

CONSIDER DEATH

"None of us are getting out of this game alive" declared the hardware store owner, "We are all going to die!" "That is why I take Christianity very seriously," I replied, "because after life there is Eternity. We will live eternally somewhere."

We had just entered a conversation about how people relate to material goods in this life. This man went on to say he refuses to horde money. Instead, he believes the funds we acquire should be used to enjoy life on a daily basis because death is imminent.

The serious-minded Christian seeks to recognize and understand the motivating impulse of the heart and is concerned that the impulse is driving us toward greater holiness. The Psalmist says, Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer (Psa 19:14). In this verse, King David a man after God's own heart brings the relationship of three thoughts into focus. They are the impulses of the heart, the actions a life produces, and our accountability before Almighty God. One of the most powerful motivators of life is the thought of death. Or we could say the brevity of life is a powerful motivator. As with the hardware store owner, I believe we all are making choices and choosing lifestyles, whether consciously or innately, because the brevity of life is driving us.

We find examples of this in scripture. In 2 Kings 20, an infirmed King Hezekiah was told by the prophet that he would not recover from his illness; instead, he would die. This motivated the King to turn his face toward the wall, praying and weeping sore. King Ahab upon the prophecy of his death in war structured his battle plans in an attempt to thwart the sentence of God. The Apostle Paul pens his thoughts to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4. Paul in thinking of death says, he is ready to be offered, his departure is at hand. He precedes these words with an exhortation to his fellow laborers to preach the word (vs 1-4) and follows them with contemplating the crown of righteousness which the Lord will give him. Romans 12:12 tells that Satan, a spiritual being, has great wrath knowing his time is short. These examples show the motivating properties of possessing a knowledge of an end. There are some areas we wish to highlight as we consider that our life is as the flower of the grass (Jas 1:10).

The foremost consideration, of course, is our relationship with God through Jesus Christ our Savior. Are we approved of Him? As God looks on us, does He approve of our obedience to Him and His Word? Is God pleased with our worship of and to Him? Does He see in us the spiritual fruit Galatians 5 requires? The thought of death must motivate us to think and act correctly concerning personal holiness and God's will for our life. It must never cause us to indulge in sinful pleasures or pursue worldly pleasure seeking.

Secondly, we should consider our influence. Are we exercising our gifts for the Kingdom of God and the growth of His Church or are we selfishly using them for personal interest only? We all have a gift that influences somehow, and in one way or another. A person's gift can be used to promote self or God's Kingdom. Spiritual gifts are not aside from our natural gifts God assigned us. They are the same. For example, the naturally gifted salesperson is the same person that can easily engage people in conversation toward spiritual things. The talented musician can lead people in meaningful worship or selfishly entertain a large audience with his/her talent. The brevity of life is usually the unrecognized, underlying motivator in the choice for self or God. Either it is "Life is short I must do more for God." or "Life is short I must do more for me." Along with legitimate uses of our natural talent, the brevity of life must propel us to think and act more for the Kingdom of God.

Thirdly, let us measure our treatment of folks around us. Are we treating others as God would have us? Luke 12:25 tells of the servant, who because time was extended to him, began beating his menservants. A constant awareness of the brevity of life helps us treat humanity around us with kindness. The story is told of an old Bishop on his death bed. Being suddenly confronted with death he began calling people to his bedside, apologizing and asking forgiveness for his harshness and severity in administration. While it is precious that a man can find forgiveness in such a late hour, would it not have served a much greater purpose of holiness to have spared all those folks from hurt by living with the brevity of life in mind at all times? It is God's will that we treat every human being with kindness.

Lastly, let us consider the transitioning of responsibilities before our passing. For fathers and mothers with young children, it is essential that we consider death in order to put into place such things as wills, living wills, etc. Not only will this ease the decisions others would need to make but also helps ensure your children would be cared for by people that you have approved of on a spiritual level. Church leaders should prepare early for the passing on of the mantle. They should seek the welfare and stability of the Church by providing sufficient, competent and younger ordained men. Numbers 8:23-26 is a directive of God to Moses concerning spiritual leadership. The regular and heavy work was to be performed by the 25-50-year-old Levites. The Levites 50 years and older were to be general directors, counselors, and ensuring that no unclean person or thing entered the tabernacle. Our awareness of the brevity of life should prompt us to provide as much as is humanly possible for all those who follow.

The brevity of life is not just about life ending. It is about meeting God. The God who is our Maker and Creator has expectations for each of us by which we will be judged.

~Darvin Halteman