

“CREED: Living with Eternity in Mind”
by Rom A. Pegram (10/25/20)

Good morning! Folks, we’ve been in a series that’s all about ‘what we really believe’—called ‘Creed.’ We’ve used both scripture and the Apostle’s Creed to help grasp a better understanding of exactly what followers of Christ do believe. And today, we conclude this series—the final line of the Apostle’s Creed which goes like this: “...for the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.”

Now, during this series, we’ve also taken a few moments each week to do some theological exploration—learning some major doctrines of the faith. Today, we’ll mainly be focusing on the theological issues of eternal life. We believe in ‘...the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.’ So be it!

In 1 John 5:11, the Apostle John—the one whom Jesus loved—said, “And this is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. ² Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God’s Son does not have life.” So, there it is ... and the issue of eternal life goes all the way back to the Old Testament.

In the OT, the Bible says God’s an eternal God—existing before anything else and will continue to exist after everything else is gone. Because God’s an eternal God, the first thing you need to know about eternity is ... *eternity is a divinely bestowed gift!* God willfully plants eternity in our hearts and gives that to us as a gift! God is the source of eternity... And God is also the source of our salvation; God is the reason we can know eternal life.

In the OT, God is often described as an eternal God. When it talks about God being a *forever being*, it describes some of God’s characteristics as eternal. As an example, 26 times in Psalm 136 we find the refrain: “His love endures forever.” God’s love is eternal. And these eternal characteristics carry over to the New Testament as well...

In the NT, there’s a division of words regarding eternity—both ‘eternity’ and ‘eternal life’ are spoken about. When the Bible uses the word ‘eternity,’ it’s often defining characteristics of God that go on eternally—like God’s love. When the NT speaks of ‘eternal life,’ it’s in a different sense than the word ‘eternity.’ But what’s interesting is all 26 books of the NT refer to ‘eternal life.’ Did you know that? ‘A central theme of the NT.

The GOOD NEWS for all of us, today, is ... we can have eternal life with God that goes on forever, but it’s not just a *quantity of life*; it’s also a *quality of life* that God gifts to us. And I want you to get this. In the NT, eternal life is not just about quantity, but it’s also about quality! For Christians, we talk about when we die, we go to heaven; that’s true. But the Bible says we can receive that same quality of life the moment we’re saved...

To wrap up this series on ‘what we believe,’ we’re going to be talking about *that new quality of life God gives us* ... that lasts for eternity. Think about the Easter story as we go through this message today; that’s what that story is all about! Jesus, at one point in his ministry, turned his face to Jerusalem, where he knew what had to happen. He went there a final time, was arrested, was tortured, crucified, died, and was buried. Then, on Easter morning, he rose from the dead! And because of what he did, we now can experience the gift of ‘life everlasting.’ *Let’s not waste that gift...*

A guy who died and went to heaven. He got to the gate of heaven and said to St. Peter, "I've always heard that when you get to heaven, you get a mansion." St. Peter said, "Of course you do!" And Peter showed him his...

He spent all day exploring his mansion—his first day in heaven. He went into all the different rooms, and was pretty impressed, and then made his way down to the basement. The mansion had a really large basement, and it was filled with all these file boxes with his name on them, and different dates and locations clearly printed. He recognized these were places he'd lived or worked in his life.

So, the next day, the guy goes to St. Peter and says, "Look, I don't want to complain. I love my mansion, but what's the deal with the basement full of boxes?" And St. Peter tells him, "You really don't want to know about that." And the guy says, "No, no, please tell me." And so, St. Peter began to explain to him, "Well, those boxes contain blessings God wanted to give you while you were on earth, but you just never asked for them."

In the NT book of Jude (1:21, TLB), it says this: "Stay always within the boundaries where God's love can reach and bless you. Wait patiently for the eternal life that our Lord Jesus Christ in his mercy is going to give you." Did you know that God wants to bless you? If we live the way God asks us to live (boundaries), God will bless us—relationally, spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, and even unexpectedly. Jude tells us we can expect this as a part of our life in Christ, but we must live in such a way that God's love can work as intended. And one of those ways is *to have an eternal perspective in all we do!* That's where I want to go today for a few minutes. But how do we do that? How do we live in such a way as to release God's love & blessings in our lives? Here's... **HOW TO LIVE LIFE WITH AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE:**

RECOGNIZE that everyone is created for eternity. This is learning to see people as God does... When God looks at you, and when God looks at me, God sees someone of eternal worth—those who have a *soul!* Because of the soul God put in you, you have eternity inside of you...

In Genesis 1:26-27 (NLT) we read: "Then God said, 'Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.' ²⁷ So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

There are several things here I find interesting. One is the plural use of 'our' and 'ourselves.' In the very first chapter of the first book of the Bible, we find God referring to himself in the plural—as in Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So, the Trinity is mentioned right away at the time of creation. And people are 'made in the image of God.' And some people misinterpret this verse, thinking we're little gods—kind of like God shaved off a little of himself and made us. But that's not the case. The verse says we've been created 'in the image of God', meaning we have similar qualities. And one of those 'qualities' is that there is a part of us that is made to last forever—our 'soul,' if you will...

So, God's placed eternity inside of us—made to last forever. And we're the only creation that has a soul. And God gives us this gift that we might know, above all creation, we're most important to him. Humanity is God's highest creation.

If you look at Ecclesiastes 3:11 with me, you'll see something that's been found all over the world through the experiences of missionaries. It says this: "Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end." So, we don't have God's full eternal perspective, but we know something eternal's been planted in us. Missionaries will go out to the ends of the earth and find people who've never heard the Gospel, but they know—intuitively—that there is an eternal life; there's something beyond this one. It's called *A Priori* knowledge—a knowledge about the 'eternity' God's planted in all of us...

And if everyone has this 'eternity' planted in them, they matter to God—the Easter message! So, how do we live with an eternal perspective? *Recognize that everyone is created for eternity!* Then...

BE ASSURED OF your own eternity in heaven. Folks, this is very important ... and it goes back to a couple weeks ago when I talked about the Wesleyan 'Doctrine of Assurance'—*the idea that we can absolutely know that we are saved, ready for heaven!* And this is one of the ways we learn to live with an eternal perspective; let's now hear our main scripture for today (John 3:16-21, NLT):

“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ “There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God’s one and only Son. ¹⁹ And the judgment is based on this fact: God’s light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. ²⁰ All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. ²¹ But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants.”

It's been said these 26 words (depending on the translation) of John 3:16 summarize the entire Bible. In these 26 words, you'll find the key doctrines of the Bible. Recently, I read that John 3:16 is the most translated phrase in all of literature—translated into almost every known language. It's a powerful verse, isn't it? And what does it say? "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." Did you hear that? It says, **WILL NOT PERISH**. For those of us who put our faith in Christ, we will not perish. And down in John 10:28 it says, "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me." A few weeks ago, during the 'Living with Jesus as Savior' message, I spoke about Jesus offering us the gift of *assurance*. In other words, as you

put your faith in Christ, as you live your life as a disciple of Christ—with the Spirit's help, you can know that you know that you know ... that you are a child of God...

That, folks, is the gift of 'Assurance.' John Wesley experienced this assurance at Aldersgate. And we can experience God's gift of assurance today, too. So, this is another way we can live with an eternal perspective—to be assured of our own eternity in heaven. And finally...

INVEST my life in eternal pursuits. Let me give you 3 practical ways that you can do this—invest your life in eternal pursuits...

Decide to invest your time in something that is going to last. Did you know your most valuable commodity in this life is not your money? *Your most valuable commodity is your time.* And God cares how we spend our time—whether at work, home, or play. It's important to God. How we invest our time can have eternal consequences. Psalm 39:4 says, "LORD, remind me how brief my time on earth will be. Remind me that my days are numbered—how fleeting my life is." The writer of this psalm had some great insights, didn't he?

So, how can you leave an eternal legacy by using your time wisely, with eternity in mind? What lives can you affect for the future? Well, spending quality time with our family is the first thing that comes to my mind. What about how we invest time in our children ... or our grandchildren? And it doesn't mean we have to be with them physically. When was the last time you wrote a letter (I don't mean an email!) to your kids or grandkids, telling them some things that are eternally important to you? Invest your time in something that's going to last. Next...

Invest your treasure in a way that will last forever. We've talked about this before—that God wants us to use our money wisely; God wants us to manage it well, so we'll have enough to live on and so forth, but is that all? No, we can also use the money we make with eternity in mind—to make an eternal difference... Jesus himself, in Matthew 6:19 says, "Don't store up treasures here on earth ... Store your treasures in heaven." In other words, invest your treasure in a way that will last forever (i.e. your church, other ministries that will go on, etc.)... And finally...

Invest your testimony in a way that will last forever. Testimony is a fancy way of saying 'sharing your life.'

I mentioned last week, if you're excited about something, you'll talk about it—your faith included. And I want you to know something about investing your testimony. If you give money away, you've basically gained some money, then lost some money. That's the way money works; it's up and down. But not faith. It doesn't work that way. If I give away my faith, someone now has that faith, but what happens my faith? With faith, when we give it away, God grows or multiplies our faith. When you share a testimony, God uses that sharing to make a difference for eternity, but also you grow as a Christian now!

So, what is it we testify about? The relationship we have with Jesus Christ. In 1 John 1:2, the Apostle John says, “This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us.” By sharing your faith, you’re living your life with eternal perspective and putting yourself in a position where you can receive the blessings God has for you. So, invest your life in eternal pursuits...

Folks, we end this series today with a talk about eternal life—that that should be our perspective. I hope and pray, during this series, you’ve nailed down some of the key doctrines of scripture (i.e. Trinity, Forgiveness, Church, Assurance, etc.). But I hope you’ve learned more than just doctrines. I hope you’ve learned to be doers of the Word (James). In other words, what you’ve learned in this series, I pray that you’ll put into practice in your life. Life is a marathon, not a sprint; it’s a process or a journey. And on this journey of life, God wants to develop your character. He wants to grow your faith and bless your life. And you’ll need the Holy Spirit to live this kind of life; you’ll need self-control and I know that’ll take more power than what we have on our own. So, let’s end on Paul’s words to the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 9:25): “All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize.” Folks, the benefits of eternity can begin today, when we offer our lives to Christ, but I am also so looking forward to the day when I get to see my Jesus face-to-face. Oh, what a day that will be...