

# Third Sunday after the Epiphany – Epistle

**FROM NOW ON IT'S GOSPEL TIME**

**I Corinthians 7:29-31**

**Third Sunday after Epiphany**

**Analysis by Bruce T. Martin**

I Cor 7:29 I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be 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 possessions, 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.

A note far too long: We who profess faith-in-Jesus, the Christ, are at this time subject to a double reality. We, individually and collectively, are simultaneously holy and unholy (or, saint and sinner; or, righteous and unrighteous). On the one hand, insofar as we put our faith in Christ alone, we are together in Christ and the whole Christ is in us. This “we” is the holy one who longs for resurrection (or, new creation; or, kingdom of God), anticipating it both in the spirit and in the body. On the other hand, since we are yet creatures who necessarily put our whole faith in whatever is not-God, not trusting any of God’s promises for us, we are wholly bound to the cares and deceptions of this world, believing that we can make and fulfill our own promises in our own good time. We pervert the creation by always taking what is penultimately good or bad and making them

ultimate. This “we” is the unholy one who, collectively and individually, wittingly or unwittingly, anticipates our own eternal death. Thus: In God’s own way (the cross of Christ) and in God’s own timing (the end of our world), God raises up the holy and puts to death the unholy.

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## **DIAGNOSIS: Bad Timing**

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** – *Between the Times*  
Poor bedeviled Corinthians! In chapters 5-8, Paul addresses their questions regarding incest, discipline, marriage and divorce with less than easy answers: some “from the Lord” and some “not from the Lord” (see 7:10, 12). Our text is an example how frustrating Paul’s less than easy answers can be. But is this gospel-speak or double-speak? We are faced with an impending new reality, for “the appointed time has grown short . . . For the present form of this world is passing away” (vv. 29, 31). The gospel’s time horizon of resurrection and Parousia anticipates and portends the coming of a wholly new creation. For anyone who knows what time it really is (gospel-time, not clock-time), all human activity is thrown into question. Hence the Corinthians’ questions “between the times,” and Paul’s uneasy answers.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem)** – *Bad Timing*

Paul’s answers depend on what time “we” are dealing with: regular old time or gospel time. If Christ has not been raised from the dead (meaning that we are not together in Christ), if the “day of the Lord Jesus” (5:5; see 7:26) will not arrive as promised (meaning that we will be judged apart from Christ), then all things are as before, as though Christ has not come at all nor will come again. But if our trust is in the Lord, we are all yoked together in Him and we know what time it is (7:26),

that is, Who is present for us now and Who is about to arrive with finality. Thus, if we belong to the Lord (6:19-20), both in spirit and in body, we live without fear. For the outward reality (our bodies) is determined by the inward reality (our spirits). Belonging to the Lord, or not, determines whether we are “free” or “enslaved” vis-a-vis all other relationships.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – Time Is Up**

Call it bad timing on our part. Or call it not paying attention. No matter, “the appointed time has grown short” (v. 29) and “the present form of this world is passing away” (v. 31). Whatever is unholy “will not inherit the kingdom of God” (6:9-10). Whatever we do, believe, feel or think, we ourselves are headed for destruction. God is calling everyone and everything to account and the time of final judgment is at hand. If on that “day” we are not found together in Christ, holy and blameless in Him alone, then we will arrive at our ending, and time itself will be no more (4:5).

## **PROGNOSIS: All In Good Time**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – Gospel Time**

Jesus Christ and his cross is God’s choice for us. “God chose what is foolish in the world . . . God chose what is weak in the world . . . God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not . . . so that no one might boast in the presence of God” (1:27-29). In God’s own good time, God chose “Jesus Christ, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1:30). Christ’s time is now our time. Call it gospel time, the time in which we live. For us, there simply is no other time.

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – Spirit Time**

Call it Spirit time, too. For Paul, basking in the gospel glow is nothing other than living by the Spirit: “Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is

from God" (2:12; see 3:16; 6:19; 12:1-13). The point is, there is a new reality taking hold of us. In Christ, we no longer have "our" minds; rather, "we have the mind of Christ" (2:16).

### **Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – From Now On**

Therefore, since body follows spirit, we also have the "body of Christ" (see 10:16-17; ch.12). From now on, we are "God's temple" (3:16), for "anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him" (6:17). This is crucial, for only the Spirit is able to discern gospel time apart from worldly time. Paul's answer to the Corinthians is based on this discernment. Paul urges them/us not to be taken in by the spirit of the world which is passing away, but to live by the Spirit of Christ and towards the new world of the Spirit's creating. "From now on," (7:29), let us live in anticipation of the new creation and "as though" (5x in our text) we were not still in slavery to the world. Indeed, from now on Christ lives in and through us, his body. Call that kind of living, "godly love" (14:1), by which even now God is being glorified (6:20).