

Living with an Eternal Perspective

Subtitle

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Powell, TN
2017

Abbreviations for Versions of the Bible

NASB (New American Standard Bible)

All scripture taken from the NASB unless otherwise indicated.

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KJV (King James Version)

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NKJV (New King James Version)

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NIV (New International Version)

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Chapter 1: The Issue Is Ownership

Various Scriptures

There was a time when you were not; there will never be a time you will not be. If that truth ever sinks in it will change the way you look at things. I think most people give mental assent to that opening statement, but I'm not sure that most people have let it really sink in. At the moment of your conception in your mother's womb, you became a human being, a person, and even if you had died in the womb, you would still exist forever into the future. That's some *heavy* truth. According to the Bible, you will have a conscious existence forever in one of two places – a place the Bible calls hell or the place that the Bible calls heaven. I suspect that most who are listening to this message would agree with what I have said thus far. I don't believe that I have to convince anyone that there is conscious existence after death. God has put that in the heart of every person. Ecclesiastes 3:11b (ESV): "...He has put eternity into man's heart..." That is why in most every known people group there is some concept of an afterlife.

The same Bible that tells us there is an eternal conscious existence in either heaven or hell, also tells us that for those who go to heaven, there are differences in reward. While all in heaven will be in eternal joy and fulfillment, some will have a greater capacity to enjoy heaven and a greater capacity to glorify God (which is the reason we were created in the first place).

In 1 Corinthians 3, the Apostle Paul is writing to Christians about a place where each Christian's works will be judged – not for the purpose of determining if they have worked hard enough to make it into heaven, but for rewards as they move into eternity. You see, our works have nothing to do with our salvation. Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." The Bible, however, does not teach that good works offered with the correct motive of glorifying God are not important and valuable. The next verse after Ephesians 2:8-9 is Ephesians 2:10: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

Let's take a moment to look at the passage I referenced earlier about the believer's works being judged. 1 Corinthians 3:11-15:

For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

There are several things that are obviously taught in this passage. First, it is referring to true believers who are going to spend eternity in Heaven. The foundation for their life and their hope for heaven is in Jesus Christ (v 11). Second, our life here on earth is our opportunity to build on that grace given foundation with one of two kinds of materials. A believer has the opportunity to build on the grace foundation with grace empowered permanent materials that will come through God's testing fires unscathed (gold, silver, precious stones). A believer who has been saved by grace may choose to build on that grace foundation with materials that are not pleasing to God. They (their works) will be burned up at this time of testing. They are illustrated as flammable building materials of "wood, hay, [and] straw."

It is not my intent, in this message, to examine in depth what makes our works gold, silver, and precious stones, and what makes the perishable works that are illustrated as wood, hay, and straw. I've done that multiple times in other messages. The short explanation is that works done in the power of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God bring reward and everything else is burned up. In the last message in this series, we will look at the subject of rewards in heaven, but for now, I simply want us to see that our lives here

impact *how* we will spend eternity, not *where* we will spend eternity. Until we live with that eternal perspective, our priorities are going to be out of order here on earth and that affects eternity.

Jonathan Edwards said, "It becomes us to spend this life only as a journey toward heaven... to which we should subordinate all other concerns of life." [Jonathan Edwards quoted by Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, page 5] What we are really talking about is what Paul spoke of in Colossians 3:2: "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth."

What we have focused on thus far in this message is a summary of what we will be expounding on these four weeks in the series entitled, *Living with an Eternal Perspective*. Let's shift gears to this specific message. The starting place for a Christian who desires to live with an eternal perspective is to settle the issue of *ownership*. Until you see that God is the owner of everything and we are the owner of nothing, you are just going to (at best) give lip service to this "eternal perspective" I've been talking about.

The Scripture is full of reminders for us that in reality we own nothing and that God is truly the owner of everything. But this has to be more than just *lip service* for believers. Listen to a few of the many verses that deal with God's ownership.

Deuteronomy 10:14: "Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it."

1 Chronicles 29:11a (ESV): "Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours."

Psalms 24:1: "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it."

In Job 41:11b God says, "Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine."

Haggai 2:8: "'The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine,' declares the Lord of hosts."

It is dangerous to act like an owner when in reality you are only a steward or a manager of God's assets that He has allowed you to invest for His glory and His causes. What I am about to say will sound harsh, but I believe it is true. What do we call someone who is entrusted with another person's assets to invest those assets where the owner tells him, and the one who is entrusted with the owner's assets uses them to purchase things for themselves without the owner's permission? I believe that the commonly accepted word for that person is an "embezzler." When the truth of God's ownership sinks in, it changes the way we view everything! It means that one of our most important tasks is to seek God for what He desires for us to do with His assets.

For the balance of this message, I want to set up what we will be talking about over the next three messages. Remember that an eternal perspective starts with settling the fact that God is the owner and we are simply His servants who are given the task of managing His assets according to His guidance.

I. God Owns All Money and Possessions

I suspect that most believers, when they think of God's ownership, think only in terms of money and stuff. As we will see, He is the owner of what we call *our money and stuff*, but the realm of God's ownership is way wider than that.

Never have so many Christians believed the lie that if they come by it honestly, it is theirs to do with as they please. Even some people who give regularly to the church and Christian causes have not understood the "ownership principle" that we are talking about. I remember some twenty or twenty-five years ago, a godly man, who I am sure loved the Lord and probably gave very generously to the Lord's work, prayed a prayer something like this before the offering was taken up. He said, "Lord thank You for how you have blessed us financially. Lord, you have said, if we will just give you 10% of what we make, we can spend the other 90% however we wish." I almost choked right there on the front pew.

There are some popular financial advisors that give some really great counsel about getting out of debt and reigning in our desires for things that we cannot afford. However, they imply (and some clearly state) that if you are out of debt and give generously, it's okay to spend your money on whatever you choose. It's okay to live wherever you desire, drive whatever you desire, and go on vacation wherever you desire.

I have a real problem with that. No matter how well you manage what God has given you and no matter if you are spending within your means; the fact is that it is not your money! You are still to seek Him on how He wants His money spent. I would quickly add that God has not appointed any of us as His special messengers to tell others what is appropriate and what is not. He may want to place a person in a neighborhood filled with empty people who have found that affluence doesn't fill the void in their lives and are open to the Gospel from the neighbor that has loved and prayed for them.

When you were born, you were not wearing designer clothes; you were naked. When you die you'll have clothes on, but it will only be because someone at the funeral home dressed you. 1 Timothy 6:7 (NKJV): "For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out." All that we use from birth to death belongs to God and it is by His mercy and common grace that we have it to use. The air you breathe is His; the space you take up on planet earth is His. The food you eat is His. The money you have was made from trees that He grew and metal that He put in the ground. The house you live in was made from wood, bricks, and concrete that was taken from His creation. The car that you drive was made from metal (and a lot of plastic) that came from His earth. I could go on and on, but hopefully you get the picture. When the fact of His ownership sinks in, it changes how you look at everything.

In the little book, *The Treasure Principle*, Randy Alcorn relates the dramatic way that he saw this ownership principle illustrated. While visiting friends in Cairo, Egypt he was taken to a very run down cemetery. It was a cemetery for American missionaries. Inside the gates of that cemetery, they took him to a worn tombstone that said, "William Borden 1887-1913."

Let me give you a little of the story of William Borden. He was into the Borden family that owned Borden Foods. He graduated from Yale and had the possibility of joining the family business and to be wealthy. Instead, William Borden obeyed the calling of God to become a missionary to the Muslims in Egypt. Borden gave away almost all of his money (a small fortune) to missions, and after just four months of zealous evangelism and discipleship in Cairo, he contracted spinal meningitis and died at age twenty-five. The epitaph on Borden's tombstone spoke of his sacrifice and his love for the Muslim people, but there was also an inscription that read, "Apart from faith in Christ there is no explanation for such a life."

From that unkempt missionary graveyard, Alcorn's friends then took him to the Egyptian National Museum where they saw the King Tut exhibit. Randy Alcorn described it as "mind-boggling." Tutankhamen (Tut) the boy king, like William Borden died young (seventeen years of age). At his burial site, it was discovered that he was buried with solid gold chariots and thousands of gold artifacts. His gold coffin was found within gold tombs within gold tombs. The Egyptians believed that these could be taken to the afterlife with him. However, when Howard Carter discovered the tombs in 1922, the golden artifacts were right there where they were put more than 3,000 years earlier.

What a contrast between the two tombs! One died in opulence and the other died with very few earthly assets. Randy Alcorn summarized it with these words, "Tut's life was tragic because of an awful truth discovered too late – he couldn't take his treasures with him. William Borden's life was triumphant. Why? Because instead of leaving behind his treasures, he sent them on ahead." [Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle*, page 36]

I would add that William Borden understood that his part in the "family fortune" was not his. He sought the true owner's will and spent it where the owner wanted it spent and now he is with the Lord and has heard those words every Christian should long to hear in Matthew 25:21 (ESV): "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'"

II. God Owns Time

In reality, all time is God's time. Time belongs to God by right of creation. God created the time dimension. The time that we have control over here on God's earth is allotted to us by God and ultimately we are responsible to Him alone for how we spend or invest His time. Psalm 90:12 (NIV): "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." God has given us instruction as to how we are to use His time. Ephesians 5:15-16: "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as

wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil.” In this series we will examine how we are to make the most of the time that belongs to God, but has been placed in our hands to be a manager of it.

III. God Owns Our Bodies

This one will certainly get me in trouble. In reality, it is His body and not ours. Psalms 139:13-14 (ESV): “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.”

The whole so called “pro-choice movement” is standing on a faulty foundation. The foundation of this satanically inspired movement is that a woman’s body is her own and therefore she has the right to decide if she wants to give birth or abort the baby inside her body. The problem is that it is not her body. Your body belongs to God. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”

If you are a believer, there is a sense that your body doubly belongs to the Lord. He created you and when you were a slave of Satan and sin, He bought you back through the blood of His Son. It is a sin to abuse your body, because in reality it is not your body. It belongs to Him.

IV. God Owns Our Children

Maybe you never thought of it this way, but while you may have been a means God used to bring your child into the world, or though you may have adopted a child, or children, that child belongs to the Lord. We read in Psalm 127:3 (ESV): “Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.” The Hebrew word translated “heritage” can mean gift or possession. The sense is that the child is a possession of the Lord and He has given them to you as a gift to raise for His honor and glory. That sweet little girl you love and cherish is a possession of the Lord. That cute little guy belongs to the Lord. As a parent, your task is raise the children God gave you according to the owner’s manual. We call the owner’s manual the Bible. The task of the steward of the child can be summarized by two words – teach and train.

A. Teach Your Children

Deuteronomy 6:4-7: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.”

B. Train Your Children

Proverbs 22:6: “Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it.” Teaching your children simply involves imparting instructions to them. Training them involves working those truths into his or her life, modeling what is taught, and disciplining them when they don’t walk in the paths they have been taught.

Conclusion

The first step in living with an eternal perspective and building a life of gold, silver, and precious stones, as opposed to wood, hay, and straw, is to settle the issue of ownership. In future messages in this series, we will attempt to balance all of these commands with the amazing joy and peace that comes when we acknowledge God as the owner – the owner of our money and possessions, the owner of our time, the owner of our bodies, and the owner of our children. When you surrender to the owner and trust Him, He will guide you and that takes the worry, the anxiety away from you. Your task is to simply consult the owner’s manual, the owner’s direction and then obey.

Chapter 2: The Greatest Enemy of an Eternal Perspective

Various Scriptures

Review:

In the last sermon, we saw that the fundamental issue, when it comes to an eternal perspective, is the issue of ownership. You will never understand or live in daily fellowship with God until you get settled the issue of ownership.

Here are the facts:

Fact 1: In reality we truly own nothing. We came into this world with nothing and we leave every material thing behind when we die.

Fact 2: God owns everything! We may hold an earthly title or bill of sale, but from an eternal perspective, it is God that owns it all. 1 Chronicles 29:11 (ESV): “Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all.”

We boast about our *net worth*, but God says in Haggai 2:8: “The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine,” declares the Lord of hosts.” In reality, the monetary net worth of all human beings is zero. From an eternal perspective, the financial net worth of Donald Trump is zero. The net worth of Bill Gates is zero. The net worth of Warren Buffet is zero. The net worth of the oil sultans in the Middle East added together is zero. When they die they will leave it all behind. When it comes to material things, this is the eternal perspective.

The task that God has given His children here on planet earth is to manage His assets and carry out His plan for the distribution of those assets. The word for one who manages assets for the owner is “steward.” When we speak of stewardship, we are talking about how we are to manage the assets of the owner in a way that pleases Him. Any Christian who loses sight of the fact that God is the owner, and begins allocating, spending, and investing the assets in the way that they desire is, in reality, an embezzler.

Here is my fear as I present these four messages to you. I fear that many will give lip service to this truth about God’s ownership, and then just go on behaving as if it is their own assets they are spending and investing. God is not pleased with lip service (saying one thing and doing something completely different). God demands obedience. When God’s people ignore His ownership and His will as to how His possessions are to be handled, He can choose to take it all away.

Listen to the unique way that God describes that “taking away.” Some seventy years after the Babylonians had taken Judah captive and destroyed the temple that Solomon had built, many of the Israelites were allowed by the Persian King Cyrus to return to Jerusalem. God gave them the task of rebuilding the temple. Instead of obeying the owner, they misappropriated the funds that were for the rebuilding of the temple and started building plush houses for themselves. We read about it in Haggai 1:3-6 (ESV): “Then the word of the Lord came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, ‘Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house [the temple] lies in ruins? Now, therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes.’”

This truth of God’s ownership is not complicated; it is very practical. It really should affect and even control what you invest in, how much you spend, how much you save, how much you give, and to whom

or what you give. If this isn't sounding revolutionary, you've missed the point and I fear that you may be just giving lip service instead of obedience.

In this message, we are going to examine the greatest enemy of stewardship and an eternal perspective. That greatest enemy is called materialism. In reality, materialism is a false God. "A materialist attaches the wrong price tags to the things of this world and the things of God." [Randy Alcorn, *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*, page 32]

Materialism is a horrible thing. It is when the desire for stuff takes precedence over God's direction as to how His assets are to be used and apportioned. Materialism is a monster that feeds on our greed, our desire to impress others, and to seek to find our self-worth in what we possess. I think that the best description of materialism I have read is this: "[Materialism] enslaves [people] – it will work you till you die. And after it has conquered your poor soul, its haunting laughter can be heard howling through the chambers of hell. And then it seeks out another hapless unsuspecting victim – an ambitious fellow who wants just a little bigger slice of the good life." [Patrick Morley, *The Man in the Mirror*, page 131]

Materialism, this evil enemy of an eternal perspective is sneaky. The people who are controlled by it are often not even aware that their spiritual life has been sucked out by this evil monster. Because materialism is so sneaky and deceptive, some scholars say that as many as one in ten verses in the Gospels deal with our relationship to material things.

I. The Detection of Materialism

One of the reasons that materialism is so dangerous is that it camouflages itself so effectively. Oftentimes it is praised in the world system in which we live as being "successful." We also need to be cautioned not to think that only those who have a lot of material things can be "materialistic." In reality, a person can have very little material goods and be "eaten up" with materialism. On the other hand, I have known people who were very wealthy and yet were not controlled by their material things, and actually, end up giving most of it away. What follows are two tests to help us examine ourselves to see if we are affected by materialism.

A. The Attention Test

What demands the bulk of your attention? What is your mind typically set on? Where is your focus? What do you think about when your mind is in *neutral*? Certainly, some attention must go to money, investments, retirement funds, etc. But when those thoughts are the main occupiers of your attention, then you likely have a problem with this enemy of an eternal perspective – this thing called materialism. The Bible says in Colossians 3:2: "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth."

B. The Affection Test

Money and stuff are not characterized in the Bible as being evil. They are, however, dangerous. 1 Timothy 6:10a: "For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil..." God created us to love people and use money, but many materialists tend to love money and use people. When your affection is set on wealth (more and more income so we can obtain more and more), the monster of materialism likely has wrapped its tentacles around your neck and is choking out your love for God and the things of God. What is the object of your love? 1 John 2:15: "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."

It is actually very dangerous when our affection is set on money and the stuff money can buy. This affection for money and stuff is so dangerous because that lust to accumulate more and more wealth tends to become the source of a person's identity. Instead of seeing our identity as being in Christ (which never changes), it is often placed in the stuff we accumulate. One psychologist asked a perceptive question. He said, "If I am what I have, and what I have is lost, then who am I?" That is why the economic woes hit many people so hard. They are not just losing retirement accounts and net worth; they are losing their identity.

In hard economic times, very few of the people who are most devastated are worried about losing the basic necessities of life (food, clothing, and shelter); they are losing the possessions that provide their identity of being successful and of great worth. In 2008 when America's economic crisis started rocking the world, we saw a large spike in suicides. It was not so much in the middle class or even the poorer people; it was in the "high rollers," the wealthy and often famous. For example, the acting chief financial officer of Freddie Mac, the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation, hanged himself in his basement. The chief executive of Sheldon Good, a leading U. S. real estate auction firm, shot himself in the head behind the wheel of his red Jaguar. A money manager who invested in Bernie Madoff's Ponzi scheme and lost 1.4 billion dollars of his client's money slit his wrists and died in his Madison Avenue office. When a Bear Stearns executive learned that he would not be hired by the company that bought his collapsed firm, he took a drug overdose and jumped from the twenty-ninth floor of his office building.

That is sad, incredibly sad. Did these folks and others take their lives because they were afraid that they couldn't buy food or have a place to live out of the elements? No, those things were not even on their radar. They took their own life because what they loved, and that from which they derived their identity, was gone. The basic message of the Bible about money is that money is not evil, but money is dangerous. Take great care that it does not capture your affections and determine your identity.

II. The Devastation of Materialism

Materialism is way more devastating than most people could even imagine. When our love, our affection, and our focus is on money and stuff, God responds in some ways that are not pleasant. In Joshua 7 when a man named Achan, because of his materialism, took some spoils of a battle that no one was to touch, it cost him his life. In Numbers 22 (and following) when a man named Balaam desired to curse the people of God for money, he was judged by God. It was Solomon's lust for more and more money and wealth that led him to disobey God's law concerning the prohibition against obtaining large amounts of horses, gold, silver, and multiple wives. Solomon became a cynical old man who lamented that he had substituted prestige, money, and hundreds of wives for a humble walk with God. Materialism is indeed devastating. The bottom line is that materialism is an unsuccessful attempt to find meaning, joy, and identity in something other than Christ, and in a place other than heaven. While there are many ways that materialism devastates us, I want to share just two.

A. Materialism Distracts Us from Our Purpose

The central message of the Bible, when it comes to our purpose, is that we exist to glorify God, to make His name famous, and to magnify Him. Philippians 1:20 (NKJV): "according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death."

When materialism begins to control us, magnifying, glorifying God, and making His name famous is choked out. Listen to how our God describes it in the Old Testament. Hosea 13:6 (NIV): "When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot me." That is the primary devastation of materialism.

B. Materialism Deprives Us of Contentment

In America, I fear that our obsession with more is the main reason that we as a nation are so discontent. Ellen Goodman, a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, described the mess our discontentment and our obsession for more has gotten us in here in America. "Normal is getting dressed in clothes that you buy for work, driving through traffic in a car that you are still paying for, in order to get to the job that you need so you can pay for the clothes, car, and the house that you leave empty all day in order to afford to live in it." [Source Unknown] That's just not very smart!

In America, we seem to have an obsession with *more*. We want more money, more luxuries, more square footage in a house, more clothes, more luxurious cars, more inches and channels on our big screen TV, more speakers with our surround sound, and more capabilities on our cell phone, lap top, and tablet. That is a description of materialism!

I have had the privilege of being in a number of countries on mission. Do you know where I have found the most contentment? It is in third world countries! These people struggle just for the necessities of life. The clothes that covered their bodies were worn out, many went bare footed, their shelter was often a mud hut, their food was from what they had grown, but their love for the Lord puts us to shame. It becomes so obvious when you are with them, for even a short period of time, that they are content and rejoice daily in the Lord. We have so much stuff, but little contentment. A good description is in Ecclesiastes 5:10 (NIV): “Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless.”

The Apostle Paul said this about contentment in Philippians 4:11: “Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.” Here is the best definition I’ve found of contentment: “Christian contentment is the God-given ability to be satisfied with the loving provision of God in any and every situation.” [Charles Kelley, quoted in David Jeremiah, *Turning toward Joy*, page 191] Materialism destroys that contentment.

III. The Defeat of Materialism

The defeat of materialism will not be brought about by making small tweaks in our approach to life. Sometimes it will involve major surgery. I think we can see the defeat of materialism by doing two things that are easy to communicate but painful to implement.

A. Choose a Pilgrim’s Mindset

There are several places in the Scriptures where we are called pilgrims. Hebrews 11:13 (NKJV): “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” A pilgrim is someone on a journey in a place that is not the land of their citizenship. A stranger is someone away from home and a pilgrim is someone on their way home. When we lose that eternal perspective, and begin to see this world as home we get into all kinds of trouble. We begin to see unimportant things as being important and we begin to see important things as trivial. When we begin to see this earth as our home, we set about trying to lay up earthly riches and building security here. In doing this, we slip into the bondage of materialism. Materialism ties us to this world and warps our perspective. Soon we begin to see everything out of focus.

Most people on earth believe that we are citizens here in the land of the living, headed for a strange place in the land of the dying. The truth is, for us who belong to Christ, we are strangers and pilgrims here in the land of the dying, headed for home where we will live with Christ for eternity and never die. In reality, this world is not our home; we are just passing through. Philippians 3:20: “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

We are not citizens of this place. We are on a journey home and people on a journey have a better trip when they travel light. A pilgrim mindset will lead us to see that our money and possessions are not meant to be stockpiled as a symbol of our worth; our money and possessions are to be used for eternal purposes.

B. Choose a Proper Master

Luke 16:13: “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” It is not that it is difficult; it is impossible. Without shame, I am calling you – God’s people – to be open to what God is calling you to do. If we are going to carry out that which I am convinced that God is calling us to do with the revitalization of dying churches, with FBA, with reaching out in north Knox County, and with continuing to take the Gospel to the unreached, then we must step up the giving. Who is your master? It is either God or wealth.

For some, the starting place is the tithe (one-tenth of your income). Giving a tenth of what God allows us to earn was practiced hundreds of years before God gave the law to Moses. In the New Testament after the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell believers, there is not a command to tithe, but proportional giving

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is clearly taught (1 Corinthians 16:1-20). Many of the early church fathers taught tithing as the beginning point of giving (Origen, Jerome and Augustine). There are many who teach that tithing is for the old covenant and today we practice grace giving. I don't have a real problem with that unless you are using it as an excuse not to give. All that we do is by His grace and that would include our giving.

Randy Alcorn proposes a question to ask if you are one of the "grace givers" proponents: "God, do you really expect less of me – who has Your Holy Spirit within and lives in the wealthiest society in human history – than you demanded of the poorest Israelite?" [Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle*, page 61]

The main difference between being under grace and under law is in the area of motivation and ability. Under the new covenant, we have a new heart that desires to go way beyond the law because we love the Lord and also He gives us the ability to go beyond the law. I'm waiting for someone who says, "I don't give ten percent because that is law and I am under grace and so I delight in giving fifty percent of my income because I love God and have been so blessed by Him." Adrian Rogers used to say, "Any Christian under grace that would do less than a Jew under the law is a disgrace to grace." I believe that tithing is the path to get us on the road to giving. The tithe is not our finishing point in giving; it is our beginning point.

We need to step up and begin to act and think like stewards and pilgrims and give ridiculously (as the world would see it) in order to see God use us to carry out His plans here, and indeed, around the world.

Chapter 3: Time from an Eternal Perspective

Various Scriptures

We are in the third message of a series entitled *Living with an Eternal Perspective*. In the first message in this series, we saw that the foundation for an eternal perspective is that God owns everything. That truth is foundational. In reality, we own nothing. We came into this world with nothing and we leave this world with nothing. While here on earth, we are simply managers or stewards of that which belongs to God. There is always a serious problem when we get the issue of ownership confused.

Some time ago, I read the account of an older woman who had finished her shopping and returned to her car to find four men inside it. She dropped her shopping bags, drew a handgun from her purse, and with as forceful a voice as she could come up with she said, "I have a gun, and I know how to use it! Get out of the car!" The men got out of the car, saw her large handgun and ran like crazy! The woman, understandably shaken, quickly loaded her shopping bags and got into the car. She wanted to get out of there as fast as she could. But no matter how hard she tried, she could not get her key into the ignition. Then it hit her, "This isn't my car!" She looked, and indeed her car was parked four or five spaces away. She got out, looked around to see if the men were near (they were not). She then loaded the bags into her own car, and drove to the police station to turn herself in. The desk sergeant after hearing her story nearly fell out of his chair laughing. He pointed to the other end of the counter, where four men were reporting a carjacking by a woman with glasses and curly white hair, less than five feet tall, and carrying a large handgun. No charges were filed. It never turns out well when someone acts like an owner but in reality is not. [Lloyd Stillely, *Proclaim*, Spring 2003, page 26]

In this message, we're going to deal with the stewardship or managing of the precious commodity of time. We must start by understanding that all time belongs to God by right of creation. God existed before the time dimension was created. He created the whole time dimension. That is the explanation of why He has no beginning and no end. This explains why God is not limited by time dimension He created. He knows the end from the beginning. Everything is in the present tense with God. One of His names is translated in English, "I AM." That is why 2 Peter 3:8 says, "But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day." While God exists above time, for us, it is a different story. We are limited by time. We are under time constraints. God has given to each of us a maximum amount of time here on this earth. We will give an account as to how we managed the time God has given us.

Management guru Peter Drucker said, "Time is the scarcest resource, and unless it is managed, nothing else can be managed." It is interesting that in spite of all our *time saving devices* we still struggle with finding time for the things that are really important. In preparing this message, I was thinking back to my childhood when Tuesday was wash day. Even though there were only four people in my family, it took my mother most all day to just wash and iron our clothes. The washing took place on the screened-in back porch of our small two bedroom home with about 800 – 1,000 square feet of living space. I can remember having to fill up the two side by side rinse tubs. After the clothes had been churned in the washing machine for the proper amount of time, my mother would turn on the "wringers" which was two pieces of wood shaped like rolling pins. As the wringers circled, the clothes were fed between the two wringers and the soapy water would be squeezed out.

Next, they were put in the first rinse tub. After the clothes were in the first rinse tub for a while, they were then wrung by hand and put in the second rinse tub. Next, we would wring the water out of the clothes by hand and put them in a large laundry basket and my mother would take the clothes outside (even in winter) and hang them on a long clothesline to dry. After a few hours the dry clothes were taken inside where they were ironed. This process took almost a whole day. Today in most homes, we just throw the clothes in the washing machine, turn it on, and when the cycles are complete we then throw them in the dryer until they are dry. Today, many people don't even own an iron. And yet, with all our conveniences,

we don't seem to have as much time as we did in the old days! In short, our time saving devices don't seem to be enabling us to have more time for things that really count.

Before we proceed, let's answer a really basic question. What is time? Oswald Sanders defines time as "a stretch of duration in which things happen." That is simple, but it is a pretty good definition of time. The quality of our stewardship or management of time is determined by what happens during that "stretch of duration." We need to learn to see time like money and investments. In some ways time is even more important than they are. There is nothing that we squander so thoughtlessly as time.

Because time is so important, there are scores of passages in Scripture dealing with time. Here are just a few of those Scriptures. Our time here is short. Psalm 89:47a (ESV): "Remember how short my time is!" When we see how short our lives are, we say with the Psalmist in Psalm 39:4-5: "Lord, make me to know my end and what is the extent of my days; let me know how transient I am." James 4:14: "Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away."

As a result of how quickly time passes, they are exhorted in Psalm 90:12: "So teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom." Our response to these truths about time is found in Ephesians 5:16: "making the most of your time, because the days are evil." The NKJV translates it, "redeeming the time." How do we make the most of or redeem our time?

I. We Must Align with God's Plans

All too often, we get this one backward. We want God to align with our plans. That's just not how it works. To try to force God to align with our plans is a formula for disaster. God says in Jeremiah 29:11: "'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.'"

Here is what we tend to do. We come before the Lord and say, "Here are my plans; I need You to make them happen in my timing." That is a formula for disaster. First, think how arrogant it is that we would think that our plans and our timing are better for us than His plans carried out in His timing. His plans are better; His timing is better! If we could see everything as God sees it, we would see that His plans are "plans for welfare and not for calamity to give [us] a future and a hope." We would choose His plans every time if we could see and know what He knows. Here is the problem that we have: we can't see His plans and how they are going to fulfill His purposes and bring our "welfare." God says, "You must trust me." We arrogantly think that we know best.

As I look back on my life, I see in hindsight that His ways truly were for my welfare and not for calamity to give me a future and a hope. I remember heading to seminary in Texas in a U-Haul with my wife of three years and our ten-month old son. After having worked in industry for three years with my own office and a nice sounding title, I assumed that lots of churches would want me on their staff. Not one church wanted anything to do with me! I ended up working for the Seminary on the grounds crew. That doesn't sound so bad – mowing and trimming. No, I had a bag over my shoulder with a long stick, with a sharp nail in the end, picking up trash along a busy road. God had other plans – way better than mine! Since no church wanted me, I got involved in an inner-city bus ministry with the church we were members of. It involved going into homes for three or four hours most every Saturday to share the Gospel with African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and almost every ethnic group imaginable. I got to share the Gospel with more people than I ever would have in a small country church that would have me on its staff. =

As seminary was winding down, Kathy and I told God our plans to go into international missions after graduation, but not long before graduation, the Foreign Mission Board (as it was called then) turned us down – REJECTED! As I look back, I see His sovereign hand in all of that. I see where He put us, at just the time we needed to be there, and, eventually, over thirty years ago brought us here. Every moment we rebel against His plans – "plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope" – we are wasting time.

If you would “redeem the time” as Ephesians 5:16 says, “if you would have a heart of wisdom” and if you would know, as Jeremiah 29:11 says, “plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope,” surrender daily to, align yourself with His plans, and trust Him even in times of disappointment.

II. We Must Analyze Our Use of Time

Psalms 39:4-5 (ESV): “O LORD, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am! Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath! Selah” In many ways, time is our most valuable commodity. Once you kill time, it cannot be resurrected! Because time is such a valuable commodity, we must always be analyzing our use of time. Someone said, “An unexamined life is not worth living.” It is not just analyzing the efficiency of our time; it is (more importantly) analyzing the effectiveness of our time. Efficiency is doing the job right; effectiveness is doing the right job right.

In England several years ago, a transportation system was getting complaints about empty busses driving past bus stops filled with people wanting to ride the bus. After an investigation, here is what they found out. The bus drivers said they had to pass up the bus stops because if they stopped they couldn't stay on schedule. That sounds dumb, but how many people are rushing through life spending valuable time on that which has no eternal significance, but they're efficient.

As you read the Gospels you don't find Jesus running at a frenetic pace with no time for people. You find that the Lord Jesus knew His purpose, knew where He was going, and had an eternal perspective that elevated the needs of people above some schedule imposed on Him by man.

A good place to start analyzing your use of time would be to do a time log for a week. Divide each day into fifteen minute segments and write down what you did in each segment. It is very difficult to be disciplined enough to do that for a whole week, but it will be worth the trouble. I remember doing one of those several years ago and it was eye opening and humbling. I made some major changes in the way I spent time after that painful exercise. I suspect that for many listening to this message, the most embarrassing thing on a time log would be the time spent on social media. I am not saying that to be on social media is sin; I am saying that it is a huge waste of time and it is addictive. It is likely more addictive than many street drugs. If you think that you may be wasting the time God has given you, I challenge you to go on a social media fast for a month. See if you don't find time for some important things that you just haven't had the time for. Anything that hijacks our time and uses it for non-essential things is robbing you of a very precious gift – the gift of time.

III. We Must Allocate God's Time Strategically

A verse we looked at earlier, Ephesians 5:16 says, “...making the most of your time, because the days are evil.” Making the most of our time really has nothing to do with the length of time God has allotted to us. Some of the men and women most mightily used by God lived relatively short lives here on earth. Missionaries Jim Elliot, William Borden, David Brainerd, and the great Scottish Pastor Robert Murray McCheyne, all died before their thirtieth birthday. Jonathan Edwards and Charles Spurgeon both died in their fifties. Jesus died at thirty-three and could say to the Father in John 17:4 (NKJV): “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.”

As much as possible, you need to plan how you will use the time God has given you. I realize that for a college student that is easier done than it is for a mother with young children. But no matter your situation in life, you have some sizable blocks of time that you can control. Most people would be amazed at how much could be accomplished if we simply redeemed the time and set aside time wasters. Mary Slessor (1848-1915), the great Scottish missionary to Nigeria in West Africa knew the will of the Lord for her life. Her alcoholic Father died when she was nine and at eleven she had to begin working in a factory in Dundee from 6:00 AM – 6:00 PM and yet educated herself and became a powerful force for the Gospel in a dark land. David Livingstone (1813-1873) worked in a cotton mill from 6:00 AM – 8:00 PM and he started when he was but ten years old. Yet by the time he was sixteen he had redeemed the time and had mastered Latin and many of the classics. By the time he was twenty-seven, he had completed his

study of medicine and theology and went on to Africa as one of the greatest and most productive missionaries that has ever lived.

Have things ready that can fill 15-30-minute time slots productively (for example, a book, a phone call or text of encouragement, a note of encouragement). I am not a real fast reader. I have taken two speed reading classes that brought me up to average! By just taking 20-25 minutes six mornings a week, I read the ESV Study Bible and most all of the articles in it in about two and a half years (over 2,500 pages). Someone said, "If we look after the minutes, the hours will take care of themselves."

I know it is possible to push this too far and feel guilty when you relax and watch a ball game or a wholesome program or movie. Planned times of mental and physical rest and casual conversation are not wasted time. However, most of us have lots of wasted time.

Allow me to give you a way to organize or plan the time God has given you. In Matthew 22 a man asked Jesus a really good question. He said in Matthew 22:36, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" Jesus gave him a very clear answer in Matthew 22:37-40 "And He said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.'" To allocate the time God has given you, divide your day under these two categories: "Loving God" and "Loving People." In the past I have taught a Wednesday night class on "Managing Your Life" that goes way more in depth, but this is a great place to start. Under the category of "Loving God" schedule time for a daily "Quiet Time" and for reading Christian books. Set aside Sunday morning and evening as the Lord's Day and let nothing steal that away. Plan times through the day to just stop and worship this one who is Lord.

The second category of allocating time is "Loving People." You would start with family, with co-workers, and those you minister to through your ministry at church. Plan ways to minister to your neighbors, those who are shut-in, and those who are lonely. Certainly there are some parts of your day that you don't control – such as job requirements. Even in your job, seek ways to "make the most of your time" by loving others even when they may be difficult to love. Certainly the greatest act of love is to share the Gospel and disciple those who are open to being disciplined.

I know that isn't very specific, but under those categories, ask God to guide you as to how to best use the time He has given you.

Conclusion

When we look at time from an eternal perspective, our time here on earth in these aging bodies is so short. We don't get a "re-do" on our time here. Back in the late 1960's and early 1970's there was a singer named Jim Croce who had several popular songs. There was *Bad, Bad Leroy Brown*, *Don't Mess Around with Jim*, and others. But the song he was probably known best for was *Time in a Bottle*. The main line in the song was, "If I could put time in a bottle, I'd save it and spend it with you." But on September 20, 1973 at only thirty years of age, Jim Croce took off in a small plane from the airport in Natchitoches, Louisiana and the plane crashed, resulting in his death. His time here was up, and as romantic as that song sounds, you cannot put time in a bottle. One day your allotted time will be up. If you are not in right relationship with God, "every day of delay leaves a day more to repent of and a day less to repent in." [William Mason]

Chapter 4: What the Bible Says about Rewards

Various Scriptures

I want to begin this message by focusing on the phrase, “an eternal perspective.” It is very easy for us to get so caught up in the demands of everyday life that we lose that eternal perspective. I find it necessary to remind myself often to see the current day’s events in light of eternity. Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), is thought by many to be the greatest intellect America has ever produced. This pastor, college president, and missionary, intentionally focused on never losing that eternal perspective. Jonathan Edwards enjoyed walking slowly along garden pathways, just praying and meditating. Sometimes he would stop, perhaps pick up some little colorful or clear stone he found on the ground, and look through it at the sunlight. Children thought he was eccentric and would ask him what he was doing. Edwards would simply reply that he was thinking about heaven. Someone described Jonathan Edwards as “having eternity stamped in his eyeballs.” [David Jeremiah, *Jesus’ Final Warning*, page 162]

I pray that I could be eccentric like that. Oh that every trial, every pleasant experience, every decision I make would all be evaluated from an eternal perspective.

A part of an eternal perspective is keeping before us the truth that there is coming a time for Christians when we as God’s stewards or managers will give an account to God (the owner) how we have managed everything that He has placed under our control – finances, time, influence, children, etc. This message is about that final accounting.

Randy Alcorn has a very simple but effective way of communicating how to develop that eternal perspective. He calls it, “the dot and the line.” The “dot” is our life on earth. Our life on earth has a starting point (at conception) and it has an end (physical death). The average lifespan in the United States is 78.8 years. Yet compared to eternity, that 78.8 years is like a vapor that quickly vanishes away (James 4:14). Our time in eternity has a starting point, but it has no end. Here is the sobering fact that I want to sink in on every one of us. What happens in the dot affects the line. At the most basic level, what you do with Jesus in the dot determines whether the line will be in heaven or hell. But here is something that so many Christians just do not comprehend. How Christians live and what they do in the dot will affect their capacity to enjoy and glorify God forever in heaven (the line). I am praying that God would use these truths to wake us up and get serious about life in the “dot.” If we do not intentionally focus on the line (eternity), we will become obsessed with things in the dot, things that will end up in the junk yard.

Let’s be honest; all too often heaven isn’t something that we desire and long for; it is just viewed as a better alternative than hell. Thomas a Kempis (1380-1471) said, “Let temporal things serve your use, but the eternal be the object of your desire.” All too often it is the “temporal” that becomes the object of our desire.

In this message, we are going to focus on the line, “the eternal,” and my goal is that you will begin to no longer put your gaze on the temporal and your glance on the eternal, but that your gaze, your meditation, your longing will be on the eternal and your glance will be on the temporal. The Apostle Paul put it this way in 1 Corinthians 15:19 (HCSB): “If we have put our hope in Christ for this life only, we should be pitied more than anyone.” Heaven is not just to be our destination; it is to be our motivation! Colossians 3:2: “Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.” Every day we face the choice of living for today or eternity, living for what we can see or living for that which is real, but unseen. All too many professing Christians believe that what they see is real, and eternity is unreal. Just the opposite is true! 2 Corinthians 4:18: “while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

Edward Gibbon is probably the best known classic historian. His most famous work was *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Gibbon (who was not a Christian) set out to determine why Christianity

flourished and had such a dynamic impact in the Roman Empire in the first several centuries after Christ. He came up with five reasons (but I want us to focus on the last one).

1. The zeal of the early Christians.
2. The power of miracles.
3. The pure morals of Christians.
4. The compact church organization.
5. Their belief in future rewards.

Today in American Christianity, I don't see much emphasis on eternal rewards. Even in so called "Christian" churches, the emphasis is on having "Your Best Life Now" instead of laying up treasures in heaven where truly our best life will be.

I. The Promise of Rewards

Heaven itself is *not* the reward for our labors! Heaven is a gift of God's grace. No one earns their way to heaven through good works. Often when an elderly, sweet, and selfless person dies, people say things like, "If anyone made it to heaven, my sweet mother did! She did more to help people than anyone I've ever known." You don't get to heaven by being sweet and helping people. You get to heaven through Jesus Christ and even your sweet, generous, precious, loving mother was a sinner in need of a Savior. She may have been way above others here in her human goodness, but human goodness is not good enough to merit heaven. Having said that, the Bible is clear that heaven will not be the same for everyone who goes there as a gift of God's grace.

A while back, I was looking in a topical Bible on the subject of rewards, and I was surprised to see how many references there were to rewards in heaven for believers in Christ. What the Bible teaches is that rewards do not determine where we will spend eternity, but how we will spend eternity. Here are a few of those verses I was referring to.

Matthew 6:19-21: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Luke 6:22-23a: "Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven."

Revelation 22:12: "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done."

We see in Hebrews 11:6 that God Himself is a rewarder. Hebrews 11:6: "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."

As we will see in detail in a moment, heaven will not be the same for everyone. Warren Weirsbe said, "Some people have the idea that, no matter how they lived as a Christian, when they die and go to heaven, they will be like the giants of the faith. But that idea is not true. An old Puritan preacher used to say, 'Every vessel in heaven will be filled, but some vessels are larger than others.'" [Warren Weirsbe, *Weirsbe Quote Book*, page 73]

Speaking of Puritans, the Puritan John Bunyan said, "Whatever good thing you do for Him, if done according to the word, is laid up for you as treasure in chests and coffers, to be brought out to be rewarded before men and angels, to your eternal comfort." [Randy Alcorn, *Money, Possessions, and Eternity*, page 155]

There are many people who have a problem with this whole concept of differing rewards in heaven. There are some who would say, “It seems self-serving to talk about rewards for a life of service. Shouldn’t we serve Him because you love Him and because your heart is overflowing with gratitude for all He has provided for us?” Certainly our love and gratitude for all He has done is a great (and likely the best) motive for pouring out our lives before the Lord. However, I would remind you that Jesus Himself used rewards as a motivator for serving Him. Look again at Revelation 22:12: “Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.”

Rewards aren’t in opposition to God’s grace; they are manifestations of God’s grace. Rewards are not owed to faithful believers. In Luke 17 Jesus spoke about a servant who did all that he was commanded. Luke 17:10 (NIV): “So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’” Our service, sacrifice, and duty do not obligate God to reward us. Our reward will be because our God is a gracious God who is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

II. The Place for Receiving Rewards

1 Corinthians 3:13a: “their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light.” What “Day” (and notice it is capitalized)? Though the name of this *day* isn’t given in this passage, it is obviously talking about the day of the Christian’s final accounting before God who is the owner of all things. In other places, this day is called the judgment seat of Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:10: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good (not referring to morally good, but good in the sense of valuable) or bad (not morally bad, but worthless).” The Greek word translated “judgment seat” is the Greek word *bema*.

I counted twelve times that word is used in the New Testament (though it is not always translated “judgment seat”). It refers to a raised platform and seat which was the official seat of a judge. It could be for a judge in civil or criminal matters but usually it refers to a judge in an athletic event. When it refers to a bema at an athletic event, it was where prizes or rewards were given out and where disputes about penalties and disqualifications were dealt with. This passage in 1 Corinthians 3 gives us more detail than any other passage about exactly what happens at this judgment seat when all believers stand before the Lord to give an account of how they built on the foundation of salvation in Christ alone.

Martin Luther said that there were only two days on his calendar, today and “that Day.” George Whitefield (who was a contemporary of Jonathan Edwards) never lost sight of the connection between his daily life and the coming judgment seat of Christ. Here is what Whitefield said he wanted written on his tombstone: “Here lies George Whitefield; what sort of man he was, the great day will discover.” He kept before his eyes the fact that human accomplishments and honors mattered little. All that counts is whether or not we are found faithful at that final accounting – the judgment seat of Christ.

III. The Procedure for Receiving Rewards

Keep in mind that only believers appear at the judgment seat of Christ. Unbelievers will appear later at a place called “The Great White Throne of Judgment”. The judgment seat of Christ pictures the believer’s life like a building being built. Every building starts with the foundation. 1 Corinthians 3:11: “For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” The foundation pictures salvation in Christ alone. The building on that foundation pictures the Christian life. Every Christian has the same foundation. There is no difference. If you are built on Christ alone, there are no foundations that are better or stronger than others. The foundations are all the same. The buildings built on that foundation differ drastically. 1 Corinthians 3:12-15:

Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s

work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Some believers are going to build on that perfect foundation with shoddy, inferior materials that won't stand the testing. Some will build on the foundation with wonderful durable materials that will stand the test and be approved. The materials with which we build can be divided into two categories: Those materials that will stand the final testing and come through unscathed, and those which do not stand the test and will be burned up. The durable ones are compared to gold, silver, and precious stones while the materials that burn are compared to wood, hay, and straw. Precious stones are probably not diamonds, rubies, and emeralds; it refers to building stones like granite or marble that stands the test of storms and time. Often in beautiful homes these precious stones of granite or marble were overlaid with gold or silver.

Wood, hay, and straw were materials used in "thrown together" temporary buildings. What is this testing fire that reveals whether a life is rewarded or suffers regret? I don't think that we can be dogmatic here, but it is interesting in the book of Revelation when the glorified Christ is presented, we see something special about His eyes. Revelation 1:14: "His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire." Perhaps the symbolism is that Christ turns His fiery gaze on our works and enables us to see them as He sees them. Those works that are like wood, hay, and straw will turn to ashes at His gaze, but the gold, silver, and precious stones will be unscathed and thus rewarded. To our eyes, certain works may look really good, but when His fiery gaze is turned upon those works, "poof!" and they're burned up. Some works may look a little shoddy to us, but under His fiery gaze they turn out to be granite, marble, gold, and silver because He sees the motive and the heart of the believer. Notice that what is measured is not primarily how much has been done, but the quality of what has been done.

The purpose of the Day of the judgment seat of Christ is to reveal who is a faithful, obedient steward of God. Good stewardship is a building constructed with gold, silver, and precious stones. To use an earlier analogy, the purpose of the judgment seat of Christ is to reveal who lived on earth for the line and not the dot. Poor stewardship is a building of wood, hay, and straw. Do you get the picture? We are all building our lives like a contractor building a building. Everyone who appears at the judgment seat of Christ is already saved, but many will see their life lived for the dot burned up and they will be left only with a pile of ashes. However, as we read in 1 Corinthians 3:14: "If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward."

IV. The Particular Examples of Reward

What exactly are these rewards? They seem to impact us throughout eternity (remember the dot and the line). The rewards fall in three categories.

A. Crowns

There are five different crowns that are identified in the New Testament as rewards. Some believe these crowns are literal (and they may be), but I believe that they are symbolic. The crowns described as rewards in the New Testament were crowns given to winners in the games. In other words, the crowns were rewards for a race run well. Using our earlier analogy, the crowns were to reward a life lived for the line and not the dot. If the crowns are literal, we get insight as to what the recipients will do with them in Revelation 4:10-11 (NIV): "the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: 'You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.'"

There are five crowns mentioned in Scripture. There is the victors crown (1 Corinthians 9:25-27) which was given to winners in athletic contests who were disciplined and ran according to the rules. There is the crown of rejoicing (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20) that has been called the disciple makers crown. There is the crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8) which is given to those who long for the Lord Jesus to return.

The fourth crown is the crown of life (James 1:12). This crown goes to those who faithfully go through trials and temptations and remain faithful. The fifth crown is the crown of Glory (1 Peter 5:4) for faithful shepherds of the church.

B. Levels of Responsibility

There are numerous scriptures that teach us that there are differing levels of leadership and responsibility in heaven. An example would be Matthew 25:14-30 (the Talents).

C. The Approval of the Lord

This is the one that motivates me more than any. Matthew 25:23: “His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’”

Conclusion

Five minutes after you die, when it is too late to gain eternal reward, what will you wish you had done differently? Tithed? Witnessed to the lost neighbor? Been involved in a ministry? Discipled someone? Treated your spouse better? Forgiven someone you harbored bitterness against? Restored a broken relationship? Been more faithful in church attendance? Prayed with your family? Been obedient in being baptized? Five minutes after you die, what will be your greatest regret? I have great news for you! You are not dead. You can do it now! Don't spend the rest of eternity lamenting that you didn't do it.