

Eternity – Understanding its Power in Our Lives

From How People Change by Timothy S. Lane & Paul David Tripp

2 Cor 5:9-10 NIV So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Phil 1:21-24 NIV For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;

The Bible contains the world's best and most important story, the story of redemption. You and I live between the First and Second Coming of Christ in the middle of the story. Sometimes life can seem a lot like reading a novel. You're in the middle of the story and you can't resist scanning the last chapters to see how things turn out. It's only when you know the end that the plot twists begin to make sense.

The biblical story has a clear beginning. Out of nothing whatsoever, God created a beautiful world and placed Adam and Eve in it. They were perfect people, living in a full and complete relationship of love, obedience, and worship with the Creator. They had everything they could ever need or want. Adam and Eve were God's image bearers, appointed by God to be resident managers over the world he had created.

But Adam and Eve were not content to worship and obey God. In a shocking act of disobedience, they stepped outside of God's plan. This defiance opened the floodgates of sin and destruction onto the once perfect earth. The fellowship between God and man was horribly broken. Fear, guilt, and rebellion replaced love, worship, and obedience. All of creation was cursed with weeds, decay, and disease. But, God was not content to let things remain broken. He declared war on sin and sent his Son to earth to win the final victory on the cross. He now applies the results of that victory to his sin-scarred children and his sin-marred earth.

When the biblical story ends, God will defeat every last enemy, the final enemy being death. We will become like God and live with him forever. This information is important for three reasons:

1. If you want to go in the right direction, you need to know your final destination.
2. The details of your life only make sense when viewed from the perspective of eternity.
3. Eternity teaches us what is really important in life.

The Bible is a storybook that gives us everything from our origin to our ultimate destiny. God opens up the last chapter of the story for us and invites us to look in, to listen, and then to look back on our lives. The purpose of Scriptures like Revelation is not to provide maps and charts to determine when Christ's return will take place. No, Revelation is in the Bible to help us understand our final destination, and thereby make sense of our lives here and now.

The biblical story makes no sense without eternity. There has to be a better end than what we are living in right now! Sin has to be conquered. People have to be purified. The cosmos has to be restored. Anything less would be a universal defeat. All the suffering, brokenness, trial, sacrifice, and battle would make no sense. Paul says it powerfully in 1 Corinthians 15:19, "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men." If God isn't taking us somewhere, following Christ has been a colossal waste of time. There has to be more than this – and there is!

Why would Jed be willing to miss promotion after promotion because he is committed to honesty and integrity? If this life is all there is, Jed is a fool. Why would Andrea be willing to forgive her husband over and over for his meanness and neglect, if there were no eternity? She would be the willing victim of her own foolishness. Why would Pete endure ridicule for his faith from his high-school peers, if there is not more than this? If there is no eternity, Pete has made a stupid choice. Why would Michael invest so much time, money, and energy in ministry, if this life is all there is? Why faithfully obey? Why cheerfully give? Why turn the other cheek? Why study God's Word? Why pray without ceasing? Why be committed to what is right? Why seek justice and mercy? Why make personal sacrifices? Why persevere? Why worship?

Everything God does and everything God calls us to do only make sense from the perspective of eternity. If there is no end to the story, believers are a bunch of fools who need to be pitied. There is no reason for what we have tried to do.

But there is a final chapter! God has opened it up so that we could look in and then look back to our lives with understanding and hope.

Rev 21:3-4 NIV And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."