

VIGIL



“Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” 1 Peter 5:8

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QUESTIONS

HOW HEAR WE...? **Ben Wright**

The Jews present at the first gospel sermon preached asked a question of great importance, “How hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?” (Acts 2:8). They wanted to know how the apostles could be speaking in their languages. A notable miracle had occurred and was evident to them.

As we consider the question, “How hear we?” we need to understand the importance of hearing in the New Testament. The word “hear” is found 130 times in the New Testament. “Hearing” is found 23 times and “heard” 242 times. Obviously, there is a premium placed on hearing in the word of God. Our faith is based on what we hear (Romans 10:17). If we want to have a saving faith, then we must have ears open to the word of God.

It is interesting that our Lord placed great importance on hearing. It was Jesus that said, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Matthew 11:15). Jesus wanted people to really listen to what was being said, to process it through the mind and to comprehend the meaning of His

words. Without proper hearing, there cannot be proper comprehension. Think of the words said to each of the congregations addressed in Revelation chapters two and three: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” A definite premium is placed on hearing in the New Testament.

Sadly, not all will hear the gospel. Our Lord knew this would be the case when He sent the apostles out to preach. He commanded them that “...whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet” (Matthew 10:14). In this reference, hearing carries the idea of acceptance of the words of the apostles. The importance of hearing in this passage is shown by the consequences attached to not hearing. Those that would not hear would find themselves in a situation less tolerable than those who were destroyed in Sodom and Gomorrah (Matthew 10:15). Again, a definite premium is placed on hearing the word of God.

It was the case at Stephen’s stoning that the ones to whom he was speaking are said to have “stopped their ears” (Acts 7:57). These people had heard the word being preached and closed their ears. They completely rejected the words spoken by Stephen.

Isaiah prophesied of the Jews’ stubbornness when he was inspired to write: “And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.” (6:9-10). If proper hearing had taken place, the Jews would have understood God’s word and their understanding would have resulted in conversion and spiritual healing. While we know that some did hear, the vast majority rejected the message and closed their ears to the truth.

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EDITORIAL

WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

Ronnie Hayes

“But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved” (Acts 16:28-30). One of the greatest questions anyone could ever ask is; What do I need to do to be saved? What can we learn from this question?

The word “what” implies there is something to do for salvation. Does the Bible tell us what to do to be saved? Absolutely! Peter in speaking of the word of God said that it “...hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness...” (2 Peter 1:3). Paul said of the word of God, “...for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16). John spoke of the importance of the word of God when he quoted Christ saying, “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). God has not left the “what” regarding our salvation to our discretion. If it were left up to man, man would create many problems. Note this statement from David Bercot in his book “*Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up.*” He states, “...our problem is that Augustine, Luther, and other western theologians have convinced us that there’s an irreconcilable conflict

between salvation based on grace and salvation conditioned on works or obedience” (61,62). There in lies the problem. Most would rather follow Augustine, Luther or others rather than what Christ said.

“Must” implies there is something that is absolute in salvation. As Americans, we almost have an inherit disdain for this word. We don’t like being told we must or we have to. We are told of Saul’s conversion, “And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do” (Acts 9:6 – emp. mine). Not what you can do if you want to, but what is necessary. Christ told his disciples, “I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24). Faith is imperative for our salvation. Is there anyway we could get around these commands? Not if we are going to do what God has required. This term “must” speaks to our submission. One who wants to do what God has required is not going to ask why. He or she will simply obey. What is our attitude toward what God has required of us?

“I” implies there is something personal for me in salvation. God has done for man what He can do. “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him” (Romans 5:8,9). “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Titus

2:11,12). When the Jailer sprang into the cell of Paul and Silas and asked, “...what must I do...” (Acts 16:30), he was asking what

“What will you and I do with what God has offered”?

was his responsibility in salvation. The answer is simple. We must obey the Savior. “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Hebrews 5:8,9). What do I need to do today to obtain salvation? That is simple. Obey the commands of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

“Do” implies there is some kind of action taken for salvation. Many say there is no action needed on your part for salvation. That is not what the Apostles answered when they were asked this question. On Pentecost, when Peter was asked, “What shall we do” (Acts 2:37), Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Christ said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved...” (Mark 16:16). When the Ethiopian Eunuch asked, “what doth hinder me to be baptized” (Acts 8:36), Philip responded, “If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37). This good confession that the Eunuch made is what Christ spoke of (Matthew 10:32). This is what the Bible says “Do”. Have you met the requirements to be saved? If not, don’t let anything hinder you. Obey Christ today!

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ARE NOT TWO SPARROWS SOLD FOR A FARTHING?

John B. Daniels

Jesus, in Matthew 10, sent out the twelve apostles and “gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease” (v.1). This is properly referred to as “the limited commission” because they were not allowed to “go into the way of the Gentiles” or “enter a city of the Samaritans” (v.5). According to verse 6, they were sent “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Because they would encounter persecution, Jesus told the disciples of His Father’s care: “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing (a copper coin)? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows” (Matthew 10: 27-31).

“Sparrow” is the name of a variation of different species of birds in the Bible. They all had similar habits of eating and for social purposes, they gathered in noisy flocks. Sparrows would often build their untidy nests in the eaves of houses, but were not driven away when they built their nests in the Temple (Psalms 84:3). These insignificant little birds were such social creatures that a lone sparrow was the symbol of loneliness (Psalms 102:7).

In the days of our Lord, sparrows were sold for a very low price – two of them for a copper coin (v. 29). A copper coin (farthing), an *asarion*, a very small Roman coin, was worth about 1/16 of a silver denarius, and was therefore worth less than a quarter in U.S. currency today. Those who were poor and could not afford to sacrifice a sheep

or a goat might bring a sparrow to the Temple (cf. Leviticus 14:1-7).

So insignificant were these little birds that if you bought four sparrows the seller would throw in one more for free (Luke 12:4-7). It was this extra sparrow of which Jesus said “and not one of them shall fall to the ground without your Father” (v. 29).

This text proves that God’s care for His creation is so great that even this extra sparrow is noted and observed by God! The point our Lord was making is this: if God is concerned about the tiny sparrow and notes its fate, how much greater must His concern be for man, who is immeasurably greater in value than the sparrow!

Though God does provide care for the sparrows, (v. 29), this verse also implies that sometimes bad things happen. There are times when they are brought down by predators or they may succumb to an accidental event or to that of a disease. Although He watches over every one of us, this does not mean that our lives will be free from care.

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as in common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Yes, God placed a “hedge” around Job (Job 1:8-11), but also allowed Satan to tempt Job (v. 12). In the midst of his trials he did not lose his trust in God (v. 21). In one of the most beautiful passages in the

We can be assured that with every temptation there will also be a way of escape.

book of Job, we hear Job say of God, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him:” (Job. 13:15). In other words, when you get to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on!

Worry is needless, useless and even injurious (Matthew 6:25-32). Worry, which wears out the mind, also wears out the body. Worry affects our judgments, lessens our powers of decision, and renders us progressively incapable of dealing with life. Worry is the manifestation of our lack of faith in God (Matthew 6:30). God’s continued care for us should bring contentment in our lives (1 Timothy 6:6-10). Sparrows do not strain to see into a future, which they cannot see, and do not seek to find security in things they have accumulated for the future.

God’s care for us is immeasurable. He allowed His Son to die in our stead (John 3:16). When we consider the “riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering” this ought to soften our heart, “knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance” (Romans 2:3-4).

God’s care for us will sustain us throughout life, for “we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

God’s care for us extends beyond the grave and into the home of the soul, for those who “do His commandments” have the right to the tree of life, and “may enter in through the gates of the city” (Revelation 22:14).

It is interesting that Jesus chose the most common of all birds to teach a profound truth: in God’s eyes, no one is insignificant!

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WHAT IS A MAN PROFITED? Matthew 16:26

Billy Hayes

In the Aachen Cathedral, located in southern France, the revered emperor Charlemagne is buried in an unusual manner. He has been seated upon his marble throne and wrapped in his noble robes. In his lap, lies a copy of the Holy New Testament. His finger is positioned in a fashion to point to the following verse: *“For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”*(Matthew 16:24-28 eph. Added bh). With this one rhetorical question, Jesus reminded mankind of the value of the human soul. Jesus reminded all that no possession owned by man is more important than the soul. Everything gained in this world: (money, wealth, fame) means nothing if man loses his soul. This could, quite possibly, be the reason for the unusual burial of this king. As we study this question, we want to focus on three ideas. **1.** Does the Bible teach man has a soul? **2.** Why is a soul so valuable? **3.** What is a fair exchange for a soul?

Does the Bible teach that man has a soul? YES. Others in the religious world teach that man IS a soul not that man HAS a soul. These teachings are in direct opposition to the Bible. Eight souls were saved in the ark. Does that mean all the other souls in the world were annihilated? Certainly not. The idea held in this phrase is to show the importance of obeying God’s commands 1Thessalonians 5:23 speaks of the “spirit, soul and body”. Matthew 10:28 speaks to the fact that others can kill the body but not the soul. My soul will be held in judgment on the Last Day for the actions of my body (Ecclesiastes 12:14). The soul will be judged, according to the holy word of God. Every man has a soul and the Christian needs to see mankind in that fashion. Man needs salvation for his soul.

Since the soul exists and it is a possession of every man, what makes it so valuable? We have two parts that make up man: the physical body and the soul. God created our physical bodies, however they do not look like God. God has no physical body. According to John 4:24 “ **God is a spirit**, they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.”(eph. Added bh). Something in mankind was “created in God’s image”. This something has to be the soul. The God given soul is what enables mankind to understand abstract ideas such as: life and death, eternity, right and wrong, good and evil or things that ought to be done. Most definitely, it is what separates man from animals (Psalm 8:3-8).

It is also valuable because it is the part we have all control over as mankind. The human body is the result of a roulette wheel of genetics. A child’s eye color, height, and hair color all deal with the genes of the parents of that child. Man can change his appearance through exercise or even plastic surgery; however man will never stop the aging and dying process. While the physical will eventually not be able to change, the soul is not so. The soul can change at any stage in life. With the gospel truth, man can change his attitude, disposition and character to follow God’s law (Romans 12:1-2, Galatians 5:21-22, Colossians 3:12-15). Man can change if he is willing to allow God to direct his steps.

The soul is valuable because the human soul does not cease to exist at the point of the physical death. The unfortunate fact is that man is born to die. We, most literally, begin dying as soon as we are born. The body soon wears down and ceases to function as designed by the Almighty Creator and the body dies. However, there is a part of mankind that will never cease to exist. The soul, after death, is returned to God (Ecclesiastes 12:7) and there it

awaits the final Day of Judgment (Hebrews 9:27). This is the precise reason for mankind to evaluate every single decision made from an eternal perspective.

Yet another reason the human soul is so valuable is because of the price required to redeem the soul. The price to redeem a soul from the justified wrath of the jealous God was nothing less than the blood of His own Son (1Peter 1:18-19)! The only sinless man to ever walk upon this wicked world was murdered, if for no other reason than, to save MY soul. Even if man cannot fully comprehend why the Christ had to die, man should be able to see the value of his soul as man sees the necessity of the death of God’s Perfect Son.

Since man DOES have a soul and since the soul IS valuable, what will man give in exchange for his soul? To “exchange” means to barter or to trade. So what does man trade for his soul? The answer is: virtually anything. For some the price of the soul is money (1Timothy 6:10). For some it is recreations of all sorts. Still others sell their greatest possession for the passion of sin (Proverbs 5:1-14). Many other prices could be mentioned such as: family, friends, false doctrine, and laziness. Ask yourself this one question: for what do you sell your soul?

Man cannot afford to lose his soul. If he loses it, he has lost EVERYTHING. It is possible to gain fame, fortune, and wealth in this life and give your soul away. When this happens God sees man’s life as a failure. However, to save your soul through the gospel of Jesus is seen by God as a wonderful success. *“For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”*(Matthew 16:24-28 eph. Added bh).

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“HOW MUCH MORE ARE YE BETTER THAN THE FOWLS?”

Patrick Morrison

It is often the case that mankind is a worrisome creature. As Christ is teaching his followers about the futility of undue anxiety, he turns our attention to the birds of the air and the grass of the field: “Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these” (Matthew 6:26, 28-29). The futility of worry is clearly spelled out in these words of our Savior.

Worry accomplishes nothing good. Undue anxiety is unproductive. “Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?” (Matthew 6:27). Worry accomplishes nothing beneficial in our lives. As a matter of fact, worry can and often does accomplish only evil or harmful things. When we realize that worry and anxiety are completely unproductive, perhaps we can then formulate a plan to deal with the stresses of life. Those things about which we so often worry fall into one of two categories: there are those things about which we can do something, and then there are those things about which we can do nothing. Separate all of your anxieties and fears into these two classifications. Those things that rest within your ability to control should be acted upon. Most of those things about which we worry fall into the latter category. They are events that lie outside the realm of our ability or control. Yet, how many people worry about the crash of the stock market, or losing their lives to the violent actions of a terrorist, or so many other things that are not within our power? The Christian has a place to deposit these cares and anxieties:

“Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Peter 5:7). Turn those things over which you have no power over into the hands of Him who has power over all things!

Worry shows a lack of trust in God’s promises. Fretfulness in the life of a Christian is the product of a lack of conviction about the faithfulness and willingness of God to keep His promises. God knows our every need—“For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things” (Matthew 6:32). He has promised to provide those things that we need if we are willing to put Him above all else. The promise of God still holds true: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33). First indicates priority. If God’s righteousness and His kingdom are not the most important things in our lives, then we have much about which to be worried! But if we are willing to enthrone God in our hearts, and place no other before Him, then we have every assurance that He will take care of our needs! May we, like Paul, say, “For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (1 Timothy 1:12). The hymn writer understood the futility of worry and the needless burden it brings when he wrote, “Oh what peace we often forfeit; oh what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.” Such conviction will alleviate worry and anxiety, which plagues the lives of so many.

Worry borrows from an uncertain future. Worry often causes us to reach into the future and attempt to bring its problems to bear on today. Listen to the words of our

Savior: “Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matthew 6:34). Yet, this is precisely what so many of us do when we worry. The Christian understands that he must prepare for what lies ahead. We must make adequate provision for our families and ourselves for the future (Proverbs 6:6-11). We must be ready to stand before the Lord in the Judgment (2 Corinthians 5:10). While we must prepare for what lies ahead, we must also realize that we live one day at a time. We know not what the future holds (Proverbs 27:1), but we know Him who holds the future! We must render our best in service to the Lord today, while it is called today (Hebrews 3:13; John 9:4). We must put our all into the work of the Lord, fully trusting in God to bless and provide us with those things that we need. We must use the time that we have right now, for we have never been promised another day (James 4:13-14). Don’t borrow from tomorrow, and allow worry to rob you of the joy that could be yours right now!

We are the crowning jewels of God’s creation. As God surveyed all that He had made, He saw that it was good (Genesis 1:25). Only after creating man did God say that it was very good (Genesis 1:31). Knowing then that we are the apex of God’s created order, and knowing that God provides freely for His lesser creatures, we can have every confidence that God will care for us! For the faithful Christian, the promises of God are even more abundant. “Be not dismayed, whate’r betide, God will take care of you.”

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HOW CAN A MAN BE BORN AGAIN WHEN HE IS OLD? JOHN 3:4

Tim Hayes

Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born (John 3:4)? This is one of the great questions of the Bible, which demands a study of the setting, the situation and the solution.

The Setting – John's account of the gospel was written to prove the deity of Jesus Christ as the second person of the Godhead. John recorded, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (John 1:1). In this opening statement of the book John proclaims: the eternality of the Word, *In the beginning was the Word*; the equality of the Word, *and the word was with God*; and the exactness of the Word, *and the Word was God*.

John continues his discussion of Jesus by writing that the Word was the light of men (John 1:4). He, the Word or light of men, came into a world of darkness offering light and life that can be offered by no other (Acts 4:12). *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God* (John 1:12-13).

John 1 records the meeting of John the baptist and Jesus, it also reports Jesus' calling of his apostles. John 2 opens with the account of Jesus' first miracle and ends with His going to Jerusalem for the Passover. On this occasion Jesus drove the moneychangers out of the temple, foretold of His resurrection and performed miracles resulting in many believing in His name (John 2:23).

The Situation-*There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man*

can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him (John 3:1-2).

Often the question is asked, why did Nicodemus come to Jesus by night? This is not a question with which one must be concerned. God does not state why Nicodemus came by night and had that information been vital God would have supplied it in His word (2 Peter 1:3).

The point of importance is that Nicodemus came to Jesus. He must have been with those who saw Jesus perform the miracles and upon seeing those things realized that Jesus was from God.

In response to Nicodemus' statement Jesus said, *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God* (John 3:3). Nicodemus then asked, how can a man be born when he is old? After the question by Nicodemus, Jesus gave the answer.

The Solution-Nicodemus was thinking of the physical while Jesus was speaking concerning the spiritual. Jesus responded to a similar situation in this manner, *But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible* (Matthew 19:26).

Christ used as an example the lifting up of the brazen serpent in the wilderness. Was the healing power in the physical serpent or was it by the power of God? Notice again John 1:12-13 *...to them gave he power to become the sons of God...even them that believe on his name...Which were born...but of God*.

Jesus' answer to being born again is culminated in John 3:16, *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*.

John recorded in John 1 those born of God are those who believe

on Christ. Therefore, those who believe on Christ are those born of God.

The word "believeth" of John 3:16 is a synecdoche, in which a part is put for the whole. Just as in speaking of cattle one may refer to a herd as so many head. All understand that the term "head" refers to the entire animal. Believeth is representative of all the acts of obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

James spoke of the new birth in this light, *Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures* (James 1:18). It is through this word of truth by which faith is built (Romans 10:17). Luke wrote as spoken by Jesus, *And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem* (Luke 24:47). Matthew recorded, *Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven* (Matthew 10:32). When it comes to the actual birth Jesus stated it had to be of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5). Notice the following passages:

For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit (I Corinthians 12:13); That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word (Ephesians 5:26); Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost (Titus 3:5).

Therefore, to be born again, is to be baptized into Christ in accordance to the word of God.

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WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?

Kerry Richardson

If we were to walk through a cemetery on a beautiful fall morning reading information on tombstones, we would notice many differences. Obviously, the names on the markers would be different... as would the numbers signifying their births and deaths. The shape of the monument might vary from one to another... as would its size. While a number of differences might exist from stone to stone, one thing would remain the same for most of them – the fact a time period existed between the birth and death of the person laid to rest underneath the marker. Whether represented by a dash or just implied by listing dates of birth and death, we refer to that particular time period as “life.”

As we consider the question posed by the Holy Spirit in James 4:14, we wonder what “life” meant for individuals whose body rests in that cemetery? For many, “life” would have been primarily defined by the word *work*. For others, the answer would have been *pleasure*. Others, having endured hardships in life, might say *pain* while those who had lived life according to “their terms” might answer *pride*. Today, while we’re still on the earthly side of eternity, we would benefit by asking ourselves the question of James 4:14.

To begin answering the question, we might assess the **balance** of our life. Even at an early stage of life, Luke 2:52 notes balance was exhibited in the life of our Lord- *Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man*. In raising children in today’s society, parents are rightly concerned with that same type of balanced growth... intellectually, physically, spiritually, and socially. Balance, however, shouldn’t be restricted to the development of our children; it’s continually needed in the life of every single individual.

As we ponder “natural outcomes” of the ideas associated with Jesus, wisdom will be utilized to pursue careers, establish families, and raise children. Effort and expense will be expended to maintain good physical health. Focus and determination will be directed to developing a functional faith in our loving God. Great time and attention will be given to cultivating relationships with those who share our world. While these matters of importance characterize life for many children of God, it’s sad to realize many Christians primarily focus on unimportant, needless matters. In eternity, the outcome of a ball game won’t produce great excitement. Having the nicest yard in a neighborhood will not cause a great stir on judgment day. In searching our lives, how much relates to things that truly matter... and how much is trivial? Like Martha in Luke 10:41, we can be troubled about many things while neglecting the things that are truly important!

In addition to our life’s balance, we might also assess its **basis**. For many people, the motto of life relates to the philosophy of Judges 17:6 – *every man did what was right in his own eyes*. When “life” revolves around self, careers are pursued simply to receive a personal reward and families are utilized to achieve security and “ease of life.” If one is directed by self, health becomes a prerequisite to simply enjoy additional pleasures and relationships are viewed as “tools” to advance one’s standing and influence. When this philosophy is present in one’s life, “balance” is not the problem – it’s the basis.

The basis of a Christian’s life is to act in such a way that God is glorified through our actions (1 Peter 4:11). God designed us for good works (Ephesians 2:10) and we have

a responsibility to place God at the center of our lives (Matthew 6:33). Doing everything under the umbrella of Christ’s authority (Colossians 3:17) means Christians do not work strictly for selfish reasons – but to provide for the needs of other people (1 Timothy 5:8; Ephesians 4:28). Children of God marry with the intent to meet the needs of a partner (1 Corinthians 7:3) and maintain their physical body in order to ensure additional years in service to God (1 Corinthians 6:20). Relationships, for a follower of Christ, exist for the purpose of encouraging faith in God (Matthew 5:16; Ephesians 5:16). Simply put, those who are faithful to God lead a life focused upon love for God and other people (Matthew 22:37-40)... not ourselves!

Finally, we might consider the **brevity** of life. In Old Testament times, the righteous patriarch Job would say *man is of few days (14:1)*. During New Testament times, James would follow the question of this article with an observation that life resembles a vapor – literally smoke rising from a fire (4:14). Even in His own life, Christ acknowledged His existence on earth would come to a close (John 9:4). Our existence today comes with no guarantee of tomorrow... and whatever plans we make must be with humble submission to the willingness of God to postpone earth’s destruction and our personal appointment with death (James 4:15; Hebrews 9:27).

When compared to the length of eternity, “life” is short – and we must utilize this time period to make preparations for our eternal destination. Heaven forbid that it would elicit a response of, “Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire!” (Matthew 25:41)

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Those who are more like the Thessalonians are needed when it comes to hearing and receiving God's word. Paul commended them for the way they received the gospel. "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." (1 Thessalonians 2:13). These brethren heard God's word and believed it to be the inspired word of God. This is a wonderful example of a proper hearing.

Proper hearing must take place in order for one to be saved. It is the first step in the process of salvation. If there is no hearing, there can be no believing (Romans 10:17). If there is no belief, there is only damnation awaiting the individual (Mark 16:16). We should understand the importance of God's Word when we see that our souls are in the balance.

There are those today that

refuse to hear the word of God. The majority of people walk through life oblivious to their spiritual state. They are content to live life selfishly and for the temporary pleasure that sin has to offer. This truth is seen in the growing number of what statisticians call "unchurched" people. This is a demographic that has increased steadily in this decade.

There are those that will hear the word but through filters. They filter God's word through their denominational prejudices or the filter of their own conscience. Some have been taught denominational doctrines and refuse to comprehend God's word because of this filter. Every verse they read is filtered through their "grace only", "faith only", "once saved, always saved" or other doctrines they have come to believe. Some allow their conscience to guide them in ways that are not found in scripture. For instance, some believe that if you are a good person then you will be saved. This is most definitely

contradictory to scripture. Those who share this belief, filter other scriptures that are contrary to their beliefs.

The filters need to be removed so proper hearing can take place. One needs to come to God's word with open ears and an open mind. The Thessalonians were commended because they came to believe that what they heard was God's word and they accepted it as such. Everything that is taken in through the ears needs to be filtered through the word of God, not man-made doctrines or consciences. If what is heard is contrary to God's word it needs to be rejected. Sadly, too many are rejecting the truth in favor of what man says.

May we ever be a people that hear, as Jesus would have us to hear. May we take off the denominational filters and accept the pure word of God. It is God's only power to save mankind (Romans 1:16). How is your hearing?

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