

*Do You
Think about
ETERNITY?*



DO YOU THINK ABOUT ETERNITY?

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DO YOU THINK ABOUT ETERNITY?

1. *Eternity!* You are rushing toward it!

Eternity! What is it? Who can explain it? Who can comprehend it? Eternity is *duration without limits*.

Properly speaking, that only is eternal which has neither beginning nor end. In this sense, only God is eternal. There never was a time when He was not! His existence is not capable of being measured by any period of time, no matter how often repeated and multiplied. He is the same from everlasting to everlasting. He was, and is, and is to come; the high and lofty One, who inhabits eternity (Psa 90:2; Rev 1:8; Isa 57:15). There are some creatures which have both a beginning and an end: as the whole brute creation.¹ There are others which have had a beginning, but shall have no end: such are angels and the spirits of men.

But oh, how deeply does it concern a creature born to live forever, to make himself acquainted with that future state to which he is hastening! What subject is more suited to restrain the sinful looseness of this thoughtless,

¹ **brute creation** – all created things besides humans and angels.

luxurious age than that of eternity! Let a few minutes, then, be devoted to the serious perusal of the following pages; and read them with a mind disposed to offer up to God such desires as these: “O God, the fountain of wisdom and goodness, assist me to read this little book with a serious, attentive mind. Let me not satisfy myself with barely agreeing to the important truths that it contains, but teach me to apply them seriously to myself. May I read them as addressed to my conscience; and, as far as they agree with Your holy Word, may I receive and submit to them as an oracle of God. May they afford me present instruction and benefit; and thus prepare me, by Your grace, through Jesus Christ, for the enjoyment of eternal glory.”

2. You have an eternal soul.

The soul of man is immortal. This is a principle on which all God’s actions toward men are based. The sacred writers do not set themselves directly to prove it, yet it is abundantly asserted in the book of God. Our Savior maintains the future existence of the soul, from God’s calling Himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, many years after their death. God, says Jesus Christ, “is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him” (Luk 20:38). The same divine Teacher asserts that though men may kill the body, they cannot kill the soul (Mat 10:28). But if the soul died with the body, or ceased to think and act after death, they might kill the soul as well as the body. The apostles speak of being unclothed; putting off the body, or the tent in which the soul resides (2Co 5:1-8). They speak of giving up the ghost or spirit (Joh 19:30; Act 5:5), of the spirits of wicked men being in

prison (1Pe 3:19), and of the spirits of just men being made perfect (Heb 12:23).

3. Heaven and hell are eternal.

The Scriptures also speak of two future states: a state of happiness in heaven, and a state of misery in hell, and affirm that each of these is eternal.

Holy souls, when removed from this world, are admitted into *heaven*, which is undoubtedly a state of glory and happiness, and the principal stress laid on this is that it is an eternal state. Thus, we frequently read of eternal life (Joh 3:16), eternal redemption (Heb 9:12), and eternal glory (2Ti 2:10). The house to which good men shall be removed is eternal in the heavens (2Co 5:1). The kingdom which they shall possess is an everlasting kingdom (2Pe 1:11). Their happiness is called an eternal weight of glory (2Co 4:17), and it is said they shall be forever with the Lord (1Th 4:17).

The misery of *hell* is also eternal. Those who lived in rebellion against God and disobedience to the gospel, and died impenitent and unrenewed, are removed to a state of misery and torment. Our Lord, speaking of it, calls it the fire that never shall be quenched (Mar 9:43); and this He repeats no less than four times. St. Paul says that the wicked “shall be punished with everlasting destruction” (2Th 1:9). Jude speaks of the inhabitants of Sodom as “suffering the vengeance of eternal fire” (Jude 1:7). Our Lord also, describing the Day of Judgment, says the wicked “shall go away into everlasting punishment” (Mat 25:46).

4. It is foolish to ignore eternity.

How astonishing then is the folly and the madness of mankind! One would imagine, from their conduct, that they expect either to die like the brutes, or else that God has no wrath for them to fear, and no mercy for them to desire. Look into the lives of men in general, and you will see that visible and temporal things appear to them to be the important things, while unseen and eternal things are the most insignificant.

They are eager to provide for their frail, dying bodies and to heap up wealth which they cannot carry with them; but they take little or no care of the nobler part of their nature, their never-dying souls. They are every day laying up for years to come but take no thought for eternity. They are diligent in trading, but negligent in praying. Their shop books are duly attended to, but they seldom consult the book of God. Some, who have lived sixty or seventy years, and know that eternity cannot be far off, have perhaps never spent one serious hour in inquiring into the state of their souls, and what preparation is necessary for eternity.

There are others, less busy about temporal concerns, but equally careless about eternal ones. They waste that precious time that was given to them to improve for eternity in unnecessary sleep or recreation. They contrive a thousand methods to “kill time” (as they ignorantly speak) and are thankful to anyone for an expedient to pass it off.

They waste God’s sacred time, as well as their own, and will not devote even the short interval of a Sabbath to consider the things that tend to their eternal happiness.

“The life everlasting” is indeed an article of their creed but is strangely forgotten and lost sight of. The warnings of conscience, the admonitions of friends, and the sermons and prayers of ministers have no abiding effect on their mind. Thus they go on in a round of folly without repentance, till their foot slips in some dreadful moment, and they are lost forever!

5. Eternity demands solemn thought.

One of the church Fathers, with great beauty and propriety, calls death “the gate of eternity.” The death of a human creature is his passing out of time into eternity. What event can be more solemn? Yet, death is so common that we seldom make any serious reflections on it; and we talk of it with as much indifference as of any common article of news.

Regarding death itself, one thing happens to the righteous and to the wicked. But oh, what a vast difference immediately follows that death! To each, their time of testing is ended, and their eternal state is begun.

The righteous man puts off the body with all its cares, temptations, and sorrows; his soul ascends to God, and enters upon everlasting rest, security, and joy. What a glorious and delightful change!

The sinner likewise exchanges his temporal things for eternal things; but it is for torment and misery. “When a wicked man dieth,” saith Solomon, “his expectation shall perish: and the hope of unjust men perisheth” (Pro 11:7). His last breath and his last hope expire together. He shall never hear preaching or praying anymore—never receive one more invitation of mercy. He is brought to the bar of

God, to give an account of the time, the means, and the advantages he has enjoyed, and to receive his doom. This is the portion of a wicked man! And is it not then an awful thing to die? You will think so when the king of terrors seizes you.

A man of humor, in his careless hours, wrote and published a history of those who had died jesting; but he solemnly retracted it in writing on his deathbed; for he found that death was no jesting matter. "Ah! Eternity! Eternity!" said a graceless wretch, when dying, and looked dismally at those about him. And there he stopped. He said no more. More he could not say; more he needed not to say. Ponder upon this example; and if you dread such a death, do not lead such a life.

When you hear of the death of others, how proper and useful a reflection would this be: "They are gone into eternity!" When you hear the solemn sound of a tolling bell, think, "Another soul is gone into eternity!" When you see the funeral of a neighbor, think, "His time is ended; he has arrived at his eternal home, and is fixed in an unchangeable state." "Man giveth up the ghost," saith Job, "and where is he?" (Job 14:10). What is become of him whom, but a few days ago, we saw and conversed with? In what place, with what company, is he now? While *I* am thus reflecting, what does *he* see, and feel, and think? And how soon will the same thing be said concerning me also: "He is dead!" Oh, that solemn, awful day that shall finish my course; that infinitely important day when I must enter upon eternity!

Surely these just and natural reflections should make me serious, as they did a very eminent courtier and

statesman in Queen Elizabeth's time (Secretary Walsingham), whose memorable words cannot fail to make some impression on every reader. This great man, having retired from the busy world into the privacy of the country, some of his carefree companions rallied him on his becoming religious and told him he was melancholy. "No," said he, "I am not melancholy, but I am serious. And 'tis fit I should be so."

Ah, my friends, while we laugh, all things are serious round about us. God is serious, Who exercises patience toward us. Christ is serious, Who shed His blood for us. The Holy Spirit is serious, in striving against the obstinacy of our hearts. The Holy Scriptures bring to our ears the most serious things in the world. The whole creation is serious in serving God and us. All that are in heaven or hell are serious. How then can we be careless?

Let us then maintain a steadfast regard to eternity, wherever we are, and whatever we do. Were we deliberately to compare temporal and eternal things, we could never imagine that providing for the present life was worthy of so many hours' thought and labor every day, and eternity scarce worthy of half a thought in many hours, and perhaps not one fixed, serious thought in many days!

6. Thinking about eternity will change your life.

Proper thoughts of eternity will *restrain our immoderate fondness for the things of time*. They will show us that the riches, honors, and pleasures of this life are all temporary, fading, and deceitful. They will teach us to follow even our lawful worldly business with

moderation, by reminding us that we have more important affairs to attend to. They will abate our fondness for the distinctions of the world that are so generally prized. The honors of this world cannot silence a clamorous conscience; much less can they suspend their possessor's eternal doom. A great man had an extraordinary mark of distinction sent him by his prince, as he lay on his death bed. "Alas!" said he, looking coldly upon it, "This is of immense value in this country; but I am now going to a country where it will be of no service to me."

In like manner, considerations of eternity will *restrain your fondness for the diversions and amusements of life*. You will have better things to mind, nobler objects to pursue. A lady, who had spent the evening at cards and in lighthearted company, returning at night, found her servant-maid reading a religious book. She looked over her shoulder, and said, "Poor melancholy soul! What pleasure can you find in poring so long over that book?" That night the lady could not sleep, but lay sighing and weeping. Her servant repeatedly asked her what the matter was. At length, she burst into a flood of tears, and said, "Oh! It was one word I saw in your book that troubles me! There I saw that word *ETERNITY*! Oh, how happy should I be, if I were prepared for eternity!" The consequence of this impression was that she laid aside her cards, forsook her lighthearted company, and set herself seriously to prepare for another world. That eminent man, Mr. Philip Henry,² when he felt the most acute pain from a kidney stone attack, said, "I am tormented, but, blessed

² **Philip Henry** (1631-1696) – English nonconformist pastor; father of Matthew Henry, famous for his commentary on the Bible.

be God, not 'in this flame.' I am on fire, but, blessed be God, it is not the fire of hell" (Luk 16:24).

A regard to eternity would make us *serious and lively in all the duties of religion*. A celebrated painter among the ancients, being asked why he took so much effort with his pictures, answered, "I am painting for eternity." This thought—"I am reading, I am hearing, for eternity"—would put life and vigor into all our religious exercises.

Serious thoughts of eternity will render the *gospel of Jesus Christ unspeakably precious*. They will lead us to receive those humbling truths which are so opposite to the pride of worldly men. Why is it that the approach of death and eternity fills the mind with fear and apprehension? It is because we are sinners; and therefore "judgment came upon all men to condemnation" (Rom 5:18). And indeed, it is "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:31). When these terrors of the Lord have taken hold of the conscience, how refreshing is it to hear that the Word of God reveals a free, full, and everlasting salvation!

It publishes pardon and eternal life as the gift of God, through the obedience and death of His Son Jesus Christ. Without this there could have been no forgiveness of sin, and no admission into eternal happiness. It is therefore only through faith in His blood that we can hope for the justification of our persons (Rom 3:25). It is only through the power of His grace that we can attain the inheritance above. Thus shall we excite and cherish the most grateful and affectionate emotions of the heart toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and God, even our Father, Who "hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good

hope through grace” (2Th 2:16). And, in proportion to the solidity and liveliness of that hope, it will fill us with joy unspeakable and full of glory (1Pe 1:8).

7. Keep thinking about eternity!

And now, serious reader, permit me to request that you would most seriously and carefully review this subject, and ask yourself, “O my soul, are you prepared for eternity?” Prepared or not, eternity is at hand!

Let me entreat this small favor of you: find a quiet place this very day and spend a little time in thinking upon eternity. Ponder, in your mind, what it is to live forever in a state of endless happiness or endless misery. If you will do this, I shall have a cheerful hope that one quarter of an hour, so spent daily, may be the most profitable you ever spent in all your life; and that God will make the meditation useful to your soul, and the beginning of eternal happiness.

If I thought an apology necessary for spending so much time on eternity, and being so earnest in my writing, that apology should be no more than the answer which a pious man once made to this question from his friend, “Why do you spend so much time in reading, meditation, and prayer?” The good man lifted up his eyes and hands to heaven, and said, with great solemnity, “Forever! Forever! Forever!”

