

Things That Count
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The apostle Paul sincerely desired that the Corinthians excel in those matters that really counted: "Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also" (2 Cor. 8:7). He earnestly sought their spiritual maturity. To grow up in Christ demands that we "put away childish things" (1 Cor. 13:11). It is never easy to "go on unto perfection" (Heb. 6:1), but we must. The most distressing matter is to observe folk who by reason of time should be teaching others, but who actually need to be taught (Heb. 5:12).

Some people with brilliant minds do not possess a benevolent spirit. Some live in a big house, but they do not have a generous heart. Many carry a rich purse, but do not manifest rare concern. Unless we have a value system based on the principles of Christianity, we will go through life without allegiance to those things that really count. Jesus made this very clear in Matthew 6:21, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

So keen and precious are spiritual values, the apostle Paul clearly stated that it would be far better to be defrauded in carnal concerns than to lose one's influence as a Christian (1 Cor. 6:1-8). What are those matters that truly are valuable that we must always keep before our minds?

1. Using our Time Wisely. Some preachers spend far too much time in social visitation to be worth very much in the pulpit. The Lord did not intend that evangelists roam hospital corridors and downtown coffee parlors day after day. It is significant that Paul told the young preacher, Timothy, "Till come, give heed to reading, to exhortation, to teaching. Neglect not the gift that is in thee" (1 Tim. 4:13-14). He needed to give attendance to growing spiritually so that proclaiming the Scriptures in depth would profit the hearers in the kingdom (1 Tim. 4; 2 Tim. 4:1-5). Every Christian should attend to those who are ill both spiritually and physically-but preachers are not supposed to do it all! Three centuries ago, Robert Herrick wisely wrote:

*Gather ye rosebuds while you may, old time is still a-flying;
And this same flower that smiles today, tomorrow will be dying.*

We must put a premium upon the things that count, and use wisely the moments God has given us: "Redeeming the time" (Eph. 5:16). "When" as John Donne wrote in 1600, "My play's last scene has been appointed, shall I look back with serious regret over wasted opportunities?" King Hezekiah had years granted to him, but those moments were poorly spent (2 Kings 20). Let us use each minute to the glory of God and the salvation of souls and the edification of the body of Jesus Christ.

2. Contributing Generously to God's Cause. In view of many passages, in both the Old and New Testaments, I am convinced that no one will be more miserable in the day of Judgment than people who were stingy with the Creator. Robbing our Maker of time, talent and money will catch up with us eventually. Such attitudes and actions also rob us of resplendent joy right here on earth. Jesus said, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again" (Luke 6:38). And again, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33).

We need to learn that we do reap what we sow in the realm of contributions (2 Cor. 9:6-11). God truly loves "the cheerful giver." "When it enters into our hearts to give even more than what is required (2 Kings 12:4), we are genuinely and greatly blessed. A penetrating gospel hymn contrasts the benevolent hand of the Lord with our devotion:

*I gave my life for thee, My precious blood I shed
That thou might ransomed be and quickened from the dead.
I gave, I gave my life for thee, what hast thou given for me*

People who think they have saved money by selfishly holding back from the cause of Christ will realize the folly of such a decision when this earth and all that it holds is dissolved (2 Pet. 3:11). The message of Proverbs 11:4 will ring in the ears of the covetous: "Riches profit not in the day of wrath. "Solomon, Ananias and Sapphira, and the rich man of Luke 16 have been telling us this for years!

3. Viewing Death with Optimism. We live in a morbid society. Nearly one-third of all movies have plots that are pessimistic and fatalistic to the core. It is a reflection upon one's intelligence to view the grotesque nature of stories that deal with monsters and giant insects that will be in charge of cataclysmic events. Could it be that missions are afraid to face the simple end of all things as depicted in the Bible, and therefore they must invent material that is both confusing and repulsive? Spectacular scenery and bombastic soundtracks do not impress the Lord, who is in charge of the universe.

Only fervent Christians can look forward to death as an angel that transports us near to the heart of God. If we live and die in Christ, only good things await us. Truly, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"(1 Cor. 15:54-57). As John Donne aptly put it:

"One short sleep past, we wake eternally, and death shall be no more. Death: Thou shalt die!"

Christians, in vibrant optimism, comfort one another in the surety that when Jesus comes again we shall then "rise to meet Him in the air" (1 Thess. 4:13-18). The next to last phrase in the Bible depicts saints who say triumphantly, "Even so, come Lord Jesus. " These are the things that count. Let us ever rejoice in them.