

“THE FASHION OF THIS WORLD”
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“The fashion of this world passes away.”
1 Corinthians 7:31.

IN this Epistle, Paul deals with many matters of conscience and explains them for the benefit of the troubled ones in the church at Corinth. In the chapter out of which our text is taken, he writes wisely concerning the important question of marriage. And he recommends that during the time of persecution it is well to abstain from marriage, though he does not forbid it even under the pressure of those trying circumstances. Then, after he has spent a considerable time in looking at the subject from various standpoints, he says, “It remains that they that have wives, be as though they had none.” He seemed to think that the whole matter of marriage was too small for him to take into any very serious consideration, seeing that the time was so short in which such questions could need to be discussed at all, “for,” he said, “the fashion of this world passes away.”

The Greek word used in this verse has, by some expositors, been read as though the apostle referred to mathematical figures, as when the boy at school, working out the propositions in Euclid, draws upon his slate, circles, triangles and squares—and then almost immediately rubs the whole out and begins another set of figures. In that sense, the whole scheme or fashion of this world is only like the markings on a slate, or the chalk drawings on a blackboard—something not intended to last, but to be done away with almost immediately. So there is no need to be troubled about the things of this world, except so far as they have reference to the world to come, for the whole scheme, plan and fashion of this world passes away.

But an interpretation which is far more likely to be correct is that the apostle meant, “The whole theatrical performance of this world’s pageant passes away. The whole of its various acts, shows and manifestations passes away.” If that is the meaning, Paul seems to be of the mind of the world’s great poet, that—

*“All the world’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.”*

So he says, “The whole play passes away. The whole performance which is now upon the stage will soon be changed and all will be gone.” Just as men put on mimic robes and one is arrayed as a monarch and another appears as a slave. Just as one is dressed in scarlet and fine linen and another comes on the scene in the rags of a beggar but, as soon as the play is over, they all take off the clothes appertaining to their various parts and go to their homes in quite different garb. And so, all the pomp and glory of this world will soon have passed away and men will go to their own eternal dwelling place, the fashion of this world having passed away forever. It is to that thought that I wish to call your earnest attention just now. May the Holy Spirit teach us what He intended the apostle to convey to our minds concerning the transitory character of all worldly things!

I. First, then, let us ask, **WHAT IS THE FASHION OF THIS WORLD THAT PASSES AWAY?**

I answer, first, it is *the whole world, itself, and all humanity dwelling upon it.* All that we see around us is passing away. Although, to some minds, this visible creation looks as if it might last forever, there are signs of decrepitude and decay which the thoughtful can easily discern. The very granite crumbles, the sea breaks its bounds, even the sun’s lamp, at times, grows dull! All things bear signs that this world is

but as the traveler’s tent that is pitched tonight, only to be struck tomorrow morning. The day is coming, whether we wish it or not, when “the heavens shall pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. The earth, also, and the works that are therein shall be burned up.” As once by a deluge of water, so the second time by a deluge of fire, the whole fashion of this world shall surely pass away—“all these things shall be dissolved.” We talk about the everlasting hills and speak of the sea as the hoary ocean, but there is nothing except God that is really worthy of veneration because of age. We read of His Son, in whom He has manifested Himself, that “His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow,” to indicate the great antiquity of Christ—but all human beings are but things of an hour—and they and the world they inhabit shall soon have departed!

Vain man, who looks on this world as a thing that is lasting, should at least look upon himself as fleeting! Generations have followed each other till the whole earth resembles a beach when the tide is down, where ten thousand worms have each one cast up his little separate hillock and then gone from sight. What is there to remind us of past generations but their graves? Even their works have decayed before the time when all men’s works are to be consumed. Since we have been our own little while in the world, how many have passed away! The funeral bell is almost always tolling—the sexton never ceases from his work. Every time the clock ticks, a soul takes its flight into the unknown land. While we have been sitting here, the great processes of decay, dissolution and death have been going on—and although we may not have noticed it, we ourselves have been passing onwards by an inevitable march towards the confines of the spirit world! We are in a dying world and none of us will be able to escape from the influences that are, in due time, to bear us away from this world which is itself passing away! So, brothers and sisters, if the apostle meant nothing more than this, there is enough in the remembrance that this world and all who are upon it are passing away, to calm our minds and to remind ourselves of the instability of mortal things—and of the necessity of securing something more substantial and enduring!—

*“The time is short ere all that live
Shall hence depart, their God to meet!
And each a strict account must give,
At Jesus’ awful judgment seat.
The time is short, oh, who can tell
How short his time below may be?
Today on earth his soul may dwell,
But tomorrow in eternity.”*

But, secondly, “the fashion of this world passes away” *in reference to all its honors and dignities*. All that was ever emblazoned on the roll of fame and thought to be written there forever, shall surely be blotted out. They who now wear royal crowns shall not always be crowned. Those who are now decorated with glittering satin and jewels shall not be always so adorned. Come to the graveyard and see how much is left of any of the Caesars! Look into the vault of Alexander and see how little is the greatest of the great! The monarch cannot be distinguished from his slave—and men cannot maintain their various ranks and degrees of dignity in the grave. Death, that great radical and communist, that awful leveler, is continually smiting down the mighty and with his dread axe he fells the haughty cedar of Lebanon as easily as he does the rush by the riverside. But there are those who will be kings when these kings of earth are no more regarded as royal, and there are those who will be peers of the heavenly reality when earthly peers have lost their patents of nobility. There are kings and priests whom the world knows not of who shall yet come forth from their obscurity—in the day when the King of kings shall be revealed, they shall also be revealed—but meanwhile, the fashion of this world, so far as its pomp and greatness are concerned, passes away.

Then, dear friends, let us remember, in the third place, that *the civil fashion of this world* will certainly pass away too. It is necessary for good government that there should be judges, dignitaries, magistrates and so forth, and men think much of the power of governing their fellow creatures, and talk proudly about constitutions that are to last all down the ages, and establishments that will withstand the attacks of the years that are yet to come—but they make a great mistake. All these must pass away! The magistrate on

the bench must be made equal with the prisoner at the bar. The great man must slumber in the dust with the beggar who was splashed by the mud from his horses' hoofs as he rode along in his pride!

Remember, too—and this is a solemn reflection that ought to press heavily upon every ungodly heart—that the association of the righteous and the wicked, which is part of the fashion of this world today, is passing away. Many of you are, at the present moment, being kindly cared for by divine providence more for the sake of your godly relatives than for your own sakes, for you are ungodly and, therefore, God cannot regard you in the same light as He does His own believing children. You are nestling under the same roof with your father, who is a saint of God—yet, if you died as you now are, you would be lost forever. You are, at this moment, sitting in the same pew with one who loves the Lord Jesus Christ, but you are, yourself, Christless and hopeless. This congregation, as I look upon it, seems to me like a heap of corn upon the threshing floor, but there is much chaff mingled with it! I see here a great field of precious grain springing up, but the tares are mixed with the wheat. That is according to the fashion of this world—it must inevitably be so in the present state of things.

Even in the professing Church, itself, this is the fashion today, for the great dragnet has taken in its meshes, fish of every kind—some good and some bad. But this shall not be the fashion for long, for this present fashion passes away and, then the net shall be drawn to shore and they shall gather the good into vessels, but they shall cast the bad away. The great reaping time shall come, by-and-by, and then the tares shall be bound in bundles to be burned—while the wheat shall be gathered into the garner—

*“East and West, and South and North,
Speeds each glorious angel forth,
Gathering in with glittering wing
Zion's saints to Zion's King.
Man nor angel knows that day,
Heaven and earth shall pass away.
Still shall stand the Savior's word,
Deathless as its deathless Lord.”*

Think of this, you who are living now in close relationship to Christian people! How will you bear to be separated from them when this present fashion passes away? O husbands of gracious wives, children of godly parents, ungodly parents of converted children, think of the time when this fashion shall be ended and the separating day shall come—and you are driven forth to the blackness of darkness forever, while your loved ones are walking with Christ forever in the home of the blessed in glory!

Mark, too, fourthly, *that the busy fashion of this world* will also pass away. You are engaged in your shops most properly. You are toiling in your various callings, or pursuing your several professions. One is a lawyer and another is a doctor, but all this occupation passes away. There is a land in which there shall be no toiling for daily bread and no need to cast ourselves wearily upon our bed after too long and too trying a day of toil. There is a time coming when that extra ten pounds which seems so important now, or that extra ten thousand pounds, or that extra million pounds added to one's estate shall be thought to be of no more value than a single hair! When men come to die, how their business dwarfs to nothing! It casts a long shadow right across the pathway of life—but when they lie upon their last bed and gaze into eternity, they see things in a different light and estimate them at their real value! O sirs, you who are pursuing earthly gain as though it were something substantial, are like the fools who hunt the will-o'-the-wisp and plunge after it in the morass to their own destruction! Can you carry your gold with you into the world where you are going? If you could hang it on the cerements that are to be wrapped about you in the tomb, how much richer would your dead body be for all its golden decorations? What can your old buy for you beyond a thicker slab of stone to lie upon your corpse while the poor sleep under a lighter load in a field where the wild flowers grow?

Believe me, there is nothing here that is worthy of your pursuit! If you give your soul up to anything earthly, whether it is the wealth, or the honors, or the pleasures of this world, you might as well hunt after the *mirage* of the desert or try to collect the mists of the morning or to store up for yourselves the clouds

of the sky—for all these things are passing away! It is difficult, sometimes, to realize that we are citizens of that country where worldly wealth has lost all value because of the infinitely more precious wealth, there, that is the common property of all the saints. It is difficult, sometimes, to realize what that land must be where we are to rest forever and yet serve God day and night in His temple. But when we are indulged by the Holy Spirit with a faith’s view of that better country and are permitted, for a little while, to think of the time when we shall gather our weary souls in these seas of heavenly rest and not a wave of trouble shall roll across our peaceful breast—then are we glad that the fashion of this poor weary world is so soon to pass away! But alas, the thought of death and the natural clinging that we all have to life, make us, sometimes, wish that this world would last forever, and that its fashion were not so transient as it is! Yet, wish as you may, you sons of men cannot make the fashion of this world remain—it will soon be gone—every jot of it! So may you all have a portion that will last!

Once more, *even this world’s religious fashions will pass away*. The time is coming when the Pharisee will no more stand and say, “God, I thank You that I am not as other men are—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week. I give tithes of all that I possess.” Self-righteousness is a fashion that will not outlast the trial hour of death. The time is coming when men will no longer be able to put their trust in priests, or to imagine that occult influences can flow from human hands into their souls! The foolish fashion of Ritualism and ceremonialism will certainly pass away! It ought never to have existed, for it is a delusion and a snare, but it will pass away when He comes who abhors it with all His soul. This world’s religion is sometimes that of mere formal orthodoxy—the mental acceptance of a certain creed, the laying hold of certain dogmas and fighting for the outward forms of them. All this is common enough in the religion with which many men are satisfied—but it will all pass away! In that day when nothing but genuine heart-work will endure the tests that will then be applied and when only the real regenerating work of the Holy Spirit will pass current with the Most High, all mere head-knowledge and notional religion will have melted and flowed away. Your unopened family Bibles with their great gilded clasps, your brass-bound prayer books and hymn-books, your mere formal family prayers read out in so orderly a tone, with no heart in the performance—all will pass away like the foam upon the waters! What cares God for all that you have to say if you say it not from your heart? What value does He set upon a round of ceremonies if true soul-worship is absent from them?

All mere outward godliness and fictitious religion will pass away—and how naked and ashamed will the worldly professor be when God shall strip him of his tawdry robes! How foul will they look who thought themselves clean! How horrible will be the leprosy upon the brows of those who imagined that all was well because they covered their filthy sores from the sight of man! How desperate will be their doom who dreamed of going to heaven, yet who have never trusted in Christ’s great atoning Sacrifice! May none of us have anything to do with this world’s fashion which will pass away, but may we all have that righteousness which will ensure to us the life everlasting!—

*“We’ve no abiding city here!
This may distress the worldling’s mind,
But should not cost the saint a tear,
Who hopes a better rest to find.
We’ve no abiding city here!
Sad truth, were this to be our home,
But let this thought our spirits cheer—
We seek a city yet to come.
We’ve no abiding city here!
Then let us live as pilgrims do.
Let not the world our rest appear,
But let us haste from all below.”*

This will suffice concerning the fashion of this world which passes away.

II. Now, just for a few minutes I am going to try to show you by way of contrast to what I have been saying, that THERE IS A FASHION THAT WILL NOT PASS AWAY.

There are some things that will remain. And among them is, first, *the life within the believer which God's Holy Spirit has implanted*. Do you know what it is, dear friends, to be born-again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which lives and abides forever? He who has a mere notional religion that springs from his own free will, will find that sooner or later it will die. But that incorruptible Seed of the Holy Spirit which constitutes us the living children of the last Adam, who was made a quickening Spirit, shall never die! That life came not from mortal man, neither can the teeth of time fret it, nor the arrows of death kill it. This is one of the things that passes not away.

And, as the inner life of the believer thus endures, so, thank God, *the outward truth also passes not away*. There is not a single truth of God that is revealed in this blessed Book that shall ever become a lie. There is not one promise there that shall ever be revoked. What God has revealed in His Word is not for yesterday nor for today, alone, but for tomorrow, and until the world's end and throughout eternity! I know that there are those who would like to see a new Bible, or a revised version of it. I mean a revised version of the original Scriptures to suit their depraved taste! They would gladly have what they call “new developments” and “fresh light” worthy of this “advanced” generation! But, beloved friends, there is nothing new in theology but that which is false—only the old is true—for the truth of God must be old, as old as God Himself! So let us rejoice that whatever may happen, and although the fashion of this world shall surely pass away, there is not a single text between the covers of this Book that shall ever lose an atom of its divine truth and force. Oh, no! The old Book is not effete and the revelation it has brought to us will never grow stale! The promises well up with as rich consolation to us today as they did to the first of the martyr-band! The solemn oaths and covenant of God stand as firm and fast today as when He first gave them to our fathers! So let us cling to the Holy Word and to the doctrines of God's grace, for these are among the things that are to abide forever!—

*“Engraved as in eternal brass
The mighty promise shines,
Nor can the powers of darkness erase
Those everlasting lines!
He that can dash whole worlds to death,
And make them when He please—
He speaks and that almighty breath
Fulfils His great decrees!
His very word of grace is strong
As that which built the skies.
The voice that rolls the stars along
Speaks all the promises!”*

Yet again, as the life within, and the truth revealed, so the *fruit of the inner life, wherein we are led by the Holy Spirit and the Word, shall remain*. They who build a worldwide empire will lose all that they have labored to gain. Men may pile up a city of marble only to see it become a heap of dust. But if you give a cup of cold water, in the name of Christ, to one who belongs to Him, you shall not lose your reward! Every holy thought, every devout purpose, every thankful hymn, every earnest prayer, every true-hearted sermon, every good work that is done for God in the power of the Holy Spirit lives beyond the possibility of death! The saints depart from earth in due season, but why? “That they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them.” Their works are still present before the mind of God and He accepts them. Not all that even Christians do shall abide, for “the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.” Many a man—and many a good man, too, shall lose much of what he did—much of his preaching, much of his teaching, much of his so-called praying and alms-giving shall prove to be but wood, hay and stubble which shall be burned, though he, himself, being on the rock, a believer in Christ, shall be “saved yet so as by fire.” But happy is that man who so completely lives unto God and is so fully guided by the Holy Spirit and by the revealed truth of God that he spends himself and is wholly spent in his Master's service—and so builds upon the one foundation, which is Jesus Christ, not wood, hay, and stubble, but gold, silver

and precious stones which shall be found to his own joy and to God’s glory in the great testing time that is surely coming!

Further, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is a very sweet reflection that among the things that shall never pass away are such as these—the love that was fixed upon us before the day-star knew its place or planets ran their round. The love that bought us upon Calvary’s cross. The love that has prepared a place for us that where Jesus is, there we, also, may be, to be like He and with Him forever—that love shall never pass away! So too, the power of God which brought us up out of Egypt and is leading us through the wilderness. The power that has fought our battles and has kept us safely to this day—that power shall never pass away! Then, too, the fullness of God upon which we have lived and from which we have been drinking such deep draughts to satisfy our great necessities—that fullness shall never pass away! There will come a time when everything of a spiritual kind which we have rejoiced in here, instead of passing away, shall be brighter than ever to our sight, nearer to us and better understood! Our true daylight draws near. It is twilight with us now, but not the twilight of the evening—it is the twilight of the dawn! Our pathway lies upward—we have already ascended somewhat, but we have to go far higher yet. Up the ladder that Jacob saw, we pursue our joyful way and there shall be no descent for us! There shall be no falling from the elevation to which divine grace lifts us, “for the path of the just is as the shining light that shines more and more unto the perfect day.”

We shall soon see the King in His beauty and the land that is very far off. We may begin to put off our old week-day garments, for the heavenly Sabbath bells will soon ring out their welcome call. Let us shake ourselves from the dust, for our beautiful array is ready and we shall soon sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Eagerly anticipate—all of you who love the Lord Jesus Christ—eagerly anticipate your better portion! You daughters of sickness, you shall soon have done with all pains and pangs forever! You children of poverty, you shall soon have done with your anxieties and griefs concerning your many needs. You toil-worn workers in the vineyard of Christ and you who are oppressed with many cares, you shall be Marthas no longer, but you shall sit at Jesus’ feet forever! As for you who have been mourning, and sighing, and crying—your weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning! Put off your sackcloth, for God shall gird you with the garment of praise. Forget the drought of the wilderness for You shall soon be in the Paradise of God and at His right hand where there are pleasures forevermore—

*“O paradise eternal!
 What bliss to enter thee
 And once within your portals,
 Secure forever be!
 They all around shall love us,
 And we return their love;
 One band of happy spirits,
 One family above!
 There God shall be our portion,
 And we His jewels be—
 And gracing His bright mansions,
 His smile reflect and see.
 O paradise eternal,
 What joys in you are known!
 God of mercy guide us,
 Till all is felt our own!”*

The gist of all I wanted to say is just this. Brothers and sisters, let us hold very loosely everything here, but let us get a very firm grip of everything that is to be hereafter! Let the visible begin, even now, to melt away and let the invisible take its true substantial form. If God has been prospering some of you—and He has been very gracious and kind to some of His people in temporal matters, set not your hearts on any of those things. Your garden, your house, your children, your gold—all the prosperity that God gives you—accept it, rejoice in it, use it as you ought, but do not abuse it—these things are not your God! You have no

abiding city here, but you seek one to come and, oh, do give a grip as of steel to the things that are eternal! Never endure a doubt that Christ is really yours! If you have one doubt, may the Holy Spirit cast it out and give you the full assurance of faith! Never tolerate the question, “Is Christ mine?” If it must be raised, and it must, sometimes, never be content till you have settled it! With your face in the dust and your hands in the prints of your Savior’s pierced feet, come now to Him again—cling to Him anew—make Him your All-in-All. And so, when the shadows thicken and the world grows dim, may the light stream full upon your eyes and your soul stretch her wings and soar away to her eternal rest!

The Lord bless you all, for Jesus Christ’s sake! Amen.

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
JOHN 9:1-38.**

Verse 1, 2. *And as Jesus passed by, He saw a man which was blind from his birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?*

Christ’s disciples were often inquisitive even when their Master was bent upon giving proofs of His practical benevolence. Fools may sometimes ask questions which wise men may not think it proper to answer, but on this occasion our Savior gave an answer to the inquiry which His disciples had put to Him.

3, 4. *Jesus answered, Neither has this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day: the night comes when no man can work.*

Think of our Lord being under the necessity of working—“I must work.” Men say that, “Must is for the king,” but here is the King of kings declaring that work is by the most urgent necessity laid upon Him—so will not you, beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, come under this divine necessity? Will not you feel that you, also, must be doing all you can for your divine Lord and Master?

5. *As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*

While Christ was here on earth, He was the great Light-Giver—and He is still the great Light-Giver! And now that His visible presence has been withdrawn from the world, His people are to be “the light of the world” by reflecting the light they have received from Him! In such works as you will be unable to perform after death, you are now to give light to the sons of men.

6-9. *When He had thus spoken, He spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle, and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay and said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent). He went His way, therefore, and washed, and came seeing. The neighbors, therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, Is not this he that sat and begged? Some said, This is He. Others said, He is like he. But he said, I am he—*

“There is no mistake about this! I know that I am that man!”

10, 11. *Therefore said they unto him, How were your eyes opened? He answered and said.*

In his own quick, clear, intelligent way, for he was a man who evidently had twice as many eyes in his brain as other people had, even while he had none with which he could see! “He answered and said”—

11-14. *A man that is called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam and wash. And I went and washed, and I received sight. Then said they unto him, Where is He? He said, I know not. They brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind. And it was the Sabbath day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes.*

You may be sure that the Pharisees would be in high dudgeon because Christ did that for, according to their stupid superstition, to make clay with spittle was a kind of brick-making which must not be done on the Sabbath—and they would, for that reason, condemn Christ as a breaker of the Sabbath!

15. *Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. He said unto them, He put clay upon my eyes, and I washed and do see.*

Now that he has to deal with Pharisees, he will not waste a word upon them. The more often he tells the story, the shorter it becomes. That is not the usual rule with stories—they generally grow like snowballs as they roll along until, at last, you would hardly recognize the original story, so much has been added to it as it has been told again and again! But this honest, straightforward man cuts the story down to the barest details and yet tells it well.

16, 17. *Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God because He keeps not the Sabbath. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them. They said unto the blind man again, What do you say of Him, that He has opened your eyes? He said, He is a prophet.*

He felt that he could safely go as far as that, for Jesus could not have worked such a miracle as that if He had not been a prophet sent by God.

18-21. *But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and received his sight until they called the parents of him that had received his sight. And they asked them, saying, Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How, then, does he now see? His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind. But by what means he now sees, we know not; or who has opened his eyes, we know not. He is of age, ask him: he shall speak for himself.*

These parents, though in humble life, were evidently like their son, sharp and shrewd. So they referred the question to the one who knew how to answer it.

22-24. *These words spoke his parents because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already that if any man did confess that He was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. Therefore said his parents, he is of age, ask him. Then again they called the man that was blind and said unto him.*

They wanted to see if they could catch him in his talk, so they said to him, in a very pious fashion—

24. *Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner.*

Dear me, what wonderful “knowledge” those Pharisees had!

25. *He answered and said, Whether He is a sinner or not, I know not. One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.*

There was no driving him out of that stronghold! That which is a matter of our own personal experience is a thing about which we may well feel positively certain. I wish we had more Christian people firmly established in their faith because it is a matter of deep, heart-felt, personal experience with them. I like to meet a man who can say, “I am willing to yield to opponents upon certain points concerning which I am not quite sure. But the fact of the efficacy of the gospel of God’s grace, the power of the precious blood of Jesus to cleanse the heart and conscience, the divine operation of the Holy Spirit within the soul—all these are truths of God which I cannot, and will not yield! Like this man, I can say, ‘One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.’”

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