

# ACTS

JUNE 30, 2017 – BIBLICAL VISION AND GODLY COURAGE- PART 2 - STEPHEN VENABLE

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## I. THE REALITY OF OUR LIVES AND OUR CURRENT EXISTENCE

### A. Biblical Testimony

*“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it. In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” Romans 8:18–27*

*“...who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father...” Galatians 1:4*

*“Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil.” Ephesians 5:15–16*

*“Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God. You turn man back into dust and say, “Return, O children of men.” For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it passes by, Or as a watch in the night.” Psalm 90:2–4 (cf. Gen 2:7, 3:19; Psalm 103:14; Isaiah 40:6–8, etc.)*

*“Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.” Colossians 3:1–4*

### B. Discerning Our Condition

The totality of creation has been subjected to *futility*, this present age in which we live is *evil*, our bodies are *dying*, and until Jesus returns our lives are *hidden*. These biblical truths create a tension and pose a challenge.

#### 1. Tension

- a. The reason these realities can create such a grueling tension in our lives is because we simply don't want any of them to be true of us.
- b. We don't want futility, we want fulfillment. We do not want to be hidden, we want to be seen and known. We do not want weakness and deterioration in our bodies, we want strength and immortality. We don't want to live as strangers and pilgrims at war, we want to be at peace in our homeland.

#### 2. Challenge

The challenge we must face is that there is nothing we can ever do to change these realities because they are ordained and imposed by God Himself. They are the inescapable contours of our existence.

- a. The overwhelming majority of our labor (both domestically and vocationally) in this age has very small impact only for a short time and goes largely unnoticed.

- b. No matter what limited measure of a societal impact we may see, it will never change the nature of this present age. Jesus and His Day can alone usher in the age of righteousness we long for (2 Peter 3:13).
- c. Regardless of how significant the revival or the move of God that takes place, it will never change the fact that the days are evil. Paul wrote these words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the midst of arguably the greatest church planting movement in the history of the church to a city that experienced full-blown revival that overturned its economic systems.
- d. No matter how much you blog, how prolific your social media presence is, and how big your ministry platform gets, your life will remain hidden in Christ and you will be mostly misunderstood, unknown, and unseen.
- e. Regardless of how healthy your lifestyle is, your strength is going to diminish and you are going to die because there is a divine decree prevailing over humanity that will hunt you down.

### C. Questions and Answers

1. The recognition of our righteous deeds, the rewards for our loving obedience, the impact of our labor, and the appreciation of our identity *do not come* fully or even primarily in this age.
2. How do we endure the crucible of this tension, escape disillusionment, and persevere in faith and love? Where do we find courage to make sacrificial choices and come into conformity with the commands of Jesus and the apostolic example when they are not outwardly rewarded in this age?
3. In His great mercy, the Lord has given us a strong consolation that we *need* as an anchor of our souls (Heb. 6:17-20). The resolution of this tension and our triumph over the challenge of our lives is found in the revelation of the judgment seat of Christ and the way that He will honor our lives in the resurrection in the age to come.

## II. THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST AND ETERNAL REWARDS

### A. The Most Important Appointment of Our Lives

***“Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” 2 Corinthians 5:9–10***

1. All of us have an unavoidable appointment scheduled in our future. We will stand before the Lord Jesus and He will share with us His evaluation of our life and reward us accordingly.
2. This is not to be confused with the judgment of the nations from His throne of glory in Jerusalem at He return (Matthew 25:31-32) or the Great White Throne which the unregenerate will stand before at the resurrection of the wicked at the close of the millennial kingdom (Rev. 20:11-15).
3. Paul’s language (βῆμα τοῦ χριστοῦ, *bēma tou christou*) would have been familiar to his readers and referred to the raised platform used by Roman governors for judicial functions as well as the judges of ancient athletic competitions to award prizes to the competitors.

***“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.” 1 Corinthians 9:24–27***

4. The judgment seat of Christ is a place of accountability where our lives will be laid bare and exposed. This is a very sober prospect, but the evaluation is *not* whether we are saved or accepted in the family of God.

5. It is the context for the vindication of the apparent foolishness of following, loving, and obeying the Lamb who was slain. It is the place where the Lord Jesus will reward, commend, and honor our devotion to Him. *Wisdom will be justified!*
- “But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God.” 1 Corinthians 4:1–5***
6. We are actually commanded to live in such a way that we have confidence and hopeful expectation of this appointment rather than dread, shame, or fear.
- “Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him. See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure...Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world.” 1 John 2:28-3:3, 4:15–17***
7. At the judgment seat of Christ, we will give an account for our lives and our deeds will be evaluated as to whether they were profitable/wise or foolish (*cf.* 1 Cor 6:12). We will not suffer punishment for sin, which has been completely forgiven through the blood of Jesus, but can suffer the loss of reward that we could have inherited if we had lived differently in this age.
- “Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building...For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.” 1 Corinthians 3:8–15***
- B. Reward
1. Meaning
- Jesus taught on eternal rewards more than anyone else in the Bible. He mentioned their reality and commended them as motivation with astonishing frequency. We do not want to remain ambiguous about what Jesus proclaimed with such clarity.
  - Jesus was and is fully aware that His preeminence is the ultimate reason for our existence and His beauty is our highest portion. Eternal rewards are not a form of delayed materialism or heavenly elitism.
  - Just as our love for Jesus has an outward, tangible expression through our obedience, these rewards are His outward expression and open declaration of *how deeply it moved His heart* when we loved Him when we could not see Him in a hostile world (1 Pet. 1:8).
  - Furthermore, the nature of the rewards is about primarily about proximity to His Person and partnership with His purposes in His everlasting kingdom. They do not detract in any way from the all-consuming supremacy of His identity.

## 2. Principle of Reward – Storing and Sowing

***“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. “But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:19–21 (cf. Mt. 5:12, 46; 6:1-6, 18 and 1 Peter 1:4)***

- a. The principle of our lives in this present age is that we see now only the slightest fragment of the full ramifications of our decisions – either for good or evil. The wicked do not perceive that with every act of arrogance and iniquity they are storing up wrath that will be poured out upon them at His Day.

***“But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS... Romans 2:5-6***

- b. Likewise, by our righteous deeds we are storing up treasure in heaven. It is kept by God and preserved imperishable until the Day of the Lord when the saints receive their inheritance.

***“But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” Luke 14:13–14***

- c. One of the primary analogies Jesus offers for this is the agricultural principle of sowing and reaping. Our hope is in the time of harvest at the end of the age.

***“And the one on whom seed [the “word of the kingdom” – Mt. 13:19] was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world [lit. “age” – Gr. αἰών αἰών, cf. Mt. 13:39-40] and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. “And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.” [i.e. at the time of the harvest, the end of the age, when men are rewarded in the kingdom for what is done during this present evil age] ...And His disciples came to Him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.” And He said, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age [Gr. αἰών αἰών]; and the reapers are angels. “So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. “The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. “Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father.” Mt 13:20-23, 36–43 (cf. Gal. 6:6-10)***

## C. Setting Our Hearts and Fixing Our Hope (1 Peter 1:13; 1 Corinthians 15:19, 30-34, 58)

1. Gazing upon the worthiness of Jesus holds the chief place in sustaining our souls. Yet as we toil in a deteriorating body under the outward futility of this present evil age, it is *vital* that we understand our small decisions for love and our weak labor for His fame profoundly matter to the Lord and actually have an everlasting significance.
2. This revelation infuses courage into our inner man and is *necessary* for sacrificial obedience and extravagant devotion over the course of decades. Everyone invariably has their reward set somewhere, and if it is fixed primarily upon this age then the depths of our hearts will eventually be crushed in disillusionment.
3. If our minds are not set on things above (Col. 3:1-4) and things to come (2 Cor. 4:16-18, Heb. 11:1), our minds will be set on earthly things, we will be conformed to this age, live in friendship with the world, the word of the kingdom will be choked out, and we will be ashamed at His coming (Phil 3:17-21, Rom 12:1-3, 1 John 2:15-17, 2 Tim 4:8-9, James 4:4, Luke 9:23-27).