

Escape from Reality

"Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." Revelation 3:11

Four times in Revelation Jesus said He would "come quickly": this verse and three times in Revelation 22:7, 12, and 20. One of the tensions most difficult for me to maintain in my life is gratitude to God for His goodness, on the one hand, and my longing to be with Him in heaven, on the other. By any standard of comparison, I am a rich man. Not just the affluence of our environment, but more profoundly things such as my health, a wonderful family, my friends in Christ, the privilege of ministering in His Name – all of these fill me with gratitude.

Still, I find I am so very eager for His coming. Partly it is because of the incredible hurt and lostness I see everywhere I look; and partly it is the depth of my own depravity. As I may have shared with you before, I am sickened by the fact that I am more easily influenced by circumstances than the presence of God in my life. I have walked with Jesus for almost 60 years, and had hoped that there would be some abatement in the perniciousness of sin. But I am chagrined to confess that such is not the case, at least in my life.

Thus I find it hard to be grateful for a life so disappointing to the One I love the most. Despair is the absence of gratitude. It is hard to maintain balance between the discouragement I feel over the depravity that I see everywhere and a spirit of thanksgiving for His inexhaustible grace so obviously present in every phase of my life.

Lord Jesus, come quickly!

Perceiving Reality

"For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood." I Corinthians 13:12

A man's perception of God is the product of the lens through which he reads Scripture. Some, as they read the Bible, see God through the prism of passages such as: "And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"; "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."²; and "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."³ Such people tend to be somber, knowing little of the joy of the Lord.

Others see God through the prism of passages such as: "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father."⁴; "There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."⁵; and "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us."⁶ Such people tend to believe grace and fear are mutually exclusive and that forgiveness eliminates accountability.

To think biblically requires holding both views of God in clear focus. Grace and fear are quite compatible and forgiveness does not eliminate accountability. God is good, but He is also just. Paul warned the Corinthian believers, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."⁷

¹ I Peter 4:18 ² Hebrews 10:31 ³ Matthew 12:36 ⁴ Romans 8:15 ⁵ Romans 8:1

⁶ Psalm 103:12 ⁷ II Corinthians 5:10