



Sunday, July 11, 2021

WEST VALLEY CHURCH OF CHRIST

Clarifying the Big Picture

Christians typically live with the big picture of life that Solomon describes in mind: “Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man’s all” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). The blessing of living with a big picture in mind is that it serves as a beacon in times of uncertainty; when I don’t know where to go or what to do, I can always reorient myself on the basis of my need to show respect to God and follow His will for me.

Occasionally though, even big pictures can be misunderstood. A person might look at Solomon’s words, assume that Solomon is encouraging respect for and worship towards God, and walk away thinking, “As long as I avoid sin and attend church, God will be pleased with me.” Imagine that person’s surprise when they hear the words of Jesus:

“Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me” (Matthew 25:41-43).

I find it incredibly powerful that Jesus doesn’t mention the sin that a person avoids or the worship that a person offers in this picture of the judgment. Of course, these things are important and are a part of the big picture of Ecclesiastes 12:13. However, Jesus chose on this occasion to remind His disciples that loving God, the first great command, can’t be accomplished without “the second [that] is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:39; cf. Mark 12:31). As John says, “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?” (1 John 4:20).

Though Christians should do good to everyone as they have opportunity (cf. Galatians 6:10), Jesus, like Paul, envisioned the primary field of service being the church. Jesus didn’t mention how those on the positive side of the picture of Matthew 25 had done these works of service to just anyone, but how they had done them to “My brethren” (Matthew 25:40). Brothers to the Son of God are sons of God who “are led by the Spirit of God” (Romans 8:13-17). As Jesus said before His death, His disciples declare their discipleship by how they love each other (John 13:34-35).

All of this means that there are two big responsibilities for those interested in the big picture of Ecclesiastes 12:13. First, we must serve our brothers and sisters in the church of Christ, responding to their needs as though we were responding to the Lord Himself. The second responsibility is also important and sometimes forgotten: Jesus words demand that Christians be open and honest about their needs so that others can meet them. There can never be a giver without a receiver. Humble, willing, and grateful receivers allow people to serve Jesus and encourage an environment of fearing God and keeping His commandments.

