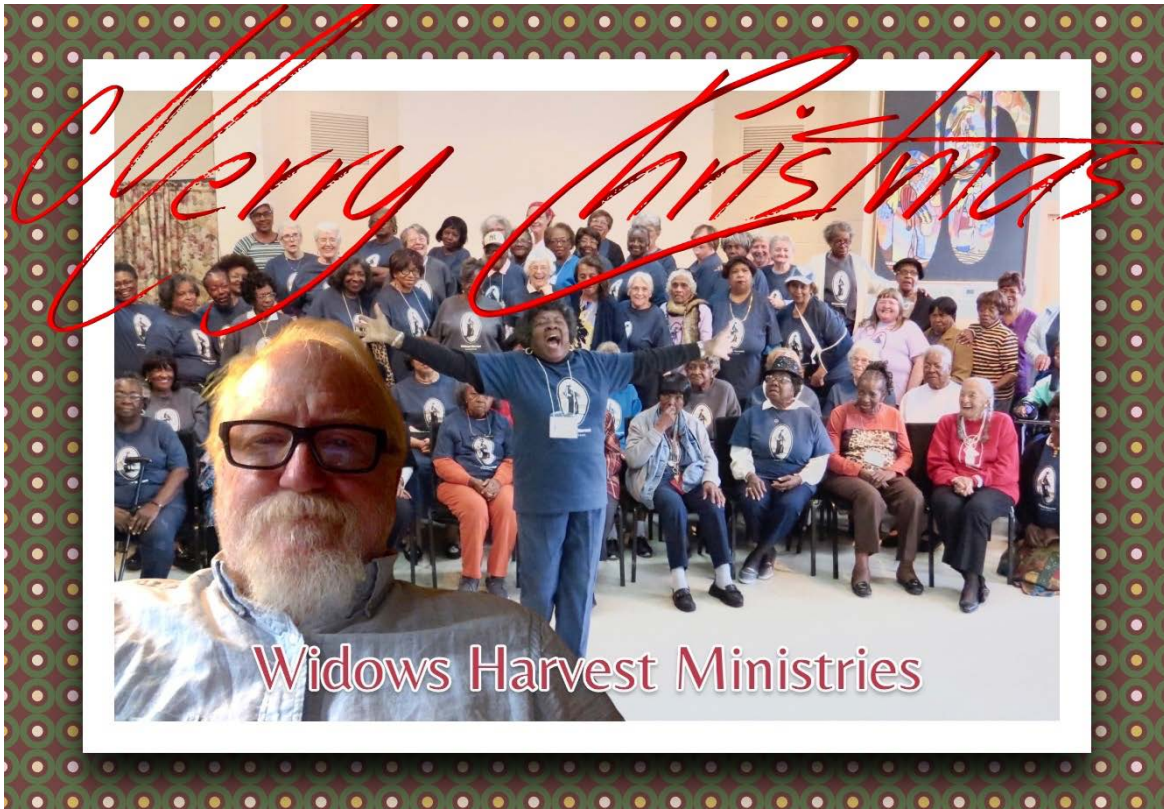




Widows Harvest MINISTRIES

In All Things Give Thanks to Our Heavenly Father In Christ Jesus Name | END-OF-THE-YEAR UPDATE 2023



End-of-the Year Letter 2023

Dear Friends and Supporters:

June 1st 2023 we entered our 36th year as a ministry with widows. Reflecting back on the years behind us 2 realities in particular stand out in my mind: Time and Love.

Whereas time, as we understand it, is fixed and therefore limited and will end when we, as well as this present age, ceases to exist. Love, on the other hand, is not fixed, has no limitations, and will remain constant beyond this life and into eternity.

Someone once said, "Time is just like money because there's never enough of it." God's love, though, is always available to us in amounts that are immeasurable. Perhaps this poem by Henry Van Dyke expresses it best:

"Time Is:

*Too Slow for those who Wait,
Too Swift for those who Fear,
Too Long for those who Grieve,
Too Short for those who Rejoice;
But for those who Love,
Time is not."*

BIBLICAL TIME

A number of years ago I came across a definition for Biblical time as “a period between two eternities.” In other words time, as we understand it, is a fixed period. Love, however, is perpetual existing both outside of as well as during, time as a fixed period. Though we might find plausible the idea of time being a fixed period between two eternities, as citizens of heaven representing it as ambassadors of the kingdom of God, we might wonder what difference this knowledge might make on a practical, day by day and week by week, basis?

SABBATH REST

Practically speaking, it should make all the difference in our world when we add to this perspective God’s Sabbath rest, which symbolizes for us both fixed time as well as the eternal Sabbath rest that awaits us. Like many things, though, that we believe to be scripturally sound, we tend to view them more through the lens of a microscope rather than through the eyes of a soaring eagle. The idea of a weekly Sabbath observance is one such example. Since the time of Jesus’ resurrection there remains continued debate on what day the Sabbath should be observed: Saturday or Sunday. Seemingly, observance of the Sabbath is understood more based on the dictates of the law rather than on the Grace we are now under through Jesus.

Paul even addresses this as one of the points he makes in Romans 14:5 when he says *“One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind.”*

Paul, of course, is explaining both grace as well as individual faith and gives a number of examples in addition to this one for those whose faith allows them to regard every day alike that they should not be regarded with disdain or judged by those who consider one day to be more sacred than another. Nor should those who consider every day alike to, likewise, have disdain or judge those who consider one day to be more sacred than another.

Perhaps, though, rather than focusing on what day we should observe as our Sabbath rest, we might consider it from a much wider and eternal perspective. For instance, based on the fact that the Greek word for “week” is “sabbaton,” which is also the exact same Greek word for “Sabbath.”

In effect, “sabbaton” not only refers to a specific day that is considered to be sacred, but it also implies, perhaps, that all 7 days of the week should be considered sacred because God not only created them but they should be understood as days of worship. Which is contrary to what we presently believe about the significance of the week with a day (Sabbath) of worship at the end of it, rather than as a day of rest and renewal. This can only be realized, though, when we understand it in the context of Biblical fixed time contrasted with the eternal life that awaits us outside of it. When we do this we will hopefully realize that every week should remind us of eternity, itself, where we have already been given citizenship in heaven through Jesus.

In that we typically view the Sabbath as a stand-alone day apart from the rest of the week, what if we understood it from an eternal perspective. That just as Biblical time can be defined as a period between 2 eternities, or more precisely, a period between 2 eternal Sabbath rests, the week itself, therefore, also represents this reality. So, instead of the present debate as to whether the Sabbath should be observed on the last day of the week or the first day of the week, we should understand it to be both.

In other words, like time itself being a period between 2 eternities, or Sabbath rests, each week serves to remind us of this when we view it as a period between 2 Sabbaths. In effect, our week begins with a day of Sabbath rest as well as ending with a day of Sabbath rest.

WORSHIP IN THE GARDEN

In the creation account, which we must remember was long before God handed down the law to Moses, God rests on the 7th day. Genesis 2:2-3, *"By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because he rested from all the work of creating that he had done."*

For 6 days all that God created was for his own glory, and as part of all that he created for his glory he included mankind to not only be a part of it, but to also continue to glorify him through Adam & Eve's everyday acts of worship prescribed in Genesis 2:15 as the *"dressing and keeping of the garden."* The word for "dress" means to work or serve," as well as "worshiper." The word for "keep" means to "hedge about (as with thorns), to protect, to preserve." Essentially, to maintain and preserve God's order. Which, we know today was disrupted by the serpent through deception. Thus, making deception perhaps, the greatest threat for us both as the church universal as well as individually.

GREATEST THREAT

The question is, though, what is God's order for us under grace that should be our greatest concern for succumbing to the subtleties of deception and, therefore, disrupting the order by which God desires for us to conduct ourselves through our daily service/worship of him?

In fact, in the book of James, chapter 1:16-27 James issues 3 warnings seemingly addressing this very concern. The first instance, found in verses 16-17, James writes *"Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."*

In the 2nd instance, rather than warning us not to be deceived, James cautions us to not deceive ourselves. Verses 22-24, *"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like."*

Remember, it was Eve who was first tempted through deception by the serpent. Then once deceived, having ignored God's warning to Adam not to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Eve becomes the deceiver of Adam. Unlike the serpent, though, whose deceptive words were knowingly malicious, once deceived, Eve's motive for deceiving Adam is anything, but malicious because she doesn't even know she has been deceived. Which is truly critical for us to understand today. Those who may be the sources for perpetuating some of the most impactful messages and teachings of deception, in all likelihood, do not know that they have been deceived (just like Eve didn't know), nor do those who are being deceived recognize the deception (much like Adam).

DECEPTION, WORSHIP & THE TONGUE

Now, the third and final instance where James warns us about deception, he again emphasizes our vulnerability for self-deception, but this time he gives us a standard, or litmus test if you will, for self-determination. In verse 26, James warns us that *"those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves and their religion is worthless."*

There are a number of different interpretations for this passage, but they do not seem to be in the context of deception, nor the passage that immediately follows it. Which is puzzling since it closely mirrors what Jesus, on multiple occasions, accused the religious leaders of being guilty of. For instance Mat. 23:2-4 *"The teachers of*

the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them."

Although Jesus did not specifically accuse the religious leaders of deceiving others, that is what they are ultimately guilty of, because their words do not match their actions. One other difference is that Jesus is making both a warning to others as well as an accusation against the religious leaders. James, on the other hand, specifically warns us to be on our guard for both being deceived as well as deceiving ourselves.

Deception always begins with words spoken by the tongue. Tongues, that James tells us in chapter 3:5-9 "in the same way a small spark can start a great forest fire, can set the whole course of one's life on fire." And furthermore, James informs us "it is impossible for us to tame our tongue, for it is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. We both praise God with it and curse those also made in the likeness of God." So, even though we proclaim truth, does not mean that our lives are a reflection of that truth and our claims about faith and worship are worthless according to verse 1:26.

WORSHIP UNSTAINED

In the next passage, verse 27, James plainly states one of the most crucial standards for determining the degree to which we might have been deceived in the context of the Christian faith under a new covenant of grace. And by doing so, he also presents us with, what is in effect, the equivalency of God's instructions to Adam *"to dress and keep the garden."* Understandably this, no doubt, may come across as a bold claim, but it is not unfounded. On the contrary, this belief is based on over 25 years of study of this one passage in the context of worship from Genesis 2 through to the end of Revelation.

And, as many of you may know, after the many years of devotion to the study of James 1:27, it resulted in the publishing of the book "Spiritual Widowhood" along with an expanded, 15 episode companion podcast, "Pleading The Case." Over the course of both this one verse has been broken down, almost word by word, revealing the critical importance that *"visiting orphans and widows in their distress"* is for our religion/worship because, according to James, it is regarded by God as worthy (i.e. "pure and undefiled"). When we add to this the fact that nowhere else in the entirety of scripture do we find any other acts of worship characterized as being "pure and undefiled," these 2 factors alone should be sufficient for removing most, if not all, doubts.

THE POWER OF "AND"

One final insight worth noting is for calling attention to the fact that the word "and" was not included in the original Greek text but was added at a later date. It may have been due to an incorrect interpretation, or even the fact that Martin Luther believed the book of James should be excluded from the New Testament. Whatever the reason, the fact remains that it has significantly altered its true meaning.

With the word "and" being inserted this passage is no longer a singular admonition but it has now become a list of 2 with the latter potentially containing a multiple item sub-list. Whereas, the first admonition is clear and specific, what has now become an additional admonition is neither clear nor specific and filled with ambiguity in that *"to keep oneself unstained by the world"* is almost entirely subjective as to what is required for us to remain so. Every church movement since the inception of the Christian faith through Jesus has had and still has a different understanding for what **"keeps us from being stained by the world."**

When the word "and" is removed, however, all ambiguity is removed from this passage in its entirety. Now when we read it the cause and effect relationship between the acts of worship described as being *"pure and*

undefiled” and our conditions for “keeping us unstained by the world” is easily recognizable. In fact, what would be far more plausible to insert is “in order.” As in “[in order] to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

FURTHER PROOF

There are at least 2 other NT passages of scripture that would agree with this interpretation. The first one is in II Corinthians 11:2 where Paul writes *“I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.”* If not remaining “unstained/pure as a virgin” was impossible then why would Paul express concern for its possibility? The answer can be found in verse 3 where he confesses *“his fear that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.”*

Should we consider it to be a coincidence that James addresses our vulnerability for deception 3 times leading up to verse 1:27 where he explains the cause and effect relationship between “pure and undefiled worship” and remaining “pure as a virgin.” Especially when we add the fact that one of the meanings of the word “keep” in this verse is “unmarried”. “Pure and undefiled worship keeps us from being in an adulterous relationship with the world.”

Maybe one of the most significant indications that the church has been deceived is rooted in denial, especially among men in general and men in particular who are in leadership positions. II Cor. 11:1-4 Paul is not just addressing “a church,” he also is equally addressing “The Church.” And whether it is “a church” or “The Church” both include males and females and, therefore, both are characterized by Paul as being equally vulnerable for being deceived as Eve was. All things Eve, though, generally have been associated with women and because of this men, typically, have not been willing to accept for themselves any association with Eve. Which literally means that they have already been deceived.

Jesus, as “last Adam” as well as bridegroom and husband, means that being a bride, or last Eve if you will, is the only identification left for us as “The Church” both males and females. But unlike the first Adam, our bridegroom/husband Jesus, remains invulnerable to deception by his bride, the last Eve, once he was seated next to our Father in heaven. According to II Cor. 11:4, though, we will continue to be vulnerable to deception as long as we remain here in our physical bodies. In fact, in verse 11:4, Paul tells us that we are not only vulnerable to deception, but we are even willing to accept deception “easily enough.” Probably because those who are guilty of deception have not been recognized as being deceived and subsequently are considered by us as certifiably credible sources of truth that we have come to trust and rely on.

DENYING THE FAITH

The 2nd passage of scripture that agrees with the above interpretation of James 1:27 is found in I Timothy 5:8, *“Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”* I & II Timothy as well as Titus have been characterized as “pastoral Epistles because of the instructions they offer for the regulation of the church.” In order to fully understand verse 8 we have to view it in the context of both the care of widows, which is addressed preceding it, and the office of widow, that immediately follows it (the word “list” in verse 9 refers to “those widows who held a prominent place in the church and exercised a certain superintendence over the rest of the women, and had charge of the widows and orphans supported at the public expense).

Without an understanding of verse 8 in this context we might be more than tempted to disregard the second part of James 1:27 for the validity of what is regarded by God as necessary acts of worship in order to *“keep ourselves from being stained by the world.”* When Timothy tells us that whoever does not provide for their

relatives, it includes all immediate family as well as any widows in their family (regardless of their age or the circumstances that have led to their being bereft of a husband. i.e. including divorce and abandonment etc.).

SPIRITUALLY WIDOWED AND FATHERLESS

The 2 things that Jesus takes away from us when we accept his proposal of marriage is our conditions for being spiritually fatherless and widowed. Once we are betrothed to Jesus we are considered married to him by our heavenly father whose family we have also been adopted into. Therefore, not to worship God through the pure and undefiled acts of caring for the widows and the fatherless is to literally say we have forgotten what you have done on our behalf, thus, denying our betrothal to Jesus. In effect we are living in an adulterous relationship with the world.

As members of God's family through Jesus, there is never a time in our lives that he does not provide for us. If he did not provide for us, according to I Timothy 5:8, he would not be who he claims to be. Since we believe that of the many things God is to us, being our provider is one of them, so how can we be a true reflection/model of Jesus if we fail to provide for our own families, including the widows and the fatherless. Furthermore, in that we consider I Timothy to be a pastoral Epistle, this admonition would equally apply to the church as a corporate body. If God does not provide for us then how could we expect the church to, and if the church does not provide for its family then how can we expect individuals to provide for their own, families.

TIME & LOVE

In the meantime, until that day arrives for each of us when we will no longer be bound to this existence by our present physical bodies, we should remind ourselves that just as Biblical time is "a period between two eternities" that every week mirrors this truth by beginning and ending with a Sabbath rest. And on an even smaller scale each day that makes up a week has enough worries without worrying about what tomorrow's worries will be. And, in that every day has enough worries, all God desires from us is to faithfully "dress and keep" the garden he has placed us in. Essentially, in order *"to serve and to protect his established order of things."* In other words, to worship God daily through our offerings of thanksgiving to him for all things in Christ Jesus's name (loving God with heart mind and soul) as well as our deeds/acts of mercy and compassion as we serve others rather than being served (loving our neighbors as ourselves) with the widows and the fatherless as an essential priority.

Time is fleeting and seems like there is never enough of it for the things we want for ourselves. By contrast, though, devoting ourselves to the worship of God and our service to others, there will never be a shortage of time in our daily offerings of love for our ongoing fulfillment of his will.

And lest we are tempted to succumb to the effects of weariness, sometimes feeling as though we cannot take yet another step forward, God gives us a day of rest. Not only to remind us of the eternal Sabbath rest that awaits us, but to also give us a time of renewal and refreshment as we begin yet another week of worshipping God on an unseen battlefield waging war against an unseen enemy in anticipation of the marriage of the Lamb when and where we will stand at the altar as bride (both men and women), with our bridegroom and husband, Jesus, as we are fully embraced by God's eternal love.

Praying God's Grace & Peace,



Andy Mendonsa
Director WHM

Our loss and Dick Mason's Heavenly Gain.



I first met Dick in 1985 when I worked for Inner City Ministries and he was a volunteer. When I left to start Widows Harvest in 1987 Dick served as a volunteer with me, primarily leading roofing projects on widow's homes. After serving for a number of years in this capacity funds became available to hire Dick full-time. The numbers of "widows hearts he made to sing with joy" are too numerous to give an accurate account. His influence in the lives of the 10's of thousands of young people he lead as volunteers will no doubt continue on for generations. Amen.



