



# Tower of Strength

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower  
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”

—Proverbs 18:10

## How to Use the World, Not Be Used by the World

In a lengthy discussion about marriage, Paul springboards into a broader discussion of priorities in life. He says,

Brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none; and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away (1 Cor. 7:29–31).

Perhaps this sentiment is one of those things that we don't fully understand until we actually find ourselves in a position where our attachment to the world has been shaken. Paul spoke earlier in the chapter of a “present distress” (v. 26) that, in his opinion, should make Christians think twice about marrying. Under normal circumstances, marriage is blessed by God, and a cause to rejoice (Heb. 13:4)!

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But, times would be different. Most people think that “the time” to which Paul was referring was not the last days of planet earth, but rather to a bitter persecution, though a brief and localized persecution, which would soon come upon the churches of the Roman Empire, and which would require special focus on the part of those who would experience its effects. It would be hard enough to maintain one’s confession when the executioner was holding a sword over his own head; much harder if over the heads of his wife and children. It would be hard enough to be exiled and have one’s property confiscated if all he had to lose was a beat up old jalopy and a rented flat; much harder if a fine two-story home with a lake view and expensive china.

Truly there are times and places for everything, “a time to keep and a time to throw away” (Ecc. 3:6). Elisha scolded Gehazi for accepting payment from Naaman because it was not a time “to receive money and to receive clothes and olive groves and vineyards and sheep and oxen and male and female servants” (2 Kings 5:26); it was rather a desperate time when the faithful were few and far between, were beset on all sides by the forces of evil, and were required to go above and beyond in their stand for the truth. The prophet Jeremiah lived in a time when God demanded that he withdraw from normal social affairs—to not marry, to not go to parties, to not even preach funerals (Jer. 16:1–13).

Could it be that such days will come to our land? Probably. But an equal challenge in my mind is living in these days of comfort and freedom without forgetting why we are really here!

How do we live in the world without becoming a part of it? How do we, as Paul says, “make use of” the world without being used by it?

1.) We never pursue wealth. Jesus warned, “how hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God” (Luke 18:25). Paul says, “those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction” (1 Tim. 6:9). In the parable of the sower, it is “worries and riches and pleasures of this life,” which choke the seed (Luke 8:14). Sure, we must work hard and support our families (Eph. 4:28, 1 Tim. 5:8), but not worry so much about keeping up with the Joneses.

2.) If wealth happens, we devote it to God's kingdom. God blesses some with riches (Rom. 12:8). There were many among the disciples of Jesus who were wealthy, and they used their blessings as good stewards to support His work (Luke 8:3); the same among the early church (Acts 4:37). Really, by any fair estimation, we Americans are fantastically wealthy. And thus, Paul may as well have addressed these words to us: "instruct those who are rich in this present world ... to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share..." (1 Tim. 6:17-19). What a great opportunity we have to spread the kingdom!

3.) We never gauge God's blessing by our earthly possessions. Paul in Phil. 4:12 learned how to "get along with humble means, and ... in prosperity." Surplus or just scraping by, we just don't worry so much about it. We do our part, and pray for our daily bread and ask God to do His, knowing that the real blessings God lavishes upon us are not found in our wallets or garages, but in the heavenly places (Eph. 1). "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matt. 6:33).

4.) We must always be prepared to have our possessions snatched away. While God "richly supplies us with all things to enjoy" we must also "not be conceited or fix our hope on the uncertainty of riches" (1 Tim. 6:17). It is always a good idea to remain detached from possessions. The forces that drain away wealth are many—taxes, stock market crashes, thieves, rust and decay (Matt. 6:19). Sometimes it feels like we pour money into a purse with holes in the bottom (Hag. 1:6)—we get a raise just in time to have the rent go up; we finish saving for a vacation just in time to wreck the family car. Job was able to get up from the shambles of his life and say, "the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). The early Christians, who were not at all sadists, nevertheless "accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one" (Heb. 10:34). Things could change tomorrow—societally or personally—and we must be ready to change with it and still be faithful.

5.) We must never focus on this world. Jesus said, “Not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions” (Luke 12:15), for our souls could be required of us at any time. Those who own things should never be engrossed in them. John says, “Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). Every single thing we possess today is destined for destruction (2 Peter 3:10). The eternal things are the unseen blessings of Christ. We sacrifice for Christ.

So, in conclusion, God has not called most of us to live as ascetics. We don't have to feel guilty about treating our spouse to a nice dinner. We don't have to feel guilty about taking a family vacation or buying a car (if we can afford to without going deeply into debt). We aren't going to win any points with God by “self-abasement” (Col. 2:23), whipping ourselves, as the flagellates did. We do not need to forbid marriage or abstain from food, “which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth” (1 Tim. 4:3).

But if we aren't able to own everything our neighbors own, we consider ourselves that much more blessed to have put Christ first in all things. We will use what we happen to have, as good stewards, for God's glory. If times change, we will let it go without shedding a tear of remorse. Above all, we will store up our real treasures in heaven, knowing that the best things God has for us are yet to be discovered! We will focus on eternity!

—*John Guzzetta*

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### **Quote of the Week:**

“Because I could not stop for Death –  
He kindly stopped for me –  
The Carriage held but just ourselves –  
And immortality.  
We slowly drove – He knew no haste  
And I had put away  
My labor and my leisure too,  
For His civility.”

—*Emily Dickinson*