

## Making Eternal Decisions

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Decision; Eternity / 2 Corinthians 5:10–15; 1 Corinthians 3:11–15

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Few things are harder than truly knowing who we are. We live in tension between who people think we are... and who we try to appear to be. The perceived image is shaped by what others think of us—and that can shift from person to person, from season to season. The projected image is the version of ourselves we carefully construct—the one we want others to see. We adjust it depending on the situation, highlighting strengths, hiding weaknesses, managing impressions. Over time, that version becomes so familiar... we start believing it is who we really are.

But beneath both of those lies the actual person—the real you—and many people struggle deeply to identify that person. If you ask someone who they are, they will often answer with what they do, what they've achieved, or how others perceive them. Their identity becomes tied to accomplishments, roles, and reputation. But what happens when those things are stripped away? What happens when the job changes, the recognition fades, or the applause stops? We have to be more than what others say about us—and more than what we tell ourselves.

This raises a deeper and more important question: Who does God say we are? The reason we struggle so much with understanding ourselves is because God has placed eternity in our hearts ([Ecclesiastes 3:11](#)). There is something within us that knows this life is not all there is. We long for meaning, for purpose, for something that lasts beyond our accomplishments, beyond our reputation, beyond the shifting opinions of others. That longing isn't random—it was placed there by God. Yet instead of turning to Him, we often try to satisfy that eternal longing with temporary things. We make what could be called “eternal

substitutes,” turning the things of this world into gods—things that are here today and gone tomorrow ([Matthew 6:19–20](#)). Nothing temporary can satisfy an eternal soul. As Augustine of Hippo once said,

“You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You.”

We were created by God, made to worship Him, and we will never find true rest until we sit at the Master’s feet and are filled by Him.

And this truth becomes even more urgent when we consider the brevity of life. Our bodies have an expiration date. Scripture tells us that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” ([Romans 3:23](#)), and that “the wages of sin is death” ([Romans 6:23](#)). From the very beginning, God declared, “for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” ([Genesis 3:19](#)). Our physical bodies will return to the ground, but our existence does not end there. The Bible reminds us that “the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” ([Ecclesiastes 12:7](#)). Apostle Paul describes this life as a temporary dwelling—a tent that can be taken down at any moment ([2 Corinthians 5:1](#)). Just as a tent is fragile and temporary, so are our earthly bodies. But this is not the end of the story. For those who belong to Christ, there is a glorious hope. At the return of the Lord ([1 Thessalonians 4:16–17](#)), what is sown in weakness will be raised in power, what is sown in dishonor will be raised in glory, and what is sown perishable will be raised imperishable ([1 Corinthians 15:42–44](#)). And in that eternal state, God promises that “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain” ([Revelation 21:4](#)).

But as we look ahead to that future, a sobering question remains: what happens next for us? Scripture speaks of a Great White Throne judgment for those whose names are not found in the Book of Life ([Revelation 20:11–15](#)). But what about those who belong to Christ—those who are saved, redeemed, and sealed by the Holy Spirit? The Bible tells us that we too will stand before the Lord—not for condemnation, but for evaluation. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of our lives ([2 Corinthians 5:10](#)).

And that is why the decisions we make today are not just important—they are eternal.

## God Judges Motive, Not Just Actions

The Judgment Seat of Christ carries profound meaning. The Greek word *bēma* referred to an elevated platform where victorious athletes received their crowns during competitions like the Olympics [3]. In the first-century Roman world, it was also a place where authorities rendered decisions—welcoming visitors, commending good citizens, and assessing punishment for others [4]. In Scripture, the Judgment Seat of Christ is where believers will stand before the Lord, “that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” ([2 Corinthians 5:10](#)). Those who stand before Him need not fear condemnation, for they have been sealed with the Holy Spirit and, by faith, are children of God ([Ephesians 1:13–14](#)). Their eternal destination is secure. This judgment is not about justification, but sanctification [5]—not about where we will spend eternity, but how we have lived in light of it.

Yet while our destiny is not in question, our stewardship is. What we have done with the life God has entrusted to us will be carefully examined [6]. Every opportunity, every gift, and every responsibility will be evaluated in light of our faithfulness. This will not be surface-level—nothing will be overlooked. Scripture reminds us that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” ([Jeremiah 17:9](#)). We are not reliable judges of our own lives, but the One who examines us is never mistaken. David understood this when he wrote:

### **Psalm 139:1–3 NIV**

You have searched me, LORD,

and you know me.

You know when I sit and when I rise;

you perceive my thoughts from afar.

You discern my going out and my lying down;

you are familiar with all my ways.

David goes on to say that God is indivisibly present everywhere, so nothing is hidden from Him.

**Psalm 139:7-10 NIV**

Where can I go from your Spirit?

Where can I flee from your presence?

If I go up to the heavens, you are there;

if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

If I rise on the wings of the dawn,

if I settle on the far side of the sea,

even there your hand will guide me,

your right hand will hold me fast.

There is no place we can go and nothing we can hide that escapes His presence. At His Judgment Seat, the truth about our lives will be fully revealed. God will not just examine what we did—He will reveal why we did it. Our thoughts, desires, intentions, attitudes, and affections will all be brought to light [7]. The

pride we harbored, the love we showed or withheld, the way we treated others, and how we built up—or failed to build up—the body of Christ will all be made known. Knowing that we, as God’s children, will one day stand before Jesus and give an account ought to place a holy urgency within our hearts. It should compel us to live each day with purpose, striving to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ ([Philippians 1:27](#)).

## Being Accountable for What we Didn’t Do

At the Judgment Seat of Christ, believers will be held accountable not only for what they did, but also for what they failed to do. We often think of sin in terms of commission—actions that violate God’s commands. Scripture clearly teaches that it is sin to lie, steal, commit adultery, or covet, as seen in the commandments given in [Exodus 20](#). But the Word of God also reveals another category of sin that is often overlooked — sins of omission. Apostle James makes this unmistakably clear:

### **James 4:17 NIV**

If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them.

When we know what God desires of us and choose not to act, we sin against Him. This is what is meant by a sin of omission [8]. It is not enough to avoid sin—we are commanded to pursue obedience. When we neglect God’s commands to love Him with all our heart and to love our neighbor as ourselves ([Matthew 22:37–40](#)), to love even our enemies ([Matthew 5:44](#)), to forgive others ([Ephesians 4:32](#)), to serve one another ([Galatians 5:13](#)), and to care for the vulnerable—the widow and the poor ([James 1:27](#); [Matthew 25:31–46](#))—When we neglect these commands... that is not neutrality—that is disobedience. True obedience is not measured by outward activity alone, but by a life that aligns with the will of God. Apostle Paul reinforces this by calling believers to full surrender:

**Matthew 7:21–23 NIV**

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and, in your name, perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

God has not only commanded us how to live—He has also equipped us to live it out. He has given each believer spiritual gifts to accomplish the divine roles He has assigned ([1 Corinthians 12](#); [Romans 12:4–6](#)). To ignore those gifts, or to live contrary to His design, is to resist His sovereign authority over our lives ([Romans 14:9](#)).

Consider the weight of this truth. Would the Apostle Paul not have been accountable had he refused to preach the gospel to the Gentiles ([Acts 9:15](#))? Would Abram not have sinned had he refused to leave his homeland and follow God’s call ([Genesis 12:1–3](#))? If Peter had rejected Christ’s command to “feed my sheep,” would he not have had to answer for it? Now bring that same question into your own life. What if, at the Judgment Seat of Christ, the Lord were to reveal the opportunities He placed before you—the people He called you to serve, the steps of obedience He prompted you to take, the works He prepared for you to walk in—and instead of obedience, you chose your own path, a way that seemed right in your own eyes ([Proverbs 14:12](#))? While such failures do not remove our salvation, they will result in loss. There will be a sobering awareness of what could have been—missed opportunities, forfeited rewards, and a life that could have been lived more fully for His glory. And That should stir something in us right now.

## Life is Short - Eternity is Forever

If we are going to give an account for our lives, then we must also remember how little time we have to live them. In [James 4:13-17](#), James paints the picture of a businessperson confidently planning their future—what they will do, where they will go, and how they will profit. Yet James warns that a person can become so consumed with plans, strategies, and the pursuit of material gain that they become blind to spiritual realities [9]. Planning itself is not sin, but living as though our plans are certain—without seeking or submitting to the will of God—is. James reminds us of a sobering truth: your life is brief—and it is passing quickly.

[James 4:13-14](#) (NIV)

Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.”

Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

In light of this, the Psalmist gives us wise counsel—to live with eternity in view:

[Psalm 90:12](#) (NIV)

Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

We are called to plan, but not independently of God. True wisdom is found in surrendering our plans to Him, trusting Him to direct our steps:

[Proverbs 3:5-6](#) (NIV)

Trust in the Lord with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;  
in all your ways submit to him,  
and he will make your paths straight.

Even in seasons of trial and suffering, Scripture calls us to view life through the lens of eternity. The Apostle Paul reminds us that our present struggles are not without purpose:

[2 Corinthians 4:17-18](#) (NIV)

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. Your life is a mist—you're here for a moment, and then you're gone. But eternity is forever. Therefore, we must live with intentionality, fixing our eyes on Christ, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith ([Hebrews 12:2](#)), and running the race He has set before us with faithfulness and endurance. Like the Apostle Paul, our desire should be to say at the end of our lives:

**2 Timothy 4:7-8** NIV

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

May we not waste the brief time we have been given but instead live each day with eternity in view—faithfully walking in His will, so that when we stand before Him, we may receive what lasts forever.

## The Fire Test - What Will Remain

If our lives will be examined at the Judgment Seat of Christ, then we must also understand how they will be tested. Scripture gives us a clear and sobering picture of this moment:

**1 Corinthians 3:12-15** NIV

If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

This passage reminds us that it is not the quantity of our works that matters, but the quality—the heart behind them, the motive within them, and whether they were done for Christ or for self. One day, everything you've built will be exposed—and tested by fire. Upon reading this, one cannot help but be reminded of Christ's teaching on the wise and foolish builders in [Matthew 7:24–27](#). There, a person's life was tested by storms—rain, floods, and winds—and only the house built upon the rock stood firm. The difference was not what they heard, but what they did. The wise man took the Word of God and put it into practice ([Matthew 7:24](#)). In the same way, at the Judgment Seat, it will not be what we knew, but what we lived, that will stand the test.

Apostle Paul further explains that we, as “fellow citizens with the saints,” are to build upon the foundation already laid — “the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone” ([Ephesians 2:19–20](#)). The materials Paul lists—gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, and stubble—are not inherently good or evil in themselves [10]. Rather, they represent the nature and durability of our works. Some things appear impressive now but will not endure eternity, while other acts—perhaps unseen and uncelebrated—will last forever. Jesus Himself warned that outward activity is not the same as true obedience. Many will say, “Have we not prophesied... cast out devils... done many wonderful works?” and yet hear the words, “I never knew you” ([Matthew 7:21–23](#)). This reminds us that works alone do not save. Salvation comes through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ ([John 3:16](#)), and through surrendering to Him as Lord.

But for those who are saved, the question remains: how have we lived? Upon salvation, each believer is given spiritual gifts and entrusted with divine assignments. The labor we offer to God's kingdom is not in vain when it is done according to His will and for His glory ([1 Corinthians 15:58](#)). Those works will endure the fire. And yet, for those whose works do not remain, though they themselves are saved, "they shall suffer loss." What a moment—to stand before Christ and see what could have been.

In the parable of the rich fool, a man focused on his wealth and comfort, disregarding God's calling to be rich in good deeds. He boasted about his future plans but died unexpectedly, leaving all of his treasures behind. His missed opportunity to serve others in his lifetime is a painful reminder that we are not promised tomorrow, and ignoring God can lead to a life full of regret instead of legacy.

Opportunities missed, obedience delayed, lives that could have been more fully surrendered to His purposes. That reality should stir within us a holy urgency to build our lives not for the temporary, but for the eternal.

## The Only Wise Response

In light of everything we have seen—the reality that we will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, that our motives will be revealed, that even our missed opportunities will be brought to light, that our lives are but a vapor, and that our works will be tested by fire—there is only one wise response. The Apostle Paul gives us that response: for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

### **2 Corinthians 5:14–15 NIV**

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

When we truly understand what Christ has done—that we were dead in our sins, and yet He gave His life for us—everything changes. If He died for you—then your life is not your own. There is only one wise response—stop living for yourself and begin living fully for Him. That means our decisions are no longer centered on what we want, but on what He desires. Our time, our gifts, our opportunities, and our relationships all become part of a life lived not for the temporary, but for the eternal. Because one day—you will stand before Him. And in that moment, the question will not be how successful we were in the eyes of the world, how much we accumulated, or how others perceived us. The question will be simple—did you live for Him? Did we love Him with all our heart? Did we obey His Word, walk in His will, and invest our lives in what would last forever? Some will stand before Him with joy, seeing that what they built has endured, while others will be saved, yet suffer loss, realizing what could have been.

You don't have to wait for that day—you can decide today. If you have never truly placed your faith in Jesus Christ, this is where it begins, for salvation is found in Him alone: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son...” ([John 3:16](#)). And for those who are believers, the question is not whether you are saved, but whether you are living for Him. Are you building with gold, silver, and precious stones, or with wood, hay, and stubble? Are you following His will, or your own path that seems right ([Proverbs 14:12](#))? Because the only wise way to live is this: live now in light of that day. One day you will stand before Christ—live now so you won't regret it then.

[1] Eric Mason, *Exalting Jesus in 2 Corinthians*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2024), 90–91.

[2] Eric Mason, *Exalting Jesus in 2 Corinthians*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2024), 91.

[3] John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 323–324.

[4] Jeremiah K. Garrett, “Judgment Seat of Christ,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

[5] Eric Mason, *Exalting Jesus in 2 Corinthians*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2024), 96.

[6] William Sailer et al., *Religious and Theological Abstracts* (Myerstown, PA: Religious and Theological Abstracts, 2012).

[7] Paul Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 195.

[8] David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in James* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014), 95–96.

[9] David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in James* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014), 94.

[10] Paul Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 176.