

## QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

### 49 What Is the Christian View of Time?

*Scripture: Psalm 90:1-17; I Corinthians 7:29-31*

It would be very surprising if there was someone here this morning who had never thought about the passing of time. I rather suppose it is a matter we have all pondered. We do it when we are young because we can't wait until we grow up. We know it is a matter of time. No longer will we have to go to bed at a certain hour, or have homework to do, or have to be told how to act. Oh, how we wish for time to move along when we are young, when the middle years arrive our attitude changes considerably. We wish time would slow down. Somehow time seems to pick up momentum on us and the years pile on until we are surprised to realize we do not have all that much time left. The very thing we once wished would pass now strikes us as being the thing we are about to run out of.

Christians are people who have a striking concept of time. There is one way in which they believe they have all the time in the world. They gather with one another and sing a song which has a familiar final stanza, "When we've been there ten thousand years, Bright shining as the sun, We've no less days to sing God's praise, Than when we first begun." Paradoxically, Christians also believe that time is short. One of the verses of Scripture mentioned above, I Corinthians 7:29, tells us, "*the time is short.*" In Job 7:6 we read, "*My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, And come to an end without hope.*" In I Chronicles 29:15 we read, "*For we are sojourners before Thee, and tenants as all our fathers were, our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope.*" In James 4:14 these words are found, "*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.*" The view is that time is short because it is swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and as elusive as a puff of smoke or a shadow. Thus, the Christian's view of time is that it is both temporal and eternal, that time is not on his side while at the same time it is his great possession. This study together will have to do with the Biblical teaching on time and the way time relates to God and to the believer.

## I. TIME IS A GREAT MYSTERY AND GOES BEYOND THE SIMULTANEOUS NOW:

Most of us think of time as moving in a direct line coming in out of the future, spending itself in the present, and flowing out into the past. The “now” of time is always preceded by what is to come and succeeded by what has been. We therefore think of time as a succession of events, the “what” of what is to come, etc. While it is true that time does deal with events and experiences, it also relates to states of being. One's experience of how time passes makes time a relative and subjective thing. We objectify time with clocks, watches and calendars forgetting that these relate to the motion of our system in reference to the sun as a fixed reference point. Einstein writes, “What we call an hour is actually a measurement in space, an arc of 15 degrees in the apparent daily rotation of the celestial sphere.” (Lincoln Barnett, **The Universe And Dr. Einstein**, pp, 46-47)

Aristotle actually anticipated this idea when he suggested that if other heavens exist they must have their own time, meaning that there would be many times at the same time. According to Einstein's relativity theory, time is definitely affected by gravitational fields and rate of speed. The closer one travels to the speed of light, the more time decreases or speeds up. A man by the name of James Reid hypothesizes concerning a trip to the distant star Alpha Centauri. It is so far away that by normal rocket speed the undertaking would take centuries.

Even if a rocket ship could travel near the speed of light. (186,000 miles per second) the trip would be prohibitive. When relativity is introduced we find that such a space craft traveling at the speed of light would land in a month. Time is dependent upon a point of reference. When one's point of reference is the sun and one goes beyond the solar system, time contracts. One day on earth may be equivalent to a split second in the space craft, or a month on earth equal to 10 seconds in space. In one month while heading toward Alpha Centauri, these travelers would have moved ten years into the future with respect to earth. It is also true that people on earth would have aged ten years during the time. (James Reid; **God, the Atom, and the Universe**; Zondervan; pp. 61-63)

The reason for mentioning this illustration is because of Peter's words in II Peter 3:8, “*But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.*” When you plug relativity into that verse and space travel it is understandable that one day with

the spaceman is worth a 1000 years on earth, and 1000 years on earth is equal to one day with the spaceman. There are two rates of time taking place at the same time. We do not understand how God is able to move through both rates at the same time. We are either a part of one or the other. We have spoken of an antinomy before. This is an antinomy. An antinomy is the irreconcilability of seemingly necessary conclusions. At the time of the incarnation, Christ stepped out of the eternal "now" and became a subject of time as we know it in terms of it being a simultaneous "now." He moved into our time frame. He subjected Himself.

## II. THE ETERNAL GOD CAUSES EACH DAY TO DAWN:

The Bible's concept of time is that of a brief parenthesis which exists between two eternities. Time has reference to man only, God is above time. He transcends it and is not subject to its limitations. One of the most difficult things for us to grasp is the fact that God is eternal. This truth the Bible teaches again and again. In Deuteronomy 33:27 we read, "*The eternal God is thy refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms.*" Psalm 90:2 tells us, "*From everlasting to his everlasting, Thou art God.*" This same verse tells that before the mountains were born or the earth and worlds were given birth, God existed. The question often arises, "Where did God come from?" The answer to this question is simply that He always was. He did not come from anywhere. Bertrand Russell in his book, **Why I Am Not A Christian**, raises the question of who made God. He reasons that everything needs a cause. If the world needed a cause, so does God need one. If God does not need a cause, then neither does the world need one. If God needed a cause, He is not God. Either way there is no God. That objection is based on a misunderstanding of the Christian teaching. The Christian theist does not say that everything needs to have a cause. He believes that every finite, limited, changing thing needs to have a cause. If you find something that is unlimited and unchanging, you have found that which does not need a cause. The Christian believes that every effect must have a cause, every creature has a creator, every composition has an author, every design has a designer. But God is the great uncaused cause. The best illustration of this is in a book written by Richard Taylor entitled, **Metaphysics**, in the last chapter. An atheist and a theist are out for a walk in the woods. They chance to come upon a ball eight foot in diameter. The atheist admits it needed a creator as do all balls, with the exception of a ball the size of the universe. Little balls need causes and medium size balls need causes, but not one the size of the universe. The atheist will not

stay with his conviction that all finite things need a cause. No matter how big a thing is it is only a bigger finite. God is infinite. He is unlimited. Anything that can grow or get bigger needs a cause. God is the one who created time. He is timeless. He is the uncaused cause and He sees eternity as He sees an infinitesimal second. A. W. Tozer writes, "In one unified present glance He comprehends all things from everlasting, and the flutter of the seraph's wings a thousand ages hence is seen by Him now without moving His eyes." (**The Divine Conquest; Harrisburg: Christian Publications, p.21**) We believe in the eternity of God. One of the basic questions in philosophy has to do with this matter of cause and origin of being. God had no cause and no beginning. We may contrast His eternity with man's brevity. This is a very practical doctrine because it means we are made for eternity having been made in His image and likeness. God, who is outside of time and space, created both when He made the universe. The eternal God causes each day to dawn.

### **III. TIME IS NOT ON OUR SIDE BUT GOD IS:**

It is folly to place one's confidence in time. I knew a man once who had a favorite expression. He would say very often, "Everything comes to the person who is willing to wait." The thought is that with the passing of time one draws nearer to realizing the desires of the heart. Granted, there are the virtues of persistence and patience, but time alone is not a rewarder. Neither is time a perfecter of human nature. Enough time has gone by for us to realize that every day man is not getting better in every way. Further, time is not a revealer of truth. We hear the expression, "Time will tell." Sometimes it happens, but it is nothing to depend on. Time often does more to conceal rather than reveal truth. This is very true when it comes to spiritual matters. Many a person has put off becoming a Christian because He figured time was on his side. The chances are actually less and less that a person will come to the faith with the passing of time. Of courses this is a human observation and God is able to bring people to Himself at any time in life. The verse in Isaiah 55:6 is to be heeded, "*Seek the Lord while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near.*" The Scripture places a premium on the day at hand. The message is continually to focus our attention on the present. The only reality we have is now. It is the now, properly handled, which relates ideally to eternity. (Matthew 6:34; II Corinthians 6:2) Of course time is not on our side because the limits of our lives here on earth are set. There comes a time when God declares, "*Go back to dust!*" We have no control when that will be. Just as God has in His time for our departing this life, so He has told

us there is a particular day for every person to come to Him in confession of sin and faith toward His Son, Jesus Christ.

An interesting question to pose is “Did you not know that God has a particular day for you to become a Christian? If I were to tell you the day and the date, would you keep the engagement?” Of course, today is the day of salvation and now is the accepted time. (II Corinthians 6:2) Today is all a person needs to come into the possession of eternal life. Thus, God has hallowed time by the sending of His Son to do His redemptive work in what we know as time. Furthermore, God has given us time to assess time redemptively by coming to the faith. Romans 8:32 informs us that, *“He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things.”* Time surely is included in the *“all things.”*

#### **IV. WE ARE TO HONOR GOD BY OUR USE OF TIME:**

Time, for the thoughtful Christian, is a sacred trust not to be wasted or squandered. We are to guard against killing, passing or wasting time. In Daniel 2:8 we have the interesting situation where Nebuchadnezzar spoke out against the astrologers who were buying up the time for themselves, with a view toward wasting it in unproductive delays. The Apostle Paul uses the same expression in Ephesians 5:16 where he speaks of making the most of time by placing a high value upon it, much the same as a merchant would on a valuable piece of merchandise. The same apostle enumerates five necessary and common experiences of life to believers living in Corinth which must be watched carefully if time is not to be wasted. His conviction was that it is in time that we hammer out a destiny and these experiences point up areas where we do not use time to its best advantage or greatest value. Time and eternity are linked together in these words of admonition.

##### **1. The Experience of Relationships:**

*“But this I say, brethren, the time is shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none.”* (I Corinthians 7:29) The context reveals that Paul is concerned with our attendance to the Lord without distraction. (Verse 35) When any relationship comes to the place where the parties involved think only of themselves and what most pleases them, the time invested in such is wasted and lost to the Kingdom of God. This principle, of course, has to do with all human relationships including friendships, and fellowship in the body of Christ.

**2. The Experience of Sorrow:**

*"And those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice."* (I Corinthians 7:30a) This is surely not a commission to indifference toward suffering and loss. Indeed, we are told in Romans 12:15 to *"weep with those who weep."* What we have here is an unreasonable sorrow which is prolonged and renders a person inoperative and ineffective in the Lord's work. The classic example of this kind of sorrow is found in Genesis 37:34-35 where Joseph speaks of going down into the grave moaning the loss of his son. Such grief wastes time and it would seem the Lord can enable us to overcome such sorrow.

**3. The Experience of Joy:**

*"...and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice."* This is the third time waster. Again, this teaching needs to be qualified for we are to rejoice with them that do rejoice. (Romans 12:15) We know that joy is the evidence of the presence of God among His people. The caution here has to do with being overtaken with the certain temporal successes which would undermine our primary loyalties and priorities. Not that many accomplished people are able to keep their mind on the things of the Lord. It becomes very easy to take one's pleasure in personal achievements than in the Lord who gives us the ability in the first place.

**4. The Experience of Possessions:**

*"...and those who buy, as though they did not possess."* I think the emphasis here is on the pursuit and the busyness which characterizes those who would possess. Time is wasted which leaves none left to be about the Father's business.

**5. The Experience of Pleasure:**

*"And those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away."* (I Corinthians 7:31) The Scripture makes it clear that while we are in this world God has given us richly all things to enjoy. (I Timothy 6:17) This waste of time has to do with the world's making use of us rather than the other way around. We become manipulated when pleasure becomes a passion. "This is what happened to Demas as mentioned in II Timothy 4:10. There is only so much time we have. When we devote it to what pleasures this world affords, nothing much can be done for the Lord.

Serving Him is time consuming, but time well spent. Truly has Shakespeare said. "I wasted time; now doth time waste me."

Alan B. Christensen, Pastor, Hope Evangelical Free Church, Wilton, CT,  
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## **NOTES**