

MESSAGE OF THE MONTH

Eternal Hope

A readable transcript of a special message
from R.C. Sproul



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Eternal Hope

A readable transcript of a special message
from R.C. Sproul, originally delivered at
the Ligonier Valley Study Center

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God,
and Timothy our brother,

To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are
in Colosse:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the
Lord Jesus Christ. (Col. 1:1–2)

At the outset, we could say that this is somewhat of a typical salutation and greeting from the Apostle, although there are one or two elements of it that are noteworthy. As far as we know, the Colossian church was not founded by the Apostle Paul but rather by Epaphras, who visited Paul and brought greetings and news of the church. Paul is responding to a community where he is known but probably not known personally, and he identifies himself with his proper credential: “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ.”

THE NATURE OF AN APOSTLE

Let me remind you of the nature of an Apostle, as I always do when we look at one of the epistles of the New Testament. An *Apostle* is not the same as a *disciple*. There is a difference. Although the twelve Apostles were first disciples, the word *disciple* literally means “learner” or “student.” The word *apostle* refers to one who is sent. “To send” in Greek is *apostellō*, and *apostolos* refers to one who is sent or commissioned by someone in authority.

In the ancient world, an apostle was one usually associated with the government as an emissary sent out by the king or the emperor, and he had the authority to speak and act in the name of the one who sent him. That is important for our understanding of the foundation for the Christian church because Jesus tells us that the foundation of the church are the prophets and the Apostles. When He commissioned the Apostles to preach and

teach in His name, He said: “Those who receive you”—speaking of His Apostles—“receive Me. Those who do not receive you do not receive Me.”

The idea of apostleship didn’t begin with the commissioning of the Twelve. It has its earlier roots in the very role and office that Jesus Himself exercised as the Apostle of the Father, the One who was sent by the Father. Jesus said, “I speak nothing on My own authority, but speak only that which has been given unto Me by the Father.” Jesus claimed to be teaching and speaking by the authority of the Father who sent Him, and the idea of the sender transmitting authority to those who are sent was carried over to the Apostles. However, it was *not* carried over from the Apostles to the generation that followed them.

One of the most interesting aspects of reading church history is to read the post-biblical literature written at the end of the first century. Works written by Clement of Rome, for example, as well as others, bear a clear mark of understanding by the authors themselves that they are *subapostolic*—that is, they are *under* the authority of the Apostles and do not themselves bear that same authority. In the writings of that generation following the Apostles, the authors self-consciously recognized that they were commissioned by the Apostles, they had ministries, and they had authority in the church, but they didn’t speak with the authority of Christ Himself.

I labor the point regarding Apostolic authority because we’re living in a time when people frequently make a distinction between the authority of Jesus and the authority of the biblical writers. They pretend as if they can come to the text and say, “I will believe and obey the words of Jesus, but Paul, John, Peter, and James were human beings, so I don’t have to submit to their authority.” Of course, it’s obvious that we don’t know anything about what Jesus said except on the basis of Apostolic authority.

When we pit Jesus against Paul, we're pitting Luke and Matthew against Paul as well.

As I mentioned a moment ago, the New Testament concept of apostleship has its roots in the commissioning of Jesus. It's Jesus who grants that authority, and the Apostles make that clear. At the beginning of our text in Colossians, Paul says, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ"—one who was sent, one who was commissioned, one who was authorized by the Lord Himself.

Notice that Paul goes on to say that he is an Apostle "by the will of God." Paul is writing not just as a friend of the church or the teacher of Epaphras or the coworker of Timothy but as an Apostle of Christ, and he became an Apostle not by his own activity but through the will of God Himself. Let me in all soberness warn you that if you disagree with the Apostle Paul, you are taking on the One who sent him.

THE TRANSMISSION OF AUTHORITY

The context of the Colossian epistle involves a heresy that was brought to much further and more sophisticated, as well as complicated fruition in the movement known as Gnosticism, which was the greatest threat to the ongoing continuation of the ancient Christian church in the second century. Gnosticism was one of the factors that provoked and made necessary the establishment of a New Testament canon of Holy Scripture in the first place. Why do we have a New Testament? Why did the church finally say that certain books belonged properly to the level of sacred Scripture and other books did not?

What provoked the church to establish a canon was an attempt in the second century by Gnostic leaders to subvert the authority of the Apostles. They wrote the so-called pseudonymous literature, in which they claimed to be Apostles, such as the Gospel of Peter or the Gospel of Thomas, which has made

quite an impact in church history. These books were written by Gnostics who knew that if they were going to get a hearing in the Christian community, they could perhaps gain an audience and win converts to their way of thinking if they had Apostolic sanction behind their teaching. That was step one.

When that didn't work, they began to say that as Gnostics, they were "in the know." They claimed to have a special kind of knowledge that even the Apostles lacked, and their knowledge was superior to the knowledge of the Apostles. Not only did they claim that their knowledge was superior, but because it was superior, it had more authority in the church than the teaching of the Apostles. That Gnostic principle was in sharp focus in the second century, but the church has had to deal with it for two thousand years. There is always somebody who presumes to have more authority than the Apostles themselves.

The great response to the Gnostic movement was led by the early church father, Irenaeus. When the Gnostics said, "We are the true followers of Jesus, but we reject the Apostles," Irenaeus answered this way: "If you reject the Apostles, you reject the One who sent the Apostles—namely, Christ. And if you reject Christ, then you reject the One who sent Him—namely, the Father. So, without the Apostles, you're without God." That was the basic argument Irenaeus brought forth in the second century.

I think Irenaeus' argument is still valid today. I might also add that Irenaeus didn't first develop that argument; he got it from Jesus Himself. This was precisely the line of thinking Jesus used with the Pharisees when they rejected Him. When the Pharisees rejected Jesus, they didn't say, "We don't believe You because we don't believe in God." Rather, they said: "God is our Father. We hold to Moses. We are the children of Abraham. We don't need You, Jesus." They affirmed Abraham, Moses, and the Father, but they denied Christ. How did Jesus respond? He said:

“You like Moses, and Moses wrote of Me. You like Abraham, and Abraham rejoiced to see My day, not to mention the fact that before Abraham was, I Am. If you reject the Son, you must reject the Father because if you knew the Father, you would love the Son.” We find those sayings throughout John’s gospel, particularly.

The link regarding the transmission of authority from the Father to the Son to the Apostles is an important element of Christianity that was already being undermined in the Colossian community. That’s why I’m bringing it out, and I’m sure that’s why Paul makes it clear at the very beginning of his letter that this isn’t a letter of an Apostle by his own appointment. Rather, he is an Apostle by the will of God, and Timothy “our brother, To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ, which are at Colosse: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Once again, this was a common form of address.

A CAUSE FOR REJOICING

Let’s move on to verse 3: “We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you.” In many of his letters, Paul starts the body of his epistle with the word *eucharisteō*, or in this case, *eucharistoumen*, “We give thanks.” The first thing he does is mention his own gratitude to God for the very existence of this body of Christians and for the knowledge that they are in Christ. It is a cause for Apostolic rejoicing. Paul does this frequently. He begins by expressing his gratitude, which is consistent with his own Apostolic admonitions regarding how we should pray. When he tells us that we are to pray frequently and fervently, bringing our requests before God, how does he tell us we are to bring them? *With thanksgiving*.

How many times have you had somebody, maybe even one of your children, come and ask you for a favor or ask you for

something that they need? It's like the child who goes away to college and writes home for money. When I was watching the NCAA basketball tournament the other day, the camera scanned the crowd to pick up the banners and signs people were holding. There was one sign rooting the team on, and at the bottom it said: "Hi, Mom. Send money"—just in case his mom was watching. It's like the boy who sent a terse, short note to his father from college. He wrote home, and the note simply said, "Dear Dad: No mon, no fun, your son." He got a note back the next week that said, "Dear Son: So sad, too bad, your dad."

You know how it is when somebody just keeps coming and coming, and you keep giving and giving. After a while, that person begins to take it for granted and never even takes the time to say thank you.

Our God says: "Come to Me with all your requests. Let them be known. I want to answer them. But when you come, remember what you've already received. Come in a spirit of thanksgiving." The Apostle didn't just preach it; he lived it. So, Paul begins this epistle, as he does so frequently in others, by giving thanks.

MARCION'S SPURIOUS CANON

I want to make a small point in passing. Paul says, "We give thanks to God." What God? "To the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul is already dealing with the Colossian heresy. He's pointing out that the God he's talking about, before whom he's grateful, is the God who is known as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is not some alien god; this is the God who is Christ's Father. What does that say about Jesus? He is the *Son of God*.

When the Scriptures were finally codified and formalized into the *canon* of Scripture, which is the rule or the norm of

Scripture, the immediate problem that evoked the church's response was the spurious canon being offered to the world by the arch-heretic, Marcion. It was because of Marcion's canon that the church found it necessary to codify her own canon of Scripture.

What was so distinct about Marcion's canon? The whole point of Marcion's canon was to get rid of the God of the Old Testament, so he expurgated and cut out anything in the New Testament that alluded to the Old Testament God. His was the scissors-and-paste edition of the New Testament: most of Paul's epistles went, the book of Hebrews went, and a lot of the material from the Gospels was cast aside.

The idea in Marcion's mind was that the Old Testament God was not the creator God, but a lesser being who was in charge of the world. He was a kind of Platonic demiurge, a mean, nasty wrathful, and vengeful sort of deity who had to be appeased if people were going to have new access to the true God. Marcion, then, was opposed to the God of the Old Testament and set Jesus in opposition to the God of the Old Testament. Of course, in order to do that, you'd have to delete two-thirds of the New Testament because the New Testament is constantly appealing to the Old Testament, and Jesus is constantly appealing to the God of the fathers, the Old Testament God, as precisely the One who He identified as His Father.

That problem was already creeping up in the Colossian community, and Paul is quick to point out that the God to whom He is giving thanks is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. He then tells the Colossians that he and Timothy are "praying always for you."

THE BLESSED TRIAD OF CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

Paul goes on in verses 4 and 5: "Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; because of the

hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel.”

There is a progression in these two verses, verses 4 and 5. There are three Christian virtues, three Christian qualities that the Apostle mentions with respect to the Colossian people: *faith*, *love*, and *hope*. We call these the “blessed triad.” This is an interesting conjunction of ideas, and we find them elsewhere. For example, we see them in the great love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13: “Faith, hope and love, these three abide; but the greatest of these is love.”

In the history of the church, when the Christian community was trying to sort out the priorities for the Christian life, they asked where our attention should be focused as we seek to grow in grace and knowledge of Christ. The great teachers of the ancient church—Chrysostom, Ambrose, Hilary, and even Augustine—laid great emphasis on the importance of Christian individuals developing the three virtues of faith, hope, and love in their lives. If you get these three together, you are developing strong Christian maturity. However, particularly in the Protestant community, we don’t hear too much anymore about these three virtues and how vitally important they are as a triad of Christian qualities.

Faith in That Which Has Taken Place in the Past

Faith, which is often translated as “trust,” has a backward aspect to it in terms of its historical dimension. What I mean is, what we believe has to do with what God has done and what God has said.

When I ask, “Do you believe in Christ?” or when the New Testament asks whether you trust in Christ, the object of that faith has to do with what Christ has done, what He has accomplished, what He has achieved for you. It’s one thing for me to say from the perspective of the Old Testament: “Do we look

for the Messiah who is to come? Do we believe and trust that it will happen?” Yes, that’s a legitimate aspect of faith. But from a New Testament perspective, when we talk about faith in Christ, we’re talking about trusting and believing in what He has done. He has accomplished our redemption. He has already made the atonement, been vindicated by His resurrection, and been established as the King of kings. We believe those things and trust in what He has done. The faith by which we live is a faith in that which has already taken place.

There is a certain sense (though not an absolute sense) in which New Testament faith looks to the past. But the Christian community is not only interested in history and clinging to the past; we’re also concerned about the present and the future, are we not?

Love That Flows from Faith in the Present

The present is indicated in this text by the exercise and action that grows out of love: “I thank God for your faith and the love you are showing one to another.” Jesus said, “By this, all men shall know that you are My disciples, that you love one another”—not that you *did* love one another, but that you *are* right now loving one another.

When a person has authentic, saving faith in what God has done, that saving faith should be manifested in the present in terms of love. It should be manifested not just in a love for the brethren but in a love for God and for all mankind. Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). The link between faith and ethics, between belief and obedience, is love. How can I really trust Christ and *not* have that change my lifestyle?

We don’t give obedience because God is standing with a sword over our heads saying, “You must do this and you must

do that, or you're going to hell." Rather, we obey because we are so overwhelmed by what God has done for us, and we believe in what He's done. We trust in Christ, and that is our salvation. If somebody saves you in the sense of redeeming you from destruction, that generates a sense not only thanksgiving but a profound commitment of love.

You want to please the one you love—that's the great motivator for the Christian ethic. We are not motivated to be moralistic for the sake of being moralistic. It is possible for people to keep laws and obey commandments for the sheer sake of keeping the laws and keeping the commandments, and that is self-righteousness. But the motivation for obedience in the Christian life is love. Because we love Christ, we want to serve Him. Because we love Him, we want to obey Him. And the more we love Him, the easier it is for us to obey Him because we *want* to obey Him. So, the past has a present dimension.

Hope That Looks to a Certain Future

The older translation of the text reads, "Since we heard of your faith . . . and of the love which ye have to all the saints, *For* the hope which is laid up for you in heaven." Some would say that Paul is simply going down the list—one, two, three: 'I've heard about three things. I've heard about your faith, and that's great. And I've heard about your love, and I'm pleased about that. And I've also heard about your hope, and I'd like to commend you for that.' But no, what the Apostle is saying is this: "I thank God for what I have heard about your faith and about your love *because of* your hope." What is the significance of that?

In the triad, hope is the one that looks to the future. I've mentioned this in other courses, but the concept of hope is so central to the New Testament that I think it bears repeating in this course so that we clearly understand this idea. When we read

the New Testament, it frequently speaks about hope. It's on every page: "Hope, hope, hope, hope." It's all over the place.

We have a tendency as twentieth-century American people to interpret this New Testament concept in light of the contemporary use of the word *hope*. Normally, when we talk about hope, we are talking about something that we wish or greatly desire will take place, but we're by no means sure that it will. For example, if you ask me whether the Pittsburgh Pirates will win the pennant this year, I will say: "I don't know, but I *hope* so. It's my desire that they do, but I can't say with certainty that they will." When the Bible speaks of hope, however, it speaks of the promises of God which have not yet taken place but most certainly *will* take place.

That is worth repeating: when the Bible speaks about hope, it doesn't speak about things we're just desiring will take place; it refers to the promises of God which have not yet taken place but most certainly will take place. Scripture speaks of an assurance of the future that has a dramatic impact on the present. If I know there is treasure stored up for me in heaven, if I'm confident that God is going to keep His promises to His people, then how does that affect my daily struggles as I decide whether I'm going to seek obedience or disobedience?

We have a commonplace saying in our culture: "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." The point of that saying is to take hold of what you can while you have a chance. You don't want to let go of the one bird that you're squeezing with all your might in the hopes that you'll be able to get the two in the bush, right? And there is a lot of truth in that saying. You see it every day in quiz shows on television. People like to be entertained by the drama and suspense engendered by the unknown quantity of risk-taking and of the gamble. The talk show host will say, "You can take the \$500 you have now and go home, or you can gamble

it against what's behind that curtain," and you see the contestants starting to salivate, and they go from one foot to the other trying to weigh the decision. They're like Reb Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*: "On the one hand, I have \$500. On the other hand, if I give up the \$500, maybe I'll get \$1000." In the TV quiz shows, the audience isn't a big help. Half of them are shouting to stop and the other half is shouting to go ahead. All kinds of shows on television are based on that dramatic principle of suspense. But that's not the way it is with the promises of God.

The promises of God are sure. He has never broken His promise. We are disappointed when people make promises to us and don't keep them. We are disappointed when somebody violates a contract or breaks a covenant. One of the fundamental biblical distinctions between God and man is that man is, by nature, a covenant breaker. God is, by nature, a God of truth who does not lie, who has no shadow of turning, and who never breaks a promise. He is a covenant keeper. But sometimes we struggle and stumble in our unbelief, and our certainty becomes less than certainty when we become confused and begin to transfer human attributes to God, as if God were a man whose Word is not altogether trustworthy. When has God ever broken a promise? We slander God when we think He might not keep His promises.

The people in the first century understood the promises of God because, first of all—keep this in mind—God had made all kinds of dramatic promises to the people of Israel in the Old Testament, but He took His time in keeping them. By the time Jesus came, there weren't too many people still believing in the promises of God. They had waited so long for the Messiah that many of them figured that promise was an old wives' tale passed down through tradition. However, when Paul was writing to the Colossians, the vivid memory was impressed upon the people that

all those Old Testament promises had just been made manifest in incredible fashion. There is a sense in which God's credibility had just received a shot in the arm through history.

Today, we're almost like the Old Testament saints in a sense. We have waited for the future promises of God for two thousand years. They haven't taken place yet. Many Christians are saying, "I hope for the future," and the biblical concept of hope is beginning to take on the secular concept and meaning of hope in our day. But the point is, Paul says, "Because of this certain hope of the future, your faith is not in vain, and your love makes sense."

THE LAST ENEMY

I was late when I came to class this morning. There was a reason for that. Because we tape these lectures, one of the cardinal rules is that I don't mention what the Pirates did last week. I don't mention contemporary events because it dates the tapes if people listen to them years from now. But I am going take that risk today because something significant happened this morning.

I received a phone call just before I came to teach. A very dear friend of mine was calling from Florida, distressed. She was upset because her father died this morning at 7:15. She was calling to ask if there was any way I could come to Florida and do the funeral. Sadly, there isn't any way, and I have to say, it really hurt me that I couldn't. I would love to have been able to participate in his funeral because I loved that man. I've known him since I was about ten years old. He was always very warm and kind to me. There isn't a time when we've gone to Florida that we didn't stop to visit them, and we were always welcome. I talked to his wife, who treated me like a son all these years and was so loving and warm, and of course, she was heartbroken as I spoke to her on the phone today. My point is this: right before

I came to give you a lecture this morning about the promises of God, death intruded into my life. Death came not as an abstraction, but with the death of somebody I really care about—the father of a family that I care about greatly.

There is a certain sense in which we learn to stiff-arm death. We deal with it only when we absolutely have to—when it strikes at home. Otherwise, we have built-in psychological mechanisms to keep our minds from dwelling on death because it is, in a sense, so obscene. It is our enemy. Death is the most awful, dreadful enemy to life. It's the antithesis of life. No one likes to talk about it. No one likes to deal with it. Death seems so final. And it seems so mocking because all the energy, all the effort, all the dreams, all the aspirations of life are suddenly cut off at the moment of death. Jesus says that death is the last enemy to be overcome.

WHERE IS DEATH'S STING?

The triumph of the New Testament regarding Christ's victory and conquest of death is a taunt that mocks not life but death itself: "O death, where is your sting? O grave where is your victory?" With the triumph of Christ over death itself, the sting of death has been removed. The victory of the grave has been reversed. As a result, we do not need to be overcome by a sense of the futility of living.

Mother nature is a killer. Every human being must die. I know that, and you know it. As I work today, what am I doing? Am I merely thinking of today? That's what the world does according to Paul. When he talks about the philosophers of his day, their creed is, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die."

That is really not a bad philosophy if death is ultimate. If death is in fact the end of human existence, then we might

as well go for all the gusto we can. Grab that bird in your hand and squeeze it with all your might because the two in the bush are going to fly away. If death is ultimate, why should we labor for tomorrow? Why should we sacrifice? Why should we seek an obedient life? The world is not going to reward you for obedience to Christ; the world is going to despise you for obedience to Christ. Why should you take up your cross and follow Christ daily if the only thing you're going to get out of it is an early grave from all the stress and hassle it involves? Why do you go the second mile? Why do you concern yourself with the poor? Why do you concern yourself with your brothers and with your sisters if everybody is going to die anyway and that's all there is?

Paul is saying that he thanks God for the Colossians—for the faith they have and the love they're showing. Why do they have that faith? Why are they showing that love? *Because they have hope.* This is not the kind of wish fulfillment the psychologist speaks about, but the hope that is rooted and grounded in the credible promise of God.

We have hope because God says so. We trust in the future because God makes a promise about the future, which makes it possible for us to endure whatever tribulation or hardship this life brings to pass. Hope makes all the difference in the world for your life right now.

The antithesis is spoken biblically where the Apostle elsewhere says of those who don't participate in that hope, who don't share in that hope, "Without Christ, without hope." If you're without Christ, your situation for the future is ultimately hopeless. Without Christ, without hope. With Christ, you have the hope that is poured abroad in your hearts, that makes you not ashamed, for which you'll never have to be embarrassed.

ANCHOR FOR THE SOUL

Another image the New Testament uses for hope is the anchor for your soul. Think of that image. Do you ever feel like your soul is just being tossed every which way? Have you ever been out on a boat without an anchor or tried to go fishing in a boat without an anchor in a storm? You're tossed all over. You can't control the boat. The Bible describes people who don't have their faith rooted and grounded in truth by using the imagery of chaff, which the wind drives away. They are tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine. They lack stability.

Do you know people like that? One week they're into est. Then they give that up. The next week they're into some other cult. Then they give that up, and the next week, they're into a different movement. They just flip from one to the other. They embrace whatever is in vogue, carry it for a few months, and then whenever the next new thing arrives, they're into that. They are blown to and fro by every wind of doctrine. There is no stability and no root to give them stability.

The Apostle is rejoicing that even though the Colossians are being threatened by a new wind of doctrine, they are off to a good start. He's reminding them of their good beginning: "So far, you have the faith, and you show the love, but remember that faith and love are established on the basis of hope."

What is the hope in this text? "For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven." It is not that you *hope* something is laid up for you in heaven, but because of the hope that *is* laid up for you in heaven. It's already there. That's what the cross has effected for you. Your reward, your place, is already established. It's laid up. It's on the reserve shelf. It's bought and paid for. All you have to do to get it is to die. It's there. Once Christ has made the atonement and then you trust in that, if you have

faith, if you love Christ, that treasure is already there with your name on it.

THE FATHER'S HOUSE

Let me remind you most famous chapter of the New Testament for the people of America. It is not 1 Corinthians 13, but John 14: "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions." And then what's the next line? "If it were not so, I would've told you" (John 14:1-2).

There are times when you wonder if it's so. Everyone around you is bellowing that there's nobody home up there, that the Christian hope is just pie in the sky. They say there's nobody home, no real mansion, no reservation for you. You're traveling on standby at best. Jesus said: "If that were not so, I would've told you." In other words: "If that were not so, I would've corrected your delusion. But it is so, and not only is it so that in My Father's house are many mansions, but I'm going there to prepare a place for you."

Think about it for a second. I don't want to be melodramatic, but just think about it. If Jesus Christ walked in the door right now and said to you: "I just came back for five minutes. Don't worry, this is not the eschaton. There is still a long time to go. But I came here because I wanted to tell you something personally. You have time left to spend on this planet, but I don't want you to worry about the future because I'm going back to heaven, to My Father's house, in a few minutes. I want you to know that there's a room in that house with your name on it. I have personally purchased it. I personally guarantee it. It's yours."

If Jesus said that to you and then turned around and walked out, how would that affect your life? What would you

be afraid of? You couldn't wait to die. The thing is, if we really trust what Christ has promised—that there is a treasure laid up for you and for me in heaven—that has to make a difference in how we live.

INVESTING IN ETERNITY

As the Apostle says elsewhere, the suffering we are called to endure in this world is not worthy to be compared with the glory that is laid up for us in heaven. But humanly speaking, dear friends, one of the most difficult things in all the world for a Christian to do is live for the future. It is tough because we are creatures of the present. We want that bird in our hand right now.

Have you read the interesting study that's been chronicled in several newspapers and magazines recently? Somebody did a sociological study of the rich, of the elite class in America, and tried to find out the differences between the upper class and the lower social stratifications. One of the things that stood out in that study in terms of style of living was how they dealt with their money and their desires. The biggest difference was that wealthy people plan for the future whereas the less wealthy classes tend to live for the moment. The wealthy class tends to think about long-term investments rather than quick killings on the market. They think about the benefits of a sound education that you pay for now and what it will reap later.

Now, that was a secular study. It was interesting that the people who have power, prosperity, wealth, and so on have learned something that the rest haven't learned yet—even those who get to that class in the Horatio Alger fashion, who start out with nothing and end up vastly prosperous. Those people did it by being careful to build for the future as they moved along. They set long-range goals for which they were willing to make present sacrifices. But there are few who are willing to do that.

Our temptation is to cash in now. What is true in earthly life in terms of our investments is all the more true when it comes to eternity. Jesus spoke about this all the time. The rich fool tore down his barn to build bigger barns but paid no attention to his soul.

Treasures laid up in heaven don't do a whole lot for your body. But Paul is saying that the because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, which is the anchor of the soul, your inner core of being is affected. You see, if you have that stability in your soul, then the loss of material possessions will not destroy you. The loss of bodily health will not destroy you. The loss of your youth will not destroy you because the greatest thing that is prepared for human life is still yet to come. For the Christian, there is a sense in which life doesn't really start until death.

The message of Jesus is about eternal life. Eternal life, not eternal death, is the treasure that He has given to us. Paul reminds the Colossians in verse 5 that they had heard that before. Have you heard it before? Do you need to hear it again and again? I do. Paul says, "For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel."

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

People often ask me: "Why do you get so exercised about the truth of Scripture? Why can you not abide a mixture of truth and falsehood in the Bible? Why does that bother you?" It's very simple why it bothers me: my hope is invested in the truth of Scripture. If it could be that the promises of God are not true, then I want to know it because I make decisions on that basis all the time, and so do you.

If you start playing loosely with the truth of God's Word, then you are open to every wind of doctrine that comes along. People look at me and say, "R.C., you sound like a McCarthyite."

You have a domino mentality that if a person abandons the truth of the infallibility of Scripture, then the next thing you know, they're going to abandon this and abandon that. It is not all that simplistic. There are lots of people who abandon the infallibility of Scripture but retain all the essential good points." And I respond: "Yes, they do. I don't deny that. But they're few and far between. They're the exception that proves the rule. Church history bears witness against it, and not only the track record of church history but common sense. Why would anybody be willing to put up with the trials, humiliation, suffering, and sacrifice that Christ calls you only to be hated of men if you're not sure about the Word of God? I sure wouldn't."

How many times are you as a Christian called to make a decision between pleasing people and pleasing God? People are right there in front of you. You have to deal with them face-to-face. You have to hear their words. You have to feel their wrath. You have to incur their displeasure. And that's painful, isn't it? What is our natural tendency if we're confronted with that? We think: "God is loving and merciful. I don't see Him here right now. I'll deal with the one I have to deal with now."

I don't know about you, but I go through that every day. I have to ask myself, "Who am I trying to please?" Because I'll tell you what, I hate to displease people. I hate to have people mad at me. It crushes me. I hate it. I've never been able to handle that. From the time I was a little boy, if my mother got mad at me, it would break my heart. I'd go in a room and cry. If my father was upset with me, I was destroyed. So, I was always trying to please them. I was never a rebellious son in the sense of slamming doors and talking back to my parents, because I couldn't bear the rejection of my parents or having them angry at me. If Vesta gets angry at me, I'm destroyed. I hate it. I'm super sensitive that way. I'm in the worst job in the world for somebody of my

sensitivities because you always have to make that choice. You try not to. You try to say, “There has to be a way I can please people and God.” In fact, there’s nothing wrong with that. The Apostle Paul tells us that we should, as much as it is possible within us, be at peace with all men.

But there are moments of truth. Once to every man and nation, there comes that moment to decide. And you have to decide, “Do I please men? Or do I please God?”

This transcript has been lightly edited for readability.



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