time by a standard, which clearly our lord forbade? Do we set our affections on thing above, or upon things on the earth? The desire to be rich is evil, and the one having this goal, has an "evil eye." They have

targeted an incorrect goal. This is not why God placed us upon the earth. This goal will make itself wings and fly away, and if we are not careful, we will chase it to the grave. The pursuit of wealth, in God's economy, is a true waste of time. It is the altar upon which untold billions have sacrificed their lives. It is the "root of all evil."

In the parable of the wedding feast, Jesus said "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise" (Matthew 22:2-5, KJV)

"And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." (Luke 14:18-20 KJV).

Our Lord was describing here a prevalent problem. He is pointing out His difficulty in finding those who will pay the price. And that price is measured in terms of the business and possessiveness of our lives.

The Lord is looking for those who will contend for "His inheritance in the Saints," who will look after His interests more than their own. I believe that this invitation is still being extended, and few are responding. Few can even hear it for the roar of the highway beneath their wheels.

According to Paul it was so even in his day. Timothy was the only one of whom Paul could say, "For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's" (Philippians 2:20-21, KJV).

If we are ever to see the ekklesia restored, it will be by those who do not seek their own interests, but the things that are Christ's. How important is it to us that God should realize "His inheritance in the saints"? Do we have time for such a thing? Is it more important than my "piece of ground," my "yoke of oxen," and my time? I believe that the world around us tricks us into moving at its pace, valuing what they value, by advertising the American dream, the inalienable right of every American. It is a kind of

national peer pressure designed to entice us to work two jobs instead of one. And to force mothers into the workplace, away from children.

We are acquainted with a young couple who are on the verge of divorce. He works nights and she works days, so they seldom have time to spend with each other. They make this sacrifice to keep up with the Joneses.

The picture of family, presented to Americans today, is one of the professional husband and the professional wife, living a life of convenience. She is okay as long as she does not interfere with his career, and vice versa. I remember a time in my childhood when this was not so.

Moving to Idaho

I was born in May of 1948, in a small community in Arkansas. It was a kind of "little House on the Prairie" existence. I don't know if we were hillbillies, but we must have been purdy darn close. The social environment was such as to thoroughly confuse a child such as myself. I thought I was related to everybody. I will never forget the shock of finding out that "Grandma Hughes," who lived just down the road, was not really my grandmother at all. She was just a neighbor lady, but I felt free to bound into her lap as freely as if she were my mother.

I remember times of sitting around the old "Cane Heater," listening to the adults tell those incredible stories. The laughter was contagious. I am sure that some of those stories were made up just for my amusement, but I loved them done the less. We had no TV, no electricity. We were considered poor, but we didn't know it. We lived in a two room log-house, which had been built by the community as a wedding gift to my parents. We didn't know to complain about the crowded conditions, as we thought it was normal for seven people to live in a two room house.

Then I remember hearing talk about moving to Idaho, and before I knew it, I was staring out the back window of an old Chevy, waving goodbye to my utopian playground. I did not know it then, but I was in no way prepared for the culture shock that awaited me. The relational climate of the northwest, in comparison, felt to me like the freezing cold winds of Antarctica. I was upset at my parents for bring me to such a place.

The last time I went back to Arkansas, I was once again reminded of the worm and relational environment into which I was born. But it is fading there as well. It is steadily dying out with the passing of those old familiar faces.

Inherent within our created beings is a cry for warmth and relationship. It is woven into us by the masters design. It is something of the likeness of Himself, that He has created in us.

I once held a dear friend's newborn baby girl. And thinking to get a better look at the child, I held her out at arm's length. She was traumatized, and began to cry, and wave her arms, and kick her feet. She did not like being held at arm's length. She did not like its cold and impersonal feel, as she had only known the close and personal embrace of her mother and father.

We should not be surprised when the world holds us at arm's length, but when brothers and sisters in Christ value their time more than the community of God, this is the nemesis of community. As this poisonous climate means the death of community in our society, it also produces death within the community of God. If denied their natural environment, any of God's creatures will be stunted and malnourished. We are relational beings in a non relational environment, and I believe that many of the social maladies of our day are directly related to this.

In the movie *The Truman Show*, Truman, played by Jim Carrey, is a man whose life is completely staged and artificial. In fact, the place he lives is a big studio with thousands of hidden cameras, all focused on him. All the people around him, even his wife and friends, were actors paid to play their roles in what had become the most popular TV-series in the world. Truman had no idea he was being exploited. However, one day, through a series of technical difficulties, he discovered everything, and set himself to escape the artificiality of his world.

At one point, "Christof," the director of the Truman show, played by Ed Harris, is being interviewed regarding the unprecedented success of the show. Being asked by the commentator "Why do you think that Truman has never come close to discovering the true nature of his world until now?" Christof replied, "We accept the reality of the world with which we are presented."

Many, like Truman, have accepted without question the supposed reality of the world with which they were presented. They are being driven, manipulated, and exploited by the world around about them. The spirit of this world sets the tempo of their lives. They were born into a turbulent torrent of tumultuous activity, and as soon as their little feet met the floor, they were on the move. And over the years of their lives they slowly become relationally inept. Resulting in husbands who cannot love their wives and children. Why? Because they cannot give that which they do not have. The young must be taught how to be relational. They must be shown. It must be modeled before them in the context of community. Children are not taught by lecturing, but by conditioning. They learn everything by being thrown into the mix of the everyday life of a family. And if they hear it and see it long enough, it will not be long before they are doing and saying what they have seen and heard. The family of God, the *Ekklesia*, like our society around us, has become non relational, disassociated, and dysfunctional.

We have become private, and closed off. The *ekklesia* is a family, a community, and will never be restored without a return to the simple values that make a family strong.

That they (the old men and women) may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded. In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity." (Titus 2:4-7)

It is the responsibility of the older men and woman to teach relationships. They are to teach the young women to love their husbands, and to love their children. You mean this doesn't come naturally? Yes, that is exactly what I mean. It is taught by example in loving community.

People are more important than things. They are more important than my schedule. They are what is dearest to God's heart. The human soul is what God values. They are His wealth, His inheritance, His temple, His bride. They are the object of His affection, His number one priority. Are they ours as well? What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and he loses his own soul, and I might add, the souls of those dearest to him.

In spite of the fact that their very beings cry out for it, many continue to do the very things, which undermine relationships. They have accepted the reality of the world with

which they have been presented. I believe that there is a call of God's spirit to return to simplicity, a divine mandate to slow down and to still and quiet our soul. It is a call to return to Godliness with contentment" which is great gain.

"They toil not neither do they spin"

"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. (Matthew 6:24-34)

"No man can serve two masters," Jesus said, for he will hate one, and love the other. He cannot love them both. We cannot serve God and mammon (money) for one or the other will claim our time and attention. How do we know which one we are serving? It is simple; the one that most occupies our minds is our master. This is why Jesus said: "Take no thought for your life what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on." And directing the attention of the disciples to God's infinite care for even the most insignificant of his creation, Jesus said "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap...Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin...Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" And pointing out that we cannot by anxious thought add one cubit unto our stature, He then concludes, "And why take ye thought for raiment?" "...if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall

he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? And then Jesus reveals the secret of contentment. Take no thought, do not be anxious, or preoccupied with money and what it can buy, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

Much of the debt that we take on is due to the fact that we do not trust the father to do for us what He does for the flowers. Furthermore, we are not content with His provision. Food and clothes are not enough. And so we take on a load of debt and our time must be spent laboring to pay, and pay, and pay. This is what Jesus meant by mammon being our master. And so our lives are reminiscent of that old Tennessee Ernie Ford song, *Sixteen Tons*. "St. Peter don't you call me, cause I can't go, I owe my soul to the company store."

There is an incredible promise here. If we prioritize and seek the kingdom of God, if we long to see His reign, we need not worry about life's material needs for Jesus has said, "All these things shall be added unto you."