

TIME AND ETERNITY

A BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Preface

At first glance this topic doesn't strike us as being a doctrine. Yet the Bible speaks much about the fact of the afterlife and the destiny of the soul. There are many different beliefs in the world of what the afterlife is and how it will be.

Time is the season God gives for one to prepare for eternity. And He commissions those who choose Him to help others in time with the gifts and opportunities He provides. God holds the church responsible in this season to carry the true light to the world.

Time is a precious commodity. It is not a renewable source; for when it is gone, it is gone forever.

We tend to take for granted the time God gives us. We forget that it is a gift, as was also our birth.

There is a tendency in modern Christianity to play down and lessen the seriousness of the afterlife, especially the judgment and sentence of the sinner. The following quote is copied from the Mennonite Encyclopedia article on Eternity: "The person with considerable formal education is more inclined to critical reflection, or poetic indulgence, such as 'Dancing across the meadows of eternity,' heard at a Mennonite Church (MC) General Assembly in 1987."

Time

"This term is commonly taken for the measure of motion, or for the duration of anything. It is also taken for opportunity, or the favorable moment of doing or omitting anything. Ecclesiastes 8:5 says, 'And a wise man's heart discerneth both time and Judgment. He knows both what he ought to do and what are the fittest seasons for doing it'" (A. Cruden).

1. "So teach us to number our days" (Psalm 90:12). The time allotted to each one is the same. Each and every person has 24 hours, or 1,440 minutes, or 86,400 seconds in a day. No more and no less.

2. "Redeeming the time" (Ephesians 5:16). Making the most of your time; using the present opportunities to the fullest. "Time is redeemed when we carefully embrace and improve all the occasions and opportunities which the Lord presents unto us for His glory and the good of others and ourselves: not suffering these seasons to be stolen from us and lost by cares

and thoughts about the world" (A. Cruden).

3. "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time" (Colossians 4:5).

4. "Occupy, till I come" (Luke 19:13).

5. The time God has allotted us is like a raw product that needs to be developed into something useful, or it is like talents given to a servant to be increased in value for the master to receive upon his return. What we are and what we will have accomplished in life will be the result of the use of our time. Lost time is never found again; it is gone forever, never to be regained.

6. Life is like the springtime of eternity. Springtime is the season when we sow the seeds in expectation of the harvest. Some seeds are of short maturity; they mature early for the reaping while other seeds mature later. Likewise with life; the sowing is done in time while most of the reaping, both good and bad, will be done in eternity. The one most important purpose in life is preparing our never-dying soul for eternity.

The Use of Time

Take notice of the questions designated with an asterisk* Ponder them carefully, answer them to God.

*Is the time allotted to us our time, or is it God's time? Will we someday give account to God for how we used His time?

The moments God has allotted to us, which consist of our lives, can be likened to a series of consecutive square spaces. These spaces, each representing a moment of our time, we must fill, and we are at liberty to fill them according to our choosing.

1. Some spaces will be filled with legitimate and necessary things (relating to that which sustains life and health).

2. Some spaces will be filled with unselfish things. These are things that go beyond the call of duty—plus-service for your fellowman. Included is that which is done for Christ's sake, receiving no material recompense or reward.

3. Some spaces we may fill with selfish things (time spent selfishly for one's personal pleasure or enjoyment).

4. Excluding the legitimate and necessary things, let's assume all the squares representing our selfish moments are filled with red and all the unselfish squares are filled in with blue. What hue does God see when He

views your life? "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matthew 6:20).

5. Since creation it has always taken 365 days to make a year. When God set this in order He saw that it would be sufficient time for us. This has never changed, and it never will. *We all agree that "time flies," so who and what makes it fly?

We live in a time of many inventions, and most of them are meant to make things more convenient for us and to save time—not make time, which we cannot do. This, in turn, allows us to put more living into the same amount of time. *Is God receiving His share of your "saved" time? Will we, someday, be required to give account of our "saved time"? *Are we using our saved time to benefit the kingdom of God or to benefit self?

6. Sometimes it is too late, as the following indicates: On the banks of the Niagara River, where the rapids begin to swell and swirl most desperately, preparatory to that final plunge, is a signboard that bears the words, "Past Redemption Point." Even while one feels the firm soil beneath his feet, a shiver of horror passes through one's soul as he looks upon the turbulent waters and realizes the full significance of the sign "Past Redemption Point." None can retrace his steps if he passes that point. "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near" (Isaiah 55:6). King Saul called upon the Lord, but He did not answer. It was too late!

Idleness is condemned in the Bible: "Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her ... (Ezekiel 16:49).

Patience

1. Patience is said to be the hardest of all Christian virtues to learn.

2. Accepting God's time schedule is a severe test in some instances.

(a) "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). The Bible uses many illustrations from nature to teach us that everything has its season and that man must accept what God set in order or suffer the consequences of lost opportunities. "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved" (Jeremiah 8:20). "Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When the branch is yet tender, and putting forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors" (Matthew 24:32-33). This account is recorded in three of the Gospels!

(b) King Saul was an example of impatience when he offered the sacrifice

before Samuel arrived (1 Samuel 13:8-13).

3. "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Peter 3:8)

If we calculated recorded time (6,000 years) into one 24-hour day (12 o'clock midnight to 12 o'clock midnight), it would work out something like this:

Time begins, 12:01 a.m.. Time ends, 12:00 midnight

(a) Because of wickedness, God destroyed the earth with a flood-8:00 a.m..

(b) God sent Jesus as the Savior of the world-4:00 P.M.

(c) Columbus discovered America (1492), Menno Simons (b. 1496)-9:50 p.m..

(d) Anti-creation publication Origin of the Species. Charles Darwin 1859 -11:30 p.m.

(e) Seventy years (three score and ten Psalm 90:10)-16 minutes, 45 seconds.

(f) Thirty-five years-8 minutes and 23 seconds.

(g) Eighteen years-4 minutes and 12 seconds.

Are we living in the last of the last time? Peter says, "But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer" (1 Peter 4:7).

What Time Reveals

There is a law called Sowing and Reaping. This law was established by God and conforms to His word. Mortal man cannot alter it. One cannot ignore it, and its voice cannot be silenced.

1. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). Let us never be fooled. The attitudes, reactions, feelings, thoughts, and emotions you harbor and foster now will have a tremendous bearing on you half a lifetime from now, let alone determining your eternal destiny. The kind of books you read, the kind of songs you sing, the things you give your time to and take an interest in now, are the little seeds we are planting, and someday they will bear their fruit.

2. We should take this seriously, because those innocent-looking seeds, whether good or bad, that show up in school, in youth, in business dealings, in marriage, or in the brotherhood were planted long ago, perhaps even by our parents. We will be no more successful trying to hide them or cover them than the lazy, dishonest boy who placed all his seeds in one hole and covered them! He thought nobody would notice. Time will not

erase sin; it only reveals it. The Bible says, "And be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23). Yes, it will all be revealed, if not in time than certainly in eternity. How sad, because then it will be too late; for time will be no more. It is disturbing when we think that we will harvest throughout eternity that which we are planting today!

Time Is Absolute

Time waits for no man. "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Genesis 8:22). "Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained" (Acts 17:31). "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Psalm 90:12).

Time also Is Relative

Everything in time is relative to other points of reference. Our calendar uses the birth of Christ as a "benchmark" for historical events. All events happening before the birth of Christ are recorded as B.C., and all events that happened after the birth of Christ are recorded A.D. A year is measured by days, and a day is measured by hours, minutes, and seconds. Distance is measured by miles and feet; miles and feet added together will circle the globe. Everything on this earth has a beginning and an ending.

This is not so with eternity. Eternity has no starting place, and there is no point where anything ends. There isn't anything in eternity that will become old or worn, and nothing will be made new. There will be no second chance, no starting over. Nothing will be lost, and nothing will be found. The idea of time simply will not be. Eternity will never be half over or even a fraction of a percent over, as those terms are relative to time. No matter how long a space you can imagine, eternity will never advance beyond the stage of "just began." This is because eternity will always be the same—time will have stopped; so the duration will forever remain the same.

In eternity, joy will be complete at God's right hand. Think of the endless ages in which we will be in His hallowed presence, in the fellowship of saints and angels, in the fullness of perfect bliss and glory, in a place where farewell tears are never shed and sorrows never come. At the same time, those who were set on the Lord's left hand in the judgment will be in the deepest anguish. Words fail to describe the grief and anguish of hell. Jude refers to it as "the vengeance of eternal fire," and the Revelator adds, where

they will be "tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Revelation 20:10).

In eternity there will be no combinations of emotions, such as joy mixed with sorrow. It will either be all joy or all sorrow, depending on which hand one is placed. Time has interrupted eternity for a brief season, but when time ceases, eternity will be divided into two realms. There will be a right and a left. These realms will be known as heaven and hell. The two will be separated by a great gulf so vast that no man can cross it, no, not even the angels of God.

In the Light of Eternity

The Wise Man refers to a man saying, "all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow" (Ecclesiastes 6:12). Think of a shadow as the result of a dark and ominous cloud advancing upon us. Then think of this shadow as the shadow of eternity. Then weigh, in the light of eternity, the things that are important to you now. Some common misconceptions of men are: "Have fun; you are only young once." "I earned it, so I will enjoy it." "Earn all you can while you can." "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." "I will seek the Lord sometime." "Tomorrow or some more convenient time." "Before I die; if not before, then I hope there will be time on my death bed."

The Brevity of Life

What the Bible says about our time here on earth:

1. Life is brief. "We spend our years as a tale that is told" (Psalm 90:9).
2. Like a shadow. "Our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding" (1 Chronicles 29:15).
3. Like a flying shuttle. "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle" (Job 7:6).
4. Like speeding messengers. "Now my days are swifter than a post: they flee away" (Job 9:25).
5. Like a handbreadth in extent. "Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth: and mine age is nothing before thee" (Psalm 39:5).
6. Like a shepherd's tent. "Mine age is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent" (Isaiah 38:12).
7. Like a vanishing vapor. "For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (James 4:14).

In Conclusion

In the light of these things, is it any wonder that the patriarchs of old, while gazing steadfastly by faith towards heaven, looked for "a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God," and confessed themselves "strangers and pilgrims on earth"? Also, that the disciples and martyrs, in the face of death, earnestly and joyfully glorified God and exhorted others to be steadfast and faithful? They looked forward and thought of the wonderful and glorious things God has prepared for those who love Him.

As we meditate on these things, may our prayer be that God will grant us life and strength that we might have more opportunities to share this vision of a blessed eternity.

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