

ETERNAL LIFE

Decisions of Eternal Consequence

As spiritual beings we shall all live on for eternity. The concept of eternity is difficult for us to comprehend but I will always remember eternity being described to me as being similar to the time taken for a bird to move the sand from a large beach, grain by grain, to a beach on the other side of the world. Although this description helped me to gain some appreciation of it at the time, it still is not an accurate description because at least in this example there is an end that would eventually come. However, in eternity, there is no end. A more accurate description would be for us to imagine the beach sand being moved back and forth across the world by a single bird forever.

Jonathan Edwards is considered to be one of the world's greatest theologians. He commenced his undergraduate studies at Yale University when he was just thirteen years old but in addition to his obvious intellectual capabilities, he also had a ministry that was blessed by the power of the Holy Spirit. I understand that there were times when he would simply read a sermon with no great emphasis or expression but yet people would be convicted by the Holy Spirit and repent with tears. Jonathan Edwards said the following:

The present state is short and transitory, but our state in the other world is everlasting. And as we are there at first, so we must be without change. Our state in the future world therefore, being eternal, is of so much greater importance than our state here, that all our concerns in this world should be wholly subordinated to it.¹¹

If only we could understand the weight of these words in our heart we would immediately commit ourselves fully to making choices and changing our life dramatically. For unbelievers it would at least warrant them taking a considerable amount of time and effort to fully satisfy themselves that they are not mistaken by their belief that people are not spiritual beings and all will end when this physical body perishes.

As believers, once we leave this life and meet God, we will not be able to improve our spiritual position. The assurance of eternal life in God's kingdom and the rewards that are given to those who receive this eternal life are based on the deeds of obedience to God accomplished in the body while each of us lives on earth, not based on any deeds we may achieve in heaven. Even though as believers we are not saved by our deeds, the Bible makes it clear that the good deeds of believers are very important to God.

There will be great sorrow among the many who die not knowing and accepting Jesus as their Savior. There will also be sorrow and regret among those that claimed to be Christians but are found by God to not be acceptable. These people took their Christianity for granted, never taking the time to examine their own faith to see if they truly had a heart-held belief in the Lord Jesus. Even some believers who are accepted into heaven will be sorrowful when they meet God because of their wasted lives. Although they received eternal life in God's kingdom, they were so occupied with the gift of life upon the earth and so focused on living their daily life the way that they wanted to that they disregarded the Giver of the gift and the plans He had for their life.

It is never too late to examine your own life and start living the life that God intends for you. There is no second chance at this life on earth. Each day is a day of our life that has gone forever. It is so important that we not waste the valuable life that God has given each one of us. Our life on earth is like a puff of wind in the context of eternity but yet it is of such tremendous importance to God and we seem to waste so much of it. David in Psalm 39 speaks of the insignificance of man's life when compared to the eternal nature of God. He speaks of the vain and worthless nature of our busy life which distracts us from building our spiritual life.

Psalm39vs4 " Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am. 5 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 vapor. Selah 6 Surely every man walks about like a shadow; surely they busy themselves in vain; he heaps up riches, and does not know who will gather them."

Faith to believe in Jesus Christ as well as justification through our faith in His blood are both gifts from God. When God touches our heart through the conviction of the Holy Spirit, then as we heed this touch, each of us is able to believe with our heart the message which to so many others in the world appears foolishness. As we are able to truly believe, Jesus said that we are assured of being acceptable to God and also of being assured of receiving eternal life with Him.

John6vs47 Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.

So much depends on the conviction through a person's spirit to believe in God and for them to then respond to this conviction with a decision to believe and live for Him. The urge is usually if not always a call by God on a life, and if it is disregarded, it may never come again and the person could die without salvation. It is important for each of us to understand that we all must seek God while He may be found.

Isaiah55vs6 Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

Faith is very important to God and while we live in our physical body we must possess it if we are to please Him (Hebrews11v6). This is clear in that once we physically die, we enter into a spiritual realm and there is no longer any need for faith for we are able to see, know and experience the full life in God's presence. At that point, where we no longer need faith to believe, it is too late to believe and be saved from the eternal fate that has already been determined by our life in the physical body and the faith we had, or lack of it.

During our physical life, it is by means of our true faith in God that we come to know, trust and love Him. He is God and demands that people have faith in Him and that we cleanse ourselves of sin. When we seek God it must be with all our heart for God knows the thoughts of all people and will only respond to those of us with repentant and humble hearts who seek Him wholeheartedly.

Jeremiah29vs13 And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

From God's perspective, there are two paths of life that people are on, the narrow path to eternal life with Him and the broad road to eternal punishment away from Him. We are told that the path to eternal life in His kingdom is not only narrow but that it is also difficult and there are only a few that truly discover it and walk upon it.

Matthew7vs13 " Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

To all people who are on the broad road to destruction, Paul tells us the message of the cross is foolishness to them. God sees a sinful, hard, dark and wicked heart in these people which results in pride, a sense of independence and even rebellion that keeps them away from Him. Today, perhaps more than ever before, the simplicity of God's good news appears foolish to some. Yet there is no more important matter in a person's life than the decisions that each of us make in regard to God, meeting His requirements for salvation and then living our life for Him. In the end God's so called "foolishness" will condemn those who mock it. God promises to bring down the so called wisdom of the wise and the knowledge that people very often pride themselves on.

1Corinthians1vs18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written: " I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. "

God demonstrated that His way of thinking is different to ours through the experiences of the nations of Israel and Judah, the life and death of Jesus, and the experiences of so many believers since the resurrection of Jesus and the introduction of the New Covenant. Jesus, although God's Son, Creator, King of kings, Lord of lords and Savior of the people, came into this world to a poor family, grew up learning the trade of a carpenter, could not receive the education that was only available to the wealthy and came from a small and unimportant town, Nazareth. When Jesus chose His apostles, the greatest of them were simple fishermen. God's ways are not the ways of the world around us.

King Solomon was the richest person in the world for his time. He not only had great wealth but he was also blessed by God with great wisdom which was the marvel of all nations. We read that he did not withhold himself from indulging in any desire or pleasure. He obtained and experienced all that this world could offer including kingdom rule, palaces, gardens, servants, great possessions, treasures of silver and gold, admiration of people, great learning and knowledge, finest foods and drinks, hundreds of wives and concubines. However, after living a life of extreme indulgence, comfort and great learning, he felt empty and describes his life as grasping for wind.

Ecclesiastes1vs10 Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this

was my reward from all my labor. 11 Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.

Solomon had David as a father, a man after God's own heart, and had once known and been close to God himself. However, he was distracted by the great wisdom he had and the lure of the world and its pleasures. As a result of his position, wisdom and pursuits, his life had been extremely successful and complete by worldly standards but it had left him far from God feeling empty and worthless. Through reflection over his life and the many lessons learned, Solomon eventually concludes that the most important matter in any person's life is to fear God and keep His commandments.

Ecclesiastes 12 vs 13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. 14 For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Solomon knew that what this world had to offer was only temporal and understood the insignificance of a person's life when considered in the context of an almighty and eternal God. He knew that how he spent eternity would rely on how he lived his life on earth. He knew and accepted that spiritual life continues after this earthly existence ends and he knew that all people would have to stand before God to be judged for all the things that they did or thought, good or evil. Solomon knew that the deep emptiness that he felt and that he knew was common to all people was due to a spiritual lack that the physical realm could never satisfy. True contentment, fulfillment, peace and joy came to those who feared God and kept His commandments.

We also read in Ecclesiastes that people should draw near to God when they are young. Although some people think that they will put off pursuing God until they are older, it is extraordinarily important for a person to commit to living for God as soon as they feel the urge to. No one knows the length of their life and also the conviction to believe may never come again in their lifetime and they will go to their grave not knowing God and not reconciled to God. They will also not know about God's plan for their life and waste it.

Ecclesiastes 12 vs 1 Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, " I have no pleasure in them ":

No matter what your age, you may be a mere breath away from death because none of us can guarantee the next breath we take to keep our body alive. Our death can either mean going to a place far better than anything we have experienced or seen in this world or our soul being subject to the wrath of God. In his letter to the Roman Christians, Paul warned them about God's judgment and wrath and how the condition of their heart and their deeds would determine their eternal existence.

Romans 2 vs 5 But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6 who " will render to each one according to his deeds ": 7 eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; 8 but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but

obey unrighteousness--indignation and wrath, 9 tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; 10 but glory, honour, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 11 For there is no partiality with God.

Condemnation of Sinners

Many in the Old Testament responded to God's call to repentance while others did not. In most cases these people were called to repent with much less evidence of the existence of God than we have today. Jesus warned that those people of the Old Testament will speak out on judgment day to condemn many for not repenting. Even though we have access to the full Old and New Testaments, a far greater knowledge of God as provided through Jesus (His life, death and resurrection), a great amount of Christian literature, evangelists and the presence of the Holy Spirit, many of us still choose to not believe.

The people of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by God for their evil lives with far less than what we have today to encourage us to believe. The queen of Sheba came a great distance to learn from Solomon about His God and the people of Nineveh repented based on the words of one person speaking with no supernatural signs that we know of. People who have lived in Jesus' time and all people since that day will undergo a far harsher judgment by God than the people of the Old Testament for we have all received a far greater revelation of God and His will. Jesus said that to whom much is given, much would be required (Luke 12vs48).

Jesus said that He came into this world to open blind spiritual eyes so that we could come to know God. He also said that there were and would be people who claimed that they had spiritual vision (understanding) who were in fact spiritually blind.

John 9vs39 And Jesus said, " For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind. "

Each of us can choose to believe what we want in regard to the value of our own life and the existence of God, His will, His love, His justice and His mercy. However in the end all that matters is what God thinks. God is God and He has defined on what conditions He will accept us or reject us. He demands repentance from sin and true faith in His Son Jesus. We have the choice of saving ourselves or condemning ourselves.

In our world, justice requires punishment for people who break the law and it is the same for those who break God's law.

2Peter 2vs4 For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; 5 and did not spare the ancient world ... 9 then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, 10 and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority.

We can try to avoid being confronted with the reality of eternal punishment in hell. Yet only the foolish ignore God's requirement for justice and accompanied wrath on people who are not reconciled to Him. The intensity of God's sense of justice is great. Jesus' knowledge of the Father's requirement for justice was reflected in the way He lived His life on earth and the words of warning that He regularly gave people.

Matthew 13vs 49 So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, 50 and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Luke 13v 28 There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out.

There is a hell as surely as there is a heaven and Jesus spoke of the place many times. When the word "hell" is used by Bible translators to interpret the words of Jesus, the original word used by Jesus was most frequently the word "Gehenna". This word referred to a place near Jerusalem in Jesus' time that was used as a refuse dump. This was the place where the city's garbage was taken along with the bodies of dead animals and criminals. Fires burnt the garbage and dead bodies and this produced a sickening smell. The best way that Jesus could find to get people to understand the horrors of hell was to compare it to this place that they were all familiar with. Jesus warned people that, as sinners, they should have a fear of God.

Luke 12vs 4 " And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. 5 But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!"

When all unbelievers die, the Bible makes it clear that they go to a place called Hades (hell). In one of Jesus' parables, a rich man lives a selfish life without sympathy for a poor beggar called Lazarus who used to sit outside his property. When both die, the beggar goes to be with Abraham in heaven and the rich man goes to hell. In torment the rich man cries out to Abraham for water. Abraham reminds the rich man of the type of life he lived and says that people cannot move between heaven and hell.

Luke 16vs 19 " There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. 20 But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, 21 desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 " Then he cried and said, ` Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. ' 25 But Abraham said, ` Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. 26 And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us. ' 27 " Then he said, ` I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, 28

for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment. ' 29 Abraham said to him, ` They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. ' 30 And he said, ` No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent. ' 31 But he said to him, ` If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead. ' "

There have been many documented accounts of people dying and then coming back to life again who testify of their experience of heaven and hell. Many of their testimonies are remarkably similar. Some have gone to heaven and others have gone to hell and returned back to physical life. Yet even with their testimonies readily available for people to read and hear and the availability of the Bible with its warnings, the lives of non-Christians and some Christians do not seem to alter to any great extent given the horror that awaits those who go to hell. It appears that the stubborn fleshly mind of many people and their hardened and corrupted heart cannot come to terms with the spiritual and refuses to take the warnings of Jesus or many people seriously. In some cases people are sadly complacent and mistakenly think that God's love and mercy will see them through irrespective of what they believe and how they live their life.

Although God's love is spoken of widely in the world today, He is also a God of justice and **both of these characteristics must be satisfied**. We must never live under the deception that God's love will always override His other attributes. In reality, God is perfect and therefore all His attributes work in balance to ensure that He acts perfectly in accordance with all. The Bible makes it very clear that while God shows His mercy and kindness to those who live for Him, His wrath is applied to all others. A.W. Pink in his book about the attributes of God speaks about the many times we read about this other side of God's character in the Bible.

A study of the concordance will show that there are more references in Scripture to the anger, fury and wrath of God, than are to his love and tenderness.¹²

The wrath of God is His anger and rage and in the Bible it is seen against the sinfulness of people. The Old Testament books of Deuteronomy, Psalms and Naham also give us a further understanding of this side of God's unchanging character.

Deuteronomy7vs9 " Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; 10 and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face."

Psalms145vs8 The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. 9 The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works. ... 17 The Lord is righteous in all His ways, gracious in all His works. 18 The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. 19 He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them. 20 The Lord preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy.

Naham1vs2 God is jealous, and the Lord avenges; the Lord avenges and is furious. The Lord will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His

enemies; the Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked.

God is full of mercy and compassion to those who are reconciled to Him through a faith in Jesus Christ and when these people sin, forgiveness for sins is received. He is patient with a believer's faults seeking to purify and perfect them through the work of the Holy Spirit. However, although He desires all sinners to be reconciled to Him, those who stubbornly refuse will retain their wicked and dark hearts and can only expect to receive His wrath.

Paul describes people who are not reconciled to God as being God's enemies (Romans 5 vs 10) and also says that God reserves His wrath for His enemies. In the book of Revelation, we read of believers being accepted by God into His family but unbelievers and other sinners being cast into a lake burning with fire and brimstone.

Revelation 21 vs 7 He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. 8 But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

While God loves the world and desires for all people to be saved and not destroyed, He has also clearly displayed His intolerance for sin through His destruction of people through the great flood during the time of Noah and He consistently continued to display it through His dealings with the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. In their journey to the Promised Land, He instructed the nation of Israel to wipe out all people of nations that they conquered due to His desire for the nation of Israel to be kept pure and not be defiled by the sin of those nations.

When we come to understand God's character as it is displayed in the Old and New Testaments, we quickly realize that we are without hope unless God changes His character or our sinfulness can be forgiven and wiped away by God. The Bible tells us that God never changes. He is unchanging (immutable).

Malachi 3 vs 6 For I am the Lord, I do not change;

God is the same yesterday, today and forever. What we read of Him in the Old Testament is the way He is in the New Testament. What He promises, will happen because He will never change His character. We have confidence when we rely on God because He can never change. His words, promises and covenants are in place for all time.

Hebrews 13 vs 8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Hebrews 1 vs 12 Like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not fail.

Apart from a true heart-held faith in Christ Jesus, there is absolutely nothing any of us can do to make ourselves acceptable to God and reconcile ourselves to Him. We are sinners and God has determined that the punishment of sin is death. It is only through

the perfect sinless life that Jesus lived and His sacrificial death for us that a pathway has been made available for each of us to receive eternal life with God.

Romans 6vs23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1John 5vs11 And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

God has done all that is required for our salvation and it is now up to each of us to believe. For those who choose not to believe, they have already been condemned to eternal punishment once they die.

John 3vs16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. 18 " He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

Choose Life

Jonah, a prophet in the Old Testament, was given the task by God to go tell the city of Nineveh with over 120,000 people to repent to avoid the wrath of God coming upon them due to their sinful lives. Jonah, after resisting God, eventually goes and gives the city the message from God. To his surprise, the people repent of their sins and turn back to God. He withdraws from the city expecting God to punish the people but God seeing their repentant hearts relents. Jonah is dismayed because he felt that they deserved to be punished for their sin.

To teach Jonah a lesson, God allows a tree to grow overnight where Jonah is camped to protect him from the hot sun. Jonah is thankful to God and enjoys the shade of the tree. That same day, God destroys the tree to leave Jonah once again to suffer under the hot sun. Jonah complains and God has the following words to say to him.

Jonah 4vs10 But the Lord said, " You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. 11 And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left--and much livestock?"

God tells Jonah that he did not work to create the plant or make it grow, yet Jonah felt sorry that the plant had been destroyed by God. Jonah, in his selfish state, could not see that God had worked to create the people and the livestock that were in the city of Nineveh. He had not only worked to create and give them life but had also worked to sustain their physical life. How could He not feel sorry for them and give them a chance to repent and save themselves?

God looks upon us today in a similar way. We are all sinners and deserve His wrath to come upon us and destroy us. Yet we are His creation and He gave each of us life. He also cares for us each day to make us grow and prosper in this beautiful, delicately balanced, wonderful world that we live in. His heart's desire is for us to repent of our sins like the people of Nineveh so that He can turn aside the punishment which we deserve and which is coming to those who will not reconcile themselves to Him.

Our world has had and continues to have many people like Jonah who God has sent to warn people to repent and be saved, but like the people of Nineveh, the choice to believe is then up to each of us.

Paul describes the last days (our current time) as being perilous because of the danger that so many people face of possessing a form of Christianity that is far from what God requires for a person to enter the kingdom of heaven. He speaks of these people having a form of godliness (or Christianity) that is not the real thing.

2Timothy3vs1 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: 2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, 4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. 7 always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

We all need to hear Paul's warning to ensure that we are not among those he lists in the verses quoted above. No one else can do it for us, God knows our hearts and we must individually come to know the state of our own heart as well. We need to be sensitive to the warnings from the Holy Spirit, be aware of our sins and repent of them. Do our lives reflect the fruit of the Holy Spirit and do we truly love God above everybody and everything? Is Jesus truly the Lord of our life? Are we allowing the truth contained in the word of God to speak into us daily to transform our lives? Are we willing to read and hear the truth of God's word and accept it with an open and obedient heart?

As believers, when compared to non-believers in this world, there must be a great distinction in our life as people who live for God rather than ourselves. Believers also need to look at the way we live our daily life to see if we in fact are more worldly Christians than spiritual Christians, more like people who live in this earthly realm rather than in God's spiritual kingdom. Today with more teaching programs, more Bibles and more Christian books than there ever has been in history, there is a greater opportunity than ever before for people to learn about the spiritual life that God requires us to live. However, how many of us are truly living our daily life the way God wants us to?

There is a need for each of us to commit wholeheartedly to a belief in Jesus Christ and to living a spirit-led life for God. He has a special plan for each of us but needs us to eagerly seek Him with all our heart so that we can be reconciled to Him, come to know His will and be obedient to the instruction and guidance of His Holy Spirit. He wants people to redeem the time in our lives so that we can build our spiritual lives rather than waste the precious days that go by and are lost forever.

When we physically die we leave fully aware of ourselves leaving behind our body. Our soul leaves with our spirit and we are drawn towards our spiritual destination, heaven or hell. When the believer dies, our spirit immediately goes to be with God rather than going away from His presence under punishment. Paul had this to say to Christians about physical death.

2Corinthians5vs8 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

When Jesus was on the cross, the thief on one of the crosses beside Him repented and Jesus had this to say.

Luke23vs42 Then he said to Jesus, " Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom. " 43 And Jesus said to him, " Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise. "

It is widely accepted that when Paul speaks in one of his letters of a person being taken up into heaven he was referring to himself having had the experience. Having tasted heaven he tells us that he desires to leave and be with Christ Jesus for this is far better than his life on earth.

Philippians1vs 23 For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

God's desire is for all people to be reconciled to Him and be restored to His image in our thoughts, words and actions. When a person does this under God's terms, He promises to give us a rich spiritual life that enables us to live our life on this earth in the way He intends with the assurance of eternal life in His kingdom. The choice has been placed by God before each one of us.

Deuteronomy30vs19 I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; 20 that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days;

When a person seeks God with all their heart by faith in Jesus Christ, they can be assured that they will be rewarded for their repentance, spiritual hunger and desire for reconciliation and restoration (please see Prayer of Salvation).

11. Reprinted from Growing in God's Spirit by Edwards J. 2003, P & R Publishing, Phillipsburg, New Jersey.

12. Pink A.W. 1975, The Attributes of God, Baker Book House, Michigan.

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