

# The Heart of the Matter

## Lesson 16: The Christian's Attitude Toward Time

---

### 1. Life in the Present Moment

Great authors, poets and men of divine inspiration have pondered the nature of time. God has ordained that earthly life be lived only in the present moment. As each moment passes it recedes into history, unchangeable and fixed in the past. Any future existence is uncertain and out of reach. The present moment is the time of decision and action, and what we do with it will have serious implications here and in eternity.

### 2. How Much Time?

Life doesn't come with a warranty; no one born into the world has any idea how long his life will last. This also makes the present moment crucial, for there may be no future to amend or improve the decision of the present.

Moses observed: *"The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years ..."* (Psa. 90:10a). This is only a broad parameter, for the author himself lived to be 120. And even in our advanced age the duration of life depends upon where one lives. While in America the average life span matches Moses' standard, yet in most of the world one's life span is drastically reduced.

In relation to eternity, however, the length of our earthly life is irrelevant. It is the *quality* that counts; i.e., has one lived appropriately before his Creator in the time he has been given? God has not seen fit to extend the life span of many of His

most faithful servants, including His own Son. Rather, God is concerned with our stewardship of time.

From an earthly standpoint, an early departure from this life is a tragedy. In view of eternity it is a blessing. For the Christian, earthly life can be summarized as service to God. Our life belongs to Him and He sustains it for as long as He chooses. Death, as we studied earlier, is a portal or passageway to heaven.

### 3. Perception vs. Reality

Although time passes at a constant rate, we have all experienced the different *perceptions* of how time passes. And understanding this is crucial to our faith.

Human life is like the morning mists that mantle the mountain. It spreads itself out, indeed, as vapour does; for it is manifold in its schemes and cares and toils; but, like vapour, it is frail and transient. We know this to be true, but how little do we realize it! We form plans about our business and family affairs, plans about our houses and fields, plans to improve our social status; and we forget that all these are dependent upon an unknown quantity – our continuance in life and health, our possession of the future, and of property in it. Now, in all this, do not we act quite irrationally? How can our calculations be correct, when we leave out the factor of the frailty of life? It is the part of a wise man often to reflect that he will soon be in eternity.

*[Pulpit Commentary,  
homily on James 4:14]*

Moses continued to note of the life span: *"Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away"* (Psa. 90:10b). At the end of life, however long we live, it will seem to have passed quickly. James acknowledges the same phenomenon: *"For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away"* (Jas. 4:14).

David also pondered this: *"Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths, and*

*my age is as nothing before You; certainly every man at his best state is but a vapor"* (Psa. 39:5). Asaph wrote of God turning His wrath from Israel: *"For He remembered that they were but flesh, a breath that passes away and does not come again"* (Psa. 78:39).

At any given moment, time may seem to drag along. Because of some present unpleasantness, the present seems to last forever and the future cannot come quickly enough. But a broader perspective on time recognizes this to be an illusion; it is merely a skewed perception based upon present circumstances.

When people are happy and content with the day, the remainder of life may seem all too short. They wish for things to remain as they are so their enjoyment may continue. But those in unhappier situations may feel that the rest of life is interminably long and cannot be lived in the way that God prescribes.

Those, for example, who ruin their prospects for divinely approved marriage early in life often willfully choose to live in adultery because they cannot bear the thought of living celibate the rest of their lives. They have a problem of perception: they have reversed the duration of earthly life and eternity and are willing to forfeit eternal happiness for a moment's joy upon the earth.

#### **4. Stewards of Time**

Moses prayed: *"So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom"* (Psa. 90:12). David asked likewise: *"Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am"* (Psa. 39:4).

As we mature we should learn from experience about the passing of time. We should learn to enjoy good times, for they

will seem to pass very quickly: Time flies when you're having fun! On the other hand, when life takes a downturn, we must remember that "this, too, shall pass." And standing above it all is God, superintending our lives with His providential care.

We must also realize that we do not have as much time as we think to accomplish the important things. We have all read various calculations like the following:

If a man lives to be 75 years old he will spend:

25 years sleeping

15-20 years working

6-7 years eating

3-4 years in school

1,000 years *mowing the grass*

At any rate, when one factors in all the time-consuming incidentals of life – from hygiene to financial accounting to leisure time, etc. – the time left to study, worship and serve the Lord in other direct ways is very minimal indeed. This is why Paul exhorts us to *"redeem the time"* that we have (Eph. 5:16).

#### **5. Problems of Time Management**

**Procrastination:** Satan whittles away our opportunities by a phantom sense that "later" is a better time than now. We must use our time wisely, and some things are best put off for the present in favor of something more important, but it is very easy to cross the line and delay unnecessarily things which ought to be done today.

**Anxiety over the future:** Jesus says: *"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble"* (Matt. 6:34). Some worry themselves into paralysis because of undue concerns about the future. If we

are consumed with fear, we will squander today fretting about tomorrow.

**Impulsiveness:** The opposite of such anxiety is an impulsiveness that takes no thought about the future. Time is wasted due to a lack of focus on specific goals and objectives. The demands of each day can be overwhelming, especially with a growing family. We must plan our time effectively or it will disappear.

**Frivolity:** Some simply squander their lives in pursuits that are unworthy of a

child of God. They can't say "no" to any element of fun or amusement, and they cram so many frivolous activities into their lives that no time is left for the truly important things.

Our lives are ticking by every second, minute, hour, day, week, month and year. We all marvel in our casual conversations about the years getting faster. Let us be wise and order each day according to this realization. We will get much more out of life if we do.

---

### ***Questions for Discussion***

1. Discuss Jas. 4:17, the "sin of omission," in the context of time management.
2. How can our past mistakes ruin the moments we have today? Cite a passage that may help overcome this problem.
3. Why is it so hard to apply the lessons of the past to the decisions of today?
4. Discuss Rom. 13:11 in reference to our outlook on life.
5. What perspective did Paul have upon the past in Phil. 3:13-14?