

Time & Transience: God's Word Stands Forever

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<http://lifemessenger.org/time-transience-gods-word-stands-forever/>

**All flesh is grass,
and all its glory is like the flower of the field.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
but the word of our God will stand forever.**

Isaiah 40:7-8

The transience of life, with all its toil and tribulations, brings into focus the biblical significance of time.

No sooner does man begin his life on this earth it is taken away. Despite all his earthly success and glory, confronted with the relentless passage of time, the ancient Hebrew King exclaimed,

All is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.

Ecc. 1:1-4

The impermanence and brevity of life, in view of God's permanence, caused Moses to cry, "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Ps. 90:12).

This also ought to be our cry. Contrary to humanistic naturalism, human history is not the product of a mindless process but the progressive unfolding of God's eternal purpose, imbuing every individual life with significance and meaning. Time and history, rather than being tyrannous or futile, are the arena for man's participation in the accomplishment of God's original creation purpose for *shalom*—an earth cultivated and governed by the knowledge of God. Time is our most valuable resource. We do not know how many days we have been granted, but we are apportioned them to steward *wisely*. How we invest our time – the minutes, hours, days, weeks and years – forms the substance of our life.

In the pandemonium of contemporary life, with its myriad distractions clamoring for our attention and time, Paul's warning is pertinent:

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use [*exagorazo*] of the time, because the days are evil [*poneros*]. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Eph 4:15-17

By this, Paul is *not* saying that the essential character of time is 'evil'—rather *poneros* carries the sense that our experience of time is calamitous or grievous. It is marked with the pain of living in a fallen and fractured world. The word is derived from a root meaning 'toil', alluding to the effect of Adam's disobedience—the ground is now cursed and humankind will encounter nothing but difficulty in its labours (Gen 3:17-19). Man's dominion purpose, through his own resistance to God, is now in turn resisted through the physical world. Thus 'evil' is simply that which opposes God's creation purpose.

Significantly *poneros* also carries the thought of moral culpability. We are morally responsible for the days we are given on this earth—as to whether we have used them in *resistance* to God's purpose or in *surrender* to it. Thus we are to be wise, 'buying up', 'rescuing from loss', and 'redeeming time' (*exagorazo*). How do we do this? By "understanding what the will of the Lord is".

However, the transcendent God, who is beyond time and space, cannot be discovered or known through the autonomy of human reason (1 Cor 2:6-16). Philosophically, Immanuel Kant deduced from this fact – the impossibility of a finite mind to know an infinite mind – that God is ultimately ‘unknowable’, relegating him to the realm of ‘possibility’, and thus being only a ‘mystery’. Contrasting this, Biblical Christianity is grounded in the reality that God, despite being transcendent, is not distant. He is the *personal* triune God – possessing the characteristics and attributes of personality – who communicates not only within himself but also to his creatures. Contrary to the impersonal, silent cosmos of humanistic man, God has spoken (Heb 1:1-2). The ground of true knowledge is the infinite God having condescended to humanity, with all its limitations, communicating with language that can be understood. God has created humanity in his image with the distinct purpose of *knowing* him.

This Creator-creature distinction, between the infinite and the finite, means that while humankind cannot have *exhaustive* knowledge, it can be certain of *true* knowledge. As finite creatures we are dependent upon the Creator and his self-disclosure if we are to know him and understand his will. It is his gracious communication to humankind, universally through creation, but particularly embodied in Christ and enscriptured in his Word – the Bible – that provides an objective rationale for his own creation and redemptive purpose. Importantly then, we are to submit our heart and mind, through the new dynamic of Christ’s Spirit within us, to the mind of God revealed in his Word, applying it to *every* area of life. It alone communicates the total mandate of God to his creatures, from creation to consummation, the corrective lens to our fallen interpretations of God and the world; thus Paul’s assurance:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

2 Tim 3:16-17

This one sentence of scripture alone ought to drive us to make the Bible our highest priority.

In a world of continuous flux and change God’s Word stands sure. It is to be desired more than the relative stability derived from physical resources such as gold and silver (Ps 12:6; Ps 19:10; Ps 119:72; Prov 16:16). While the prosperity and philosophies of our age are ephemeral, God’s Word remains throughout all generations, communicating the answer to human flourishing in every time and place. As transcendent, God alone is unencumbered by the vagaries of either history or nature and able to communicate timeless truth through time-bound places, people and events. This God, who changes not, not only created the world but also providentially sustains and governs it according to his Word (Heb 1:3):

Let all the earth fear the Lord;
let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!
For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm.

The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing;
he frustrates the plans of the peoples.
The counsel of the Lord stands forever,
the plans of his heart to all generations.

Ps 33:8-11

God's word is his bond:

God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it?
Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?

Num 23:19

In the beginning of a New Year why not commit to investing time daily in understanding what God has spoken?

Resources to help you read through the whole Bible in a year:

<http://hippocampusextensions.com/mcheyneplan/>

<http://www.christianity.com/bible/year/esv/bjan01.htm>

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