

THE FUTURE OUTLOOK

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Advantages of Continuous Study

It has been said from time to time "One never gets too old to learn." After an individual has earned his masters or doctors degree in an academic subject, there is a time when he needs to know some vocation for his own benefit. This is necessary due to the fact that when he reaches the age of retirement, or is stricken with some chronic illness, he can still practice in his skilled field of study. For example, several academic teachers are taking some vocational training in their leisure time, such as auto mechanics, carpentry, electricity, and brick masonry, whereby, they are able to make use of these vocational opportunities at home while still teaching, and after retirement may be more capable of advising others in some of these vocational opportunities.

Of course, the teachers will not enjoy these vocations equally as well as teaching because dealing with students is the first love of earning a living through their education.

Being told by several elderly teachers that a principal, in her lecture to the teachers, said it had been requested by the superintendent that no teacher be recommended who was over 35 years of age, if a young one was available, because when they become older they will have to miss several days out of the classroom due to many chronic illnesses.

On the other hand, these elderly teachers stated that they had more experience in dealing with the pupils. They further stated that they have connections with community organizations and churches, where they will come in contact with the parents, while the younger teachers associate with people in their own category who have less interest in family life and their routine of work.

We would suggest that all teachers give some study to certain phases of vocational opportunities in case they lose their job before they reach retirement age, so they can go into a business or practice a vocation and make themselves feel comfortable as they were as teachers.

There are many interesting fields for retired teachers and those who have been replaced, due to some irregularity. If they are musically inclined, they can set up a music studio; if a typist, apply for a job with some business firm; if in the field of home economics, they can get up a restaurant, or sewing and tailoring shop, or they can follow carpentry, brick masonry, salesman, mechanics, and tutoring.

Many of these substitutes not only apply to teachers, but to many individuals who are trained in their fields. There is no need for teachers to hang up their kits and get ready to die simply because they are not practicing in their first field of education.

It is further suggested that while in their major field of work they should invest wisely in real estate, stocks and bonds or some well developed business. This is in order to have an income which will keep them in continuous contact with working, enjoying people, and helping to keep their minds busy so as not to grieve over their precious work.

Students as well as teachers may also put their vocational studies to use. Many students who are forced to withdraw from school because of financial difficulties or some other reason may take a job which requires some skilled training and earn while they learn.

As far as employment according to age, all business and professional jobs are seeking well-rounded trained young persons. It was once said by a church congregation that they preferred an elderly minister with spirit in his sermon. That seems to be declining more and more. The church congregations prefer a well-trained minister who can bring something new, and who is able to do more than give a harangue sermon on Sunday and then forget his congregation the rest of the week.

Our professional leaders should not wait until they become old or lose their jobs and then blame someone else for their misfortunes. They should study all the time in more than one field, so they will be prepared to keep up with the modern trend of time.

CONFESSION AND COVENANT

What Is Our Concern?

If writers in our time have any one theme they are trying to point out to us, it is the lack of communication in our society. What this means is that although we talk and talk and we listen and listen, no one really hears. It is this situation that sometimes draws from us the exasperated complaint: "You're not hearing a word I'm saying."

Biblical writers imply that most of our problems are caused by our failure to hear. Amos warned his hearers that because they had turned a deaf ear to God, the day would come when they would no longer be able to hear God. Isaiah 6:9-10 suggests that the prophet Isaiah may have believed that the primary purpose of his call in the early days was to make Judah unable to hear God's voice. They had been disobedient. Now God would harden their hearts and close their ears.

When we lie to ourselves about ourselves, we cannot be honest with anyone else. We lie to others, and we lie to God.

When the Chronicler describes the people of Israel confessing their sins (Nehemiah 9), he is describing communication. He is describing the way Israel took a good, hard look at herself. Our lesson will examine this soul-searching event in the life of Israel to see what the implications might be for the church of the late 1960's.

We can state the questions this way: Just what is the real nature of confession and covenant? What is the role of confession and covenant in the life of the Christian church? What is the relation between our being ready to confess and our ability to hear and speak with God and with our neighbor?

Before You Read the Scripture

The restored Israelite community had two points of reference in its worship of God. Now that the Temple had been rebuilt, the ancient sacrificial system could be started again. During the Exile, however, another point of focus for Israelite faith had developed. This was the law. The law had always been important. But during the Exile, when people could not offer sacrifices in the Temple, the law became more important than ever. The synagogue arose as the place to study the law.

After the fall of Jerusalem and the deportation to Babylon, people looked back on the prophets' warnings as statements that should have been heeded. "Because we disobeyed," the people said, "we were captured." In order to keep from going into exile again, therefore, they renewed their interest in knowing the will of God. The result was the establishment of the Pentateuch—the first five books of the Old Testament.

Scholars disagree as to whether the body of law Ezra read (Nehemiah 8:1-3) was the Pentateuch. The Pentateuch is composed of a number of traditions and narratives that were molded together over a long period of time. This part of the Bible seems to have been com-

pleted by a priestly narrator. Because Ezra was a priest, some scholars think he compiled the Pentateuch. However, we have no way of really knowing.

The Chronicler's account of his material exalts the law and portrays in moving terms the people's reverence for the law.

Originally the Feast of Booths (Nehemiah 8:13-18) was a Canaanite agricultural festival. The booths had been used as dwellings by those who tended the crops. However, as with all the feasts borrowed from their neighbors, the Israelites interpreted the celebration in line with their own history. Thus the booths became reminders of God's grace during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

What the Scripture Says

The Scripture for today is Nehemiah 8 through 10. Selected verses are printed below. See Home Bible Study suggestions in the back of the quarterly.

Nehemiah 8:1, 8

1 And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel... 8 And they read from the book, from the law of God, clearly; and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

Nehemiah 9:32-38

32 "Now therefore, our God, the great and mighty and terrible God, who keepest covenant and steadfast love, let not all the hardship seem little to thee that has come upon us, upon our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and all thy people, since the time of the kings of Assyria until this day. 33 Yet thou hast been just in all that has come upon us, for thou hast dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly; 34 our kings, our princes, our priests, and our fathers have not kept thy law or heeded thy commandments and thy warnings which thou didst give them. 35 They did not serve thee in their kingdom, and in thy great goodness which thou gavest them, and in the large and rich land which thou didst set before them; and they did not turn from their wicked works. 36 Behold, we are slaves this day; in the land that thou gavest to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold, we are slaves. 37 And its rich yield goes to the kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins; they have power also over our bodies and over our cattle at their pleasure, and we are in great distress."

38 Because of all this we make a firm covenant and write it, and our princes, our Levites, and our priests set their seal to it.

Memory Selection: Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach his statutes and ordinances in Israel. —Ezra 7:10

How We Understand the

Scripture

Nehemiah 8:1-12: The people gathered in the seventh month. This was a month of festivals, for several were celebrated during this month. The gathering here does not seem to have been a worship service. It was a time

of public assembly to hear the law.

As we have already mentioned, some persons think Ezra read the Pentateuch. However, it would have required an extremely long time to read all five books. What he read may have been portions of the book we call Deuteronomy. Verse 8 may mean that the Hebrew had to be translated into Aramaic, the language of the Jews living in Palestine after the Exile.

Ezra was surrounded by twelve men. These were probably elders of the community. The number twelve is symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel, and it suggests that either Ezra or the Chronicler—perhaps both—saw the assembly as the true Israel. (The thirteenth name, Meshullam, is missing from another account of this event.)

Chapter 8:13-18: The Feast of Booths was celebrated in keeping with the law. The note that this festival had not been celebrated since the time of Joshua probably meant that the details of the celebration had not previously been carried out as fully as the people under Ezra carried them out. Certainly the Feast of Booths was celebrated during the period before the Exile. Perhaps the Chronicler's words were intended to associate the practice with the wilderness period as a way of affirming the true meaning of the festival.

Chapter 9:1-5: The people confessed not only their own sins but also the sins of their fathers. They were well aware that Israel was not merely a community gathered at a given time. Israel was the community of God's people that survived the passing of generations.

The note that the sins of the fathers, as well as those of the people, were confessed indicates that the confession dealt with the entire history of Israel's rebellion. It was an honest look not only at what Israel was at the moment but also at what she had been in the past. Such honesty involved a shock of recognition that could be adequately reflected only in sackcloth and ashes, the traditional signs of mourning among the Jews.

Chapter 9:6-37: At this point the Chronicler inserted a lengthy prayer, placing it on Ezra's lips. The prayer recalls God's mercy to Israel in the Exodus and the wilderness wanderings, Israel's rebellion, God's kindness despite their early rebellion, his eventual judgment upon them for their continued rebellion, and his refusal to give them up completely. The prayer concludes with the assertion that Yahweh's judgment was just.

Chapter 9:38: In response to all that God had done, and in honest recognition of her own rebellion, Israel reaffirmed her allegiance to God through the making of a covenant. By the very nature of the covenant concept, this action meant that from now on Israel would not turn a deaf ear but would be attentive to God.

Chapter 10: The covenant entailed specific pledges. Israel would separate herself from non-Israelites and would bring tithes and offerings to the priests and

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