

The Collegiate Letter

December 2006

Dear Collegian,

I do hope that this finds you in the midst of a very wonderful and fulfilling holiday season. That includes a wonderful Christmas and a most happy new year. May this year be the best of all!

The coming of Christmas, of course, is supposed to remind us of that greatest event that has happened in all of history. That is, of course, the birth of a baby who was then laid in Bethlehem's manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes. Jesus Christ was "Emmanuel," meaning "God with us." Because Jesus came to be with us, life never again needs to be sad, lonely, depressed or the like. Jesus Christ in His coming brought the answer to every question and, more wonderfully, the forgiveness of every sin. There is no eloquence on earth that can properly express the wonder of the coming of Jesus Christ and the degree to which this demonstrates the love of God.

The reason that Jesus came into the world was to bring to us the atonement and the consequent mystery of redemption. This is beyond the understanding of many, but it is within the faith of everyone.

During these days, we are also reminded of the passing of time. In the events we can hear the tick and the tock of eternity's clock. Finally, of course, that cadence becomes just a bit slower and we become more conscious that life itself is slowly passing and we must, therefore, do some serious thinking about today and especially tomorrow. Each of us has certainly heard the expression, "planning for life" many times. When we are quite young that expression seems meaningless, but it takes on more substance with every day that passes. Planning for life soon becomes a most valuable activity. How is your plan going?

Considering that question, it might be well for us to think for a few moments about the principles that we need to keep in mind if we are going to move on a master plan that will take us properly along the time-line of life. One of the most perceptive individuals to have ever lived in the world has agreed to give us a little help on this. His name used to be Saul of Tarsus, but then he became the Apostle Paul. Paul, then, became a servant of Jesus Christ and traveled all over the world to tell people about Him. In one of the letters that he wrote, he really took the time to tell us about how he handles life and made us some suggestions which can be valuable to us. Are you interested? The set of suggestions is worth looking at. Here are some from Paul himself.

1. Life is not static, it is dynamic! Paul said, “*Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 3:12). Yes, the Apostle Paul hereby reveals to us that life is a very dynamic thing. It moves!

Although he had done much, the Apostle Paul, in effect, said, “I don’t have it made.” He would tell us that he lived on what could almost be called a conveyor belt, which takes us from the past to the future. As the belt seems to move faster and go higher, Paul confesses that he still has not attained that thing called perfection. Even though the years had passed, Paul said, “*I follow after.*” He wanted more than anything else to discover the reason why Jesus Christ discovered him. “Why me?” he surely asked.

Each one of us surely needs to remember that. We may well be harboring the fond but false ambition that there is coming a day when we will have it made. We dream of a time in which we can lean back, relax, and abdicate every responsibility and retire from every obligation. This will never be and to believe it is to believe a falsehood. Therefore, every day must be lived with the sense that we are “in transit,” moving into a future filled with possibilities, but one in which we have not yet “arrived.”

2. The past must not unduly influence the future. Paul said, “*forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before*” (Phil. 3:13). Each one of us has a past and that past has been filled with many events. Every person has, within that past, done things of which he or she is not proud. Each person has said foolish things and done stupid and dangerous acts as well. Then, having matured just a bit, we say, “I wish I could go back and change those things in the past of which I am now ashamed.” While this is a commendable attitude, it is simply not possible. No one can move back into his life a year or five years ago and live it over again.

Therefore, for many, past failures have become a burden too heavy to bear. Past successes can also be very tricky, because they produce pride in the present. What shall we do about past successes and failures? We must pray that God will, on the basis of our confession to Him, bring forgiveness and cleansing. It is then possible to stand in this moment and know that the past is forgotten. It is forgotten by God and needs to be forgotten by you. Rather than look in the past, we are to reach forth to those things which are before. When we are young, the great lesson that needs to be learned is that the past is to be dismissed and the future needs to be embraced. Develop that attitude and God will help you step into every event of the future. Life then becomes a constant adventure.

3. Life must be lived with intensity. The Apostle said, “*I press toward the mark.*” He did not say, “I drift, I meander, I float down the river toward the mark.” No, indeed, he lived his life with daily forceful intensity. Paul was always pressing the issue, always controlling the meeting, always asserting the truth — the truth of the Gospel, that is. By so doing he illustrated the fact that no one will make it too far in life who is unwilling to take the initiative, to press the battle. Take the initiative! That’s where it’s at!

4. There is a prize awaiting the faithful. Paul calls this “*the prize of the high calling*

of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14). Yes, the events of time are never forgotten. They are remembered in eternity and they will be the object of a very revealing discussion at an event called the “Judgment Seat of Christ.” Paul talks about this event when he says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (II Cor. 5:10).

We are then taught that those who have lived lives as believers, lives that are a compliment to Jesus Christ, will receive a reward. Conversely, those believers who have been lazy, neglectful, or rebellious will even suffer the loss of the good things that they might otherwise have earned. To always keep the prize before us is to have the proper attitude in life.

It may be good to remind ourselves that practically all of life is determined by three great decisions that we make. Make these decisions well and you are on the way. Make them incorrectly and life will be a terrible sequence of troubles. Are you curious? The three great decisions of life are the answers to three vital questions. They are . . .

1. What will my life’s work be? We are told that a clear majority of people who labor at one thing or another really hate what they are doing. Consequently, every day is a dreary, resented thing. It’s out of this common attitude that the expression arose, “Thank God it’s Friday.” Why, they have even set up a restaurant chain with this name.

Yes, too many people drifted down the street after graduation and took the first job that came along. The far better way is to have a clear picture as to what you would like to do and where you would like to be 50 years from now. Read Proverbs 3:5,6 about this.

2. Who will my life’s partner be? Surely the greatest influence in anyone’s life will come from the person that one chooses to marry. Marry the wrong person and you are buying a lifetime of unhappiness. Marry the right one and a large and good influence will be in place. Marriage makes us “*heirs together of the grace of life.*”

Don’t forget, therefore, the sage advice that says, “If you marry a child of the devil, you are in for plenty of trouble from your father-in-law.” I would like to meet the person who first said, “You never know true happiness until you’re married . . . then it is too late.”

3. What will be the faith of my life? Here, of course, we have the core of it all. A person who has no faith and entertains nonsense, like atheism, is, of course, a fool.

Seriously, believing the right thing is the great foundation of life. What is the right thing? It is to believe the Bible as the Word of God. It is to believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. It is to believe that when He died for us He takes away our sins. It is to truly receive Him as personal Savior.

Especially remember that the first and most essential decision is to receive the Lord. All other decisions of life, for good or ill, grow out of that first decision — faith in Christ. Jesus said, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life.*” Believing this is the key to life eternal.