



"There are few things more lacking in the average Christian life of today than resolute, conscious concentration upon an aim which is clearly and always before us."

—Andrew MacLaren

06-Mar-09

Nothing Is More Important

Many of us have experienced an event that completely altered the direction we were heading. It is often meeting another person, perhaps our future spouse. Sometimes it is a near miss with death, say, an accident that we escape "by the skin of our teeth." It may have been a brush with death from a wasting, debilitating disease. Whatever it was, this event filled us with resolve to change and seek out a new vision of our future.

In early 1959, I had such a life-changing experience. It came as I thought about what I read in a small booklet, *Why Were You Born?* written by Herbert W. Armstrong. The booklet could not have been more than sixteen narrow pages long, but what it said, combined with the way it was said and the mindset I had, excited me about religion as I had never been excited before. For the first time in my life, I understood the importance of religion to life—mylife—moreclearly than ever before. It set me on a path I had never previously considered as anything more than a commonplace part of the fabric of life.

Until that time, my religious life was much like everyone else's. I grew up attending the Methodist church of which my parents were members. We attended church virtually [every Sunday](#) through my childhood until I graduated from high school. My wife and I married in 1952, and I was steadily employed as a welder in a steel mill. We bought a home, and by 1959, when I read that booklet, we had four children and a fifth was on the way. For a number of years in that seven-year span, church attendance was a rare afterthought.

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On two occasions close together, we attended a Methodist church near our home, hearing two messages that struck me as far different from what I learned in the Methodist church of my childhood. A few teachings had indeed stuck in my mind. It spurred us to begin looking more deeply at spiritual subjects by attending another denomination and reading books on religious topics. Well over a year after that study program began, we read *Why Were You Born?* The awesome potential for our lives that slender pamphlet taught moved us in a direction that continues to this day.

I cannot say that I have always been burning with a fervent desire toward the goal the booklet placed before me, but regardless of the trials that came as a result of being on that path, I have nonetheless continued onward, as has my wife. Why? In one way, the answer is quite simple: Nothing so important has ever come into our lives that would make us turn aside. We consider it so valuable that it is worth all of our dedication to have it. The goal is [salvation](#) in the [Kingdom of God](#). [God](#) offers it freely, but we have found that, in the actual practice of life, it is costly.

Was I born into this world merely to eat and drink?—merely to dress up my body and to follow my fleshly desires wherever they might take me?—merely to talk, laugh, work, sleep, and play games?—merely to accumulate money, to travel to see all kinds of sights, to enjoy myself but never to think about time and the fact that my time on earth would end? What happens then?

[Hebrews 1:10-12](#) tells us that this earth—which appears so solid that it will endure forever—and even the heavens are growing old and will perish. [II Peter 3:10](#) confirms this, specifically saying that the heavens and the earth will "pass away with a great noise." They and all the works that are in it will burn away in "fervent heat." Where will we be?

The works of statesmen, writers, architects, and engineers are all short lived. Each generation watches the passing of its creative people, only to see them replaced by others with different names and different achievements as the new generation arrives. In [Ecclesiastes 1:14](#), King Solomon, at a time of depressed contemplation on this seemingly endless and pointless process, writes, "I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for wind." Either Solomon did not know—or if he did know, did not believe what I know and believe—what we have been created for.

Many are in the same mental state as Solomon. It is not because the opportunity to have a far better life is not available, but because their priorities in life are severely misplaced, combined with poor judgment of the value of what is open to them through a

[relationship with God](#). Paul writes in [Romans 3:11](#), "There is none that seeks after God." He adds in [Romans 1:20](#), "For since the creation of [the world](#) His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and [divine nature], so that they are without excuse."

God is not hiding; mankind is ignoring. Scripture indicates that man's disregard is largely a deliberate choice, driven by terribly skewed priorities resulting from people placing little or no value on a relationship with God. Therefore, they give only passing attention to what He says that man must do with his life. God even challenges mankind: "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" ([Deuteronomy 30:19](#)).

[I Peter 1:17](#) informs us that God "without [partiality](#) judges according to each one's work." Jesus says in [Luke 12:48](#), "For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more." God does not show favoritism, nor does He respect the honors bestowed by men. He rewards no man's heritage, wealth, rank, position, titles, education, or beauty. He is unconcerned whether a person is a millionaire, middle-class, or poor. Because He does not see with a man's eyes, He does not value highly what man values.

He measures our heart and our works against that of His Son, our Savior. What matters is how well have we done spiritually and morally with what we have been given. Those who do well will be those who value highly—asprecious above all gifts—whatthey have been given to attain the Kingdom of God. Those who do well will be those who, regardless of their station in life, use them to serve God and mankind in order to glorify God. They will use them because they have caught a vision of their worth. The apostle Paul considered our calling a prize that he pressed toward as a goal ([Philippians 3:12-14](#)).

Peter refers to Jesus Christ's sacrificed blood as "precious" ([I Peter 1:19](#)). Since His shed blood has been deemed by God to be sufficient to redeem the life of everyone who has ever lived on earth, it is more valuable than all the lives of everyone who has ever lived or will live. Why? First, because of whose blood it was, a sinless God-Man. Second, because it can free us from the shackles of a pointless life that ends in death. Third, because it opens the door for us to an eternity of life with [joy](#), [peace](#), and accomplishment.

[Proverbs 3:15](#) says that [wisdom](#) "is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her." Here is some precious wisdom from our Savior: "He who sent

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Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him" ([John 8:29](#)). Why did He do this? Because nothing was more valuable to [Jesus Christ](#) than His relationship with His Father and fulfilling His life's purpose. Like Him, let us seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness always ([Matthew 6:33](#)).

- John W. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Awesome Cost of Salvation](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

In this Passover message, John Ritenbaugh observes that the world's religions are in abject bondage to falsehood because they do not observe the Passover. Freedom comes to God's called out ones incrementally from continuing on the way- the relationship between God and us. It is this relationship which is the most important thing Christ has died for. We need to be sobered at the awesomeness of the cost to set us free from sin- how far Christ was willing to be pushed. Immense have been the preparations for our ransom- involving billions of years (Hebrews 11:3, I Corinthians 10:11) and the death of our Savior. Because we have been purchased, we have an obligation to our Purchaser.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Ecclesiastes and Christian Living \(Part One\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Among the Old Testament's books of wisdom, Ecclesiastes stands as one seemingly out of place: full of frustration, blunt, and even a little hopeless. However, since God is its ultimate Author, its themes are realistic and necessary for us to grasp. With this article, John Ritenbaugh begins an extended series on Ecclesiastes and its trove of deep understanding.

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