



PRIORITIES

It's something that many of us face every day at work: of the numerous tasks that have piled up in my In-Tray (or In-Box), which one should I do first? Which one next after that? And which ones can I safely put off indefinitely? Sometimes the answer is obvious – the Assembly Question with an impending deadline, or the briefing that your Head of Division needs for a meeting this afternoon. But sometimes it's not so straightforward, and deciding what's really your top priority requires thought. Experience clearly needs to be brought to bear.

I don't want this editorial to turn into an article on time management! What I do want to do is for all of us, irrespective of grade and regardless of whether we're working or retired, to pause and reflect on our priorities. Priorities, that is, in our lives. I want to try to think about this in a biblical way, by posing a number of questions.

What's my priority: this world or the next?

The material things all around us inevitably take our attention. They are, after all, part of God's creation. But too many people nowadays seem to think that there's nothing more to human life, and that their personal existence will cease when they die. This, of course, is the opposite of what God has revealed in the Bible. In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord Jesus asks "Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?" (Matthew 6:25, NKJV). He goes on to urge his audience "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness" (v. 33). He teaches that His followers – those who seek first the kingdom of God, who enter at the narrow gate (Matthew 7:13) – will have their material needs met by their heavenly Father. In other words, by putting heavenly things first, they won't be unprovided for in this world. The alternative to entering at the narrow gate is to travel on the broad way. Christ's description of the destination of the broad way is a word that denotes eternal loss, and is elsewhere translated as perdition.

The question in the heading of this section isn't solely applicable to those who are disregarding the Lord's call to repent, and believe the gospel (Mark 1:15). It is also relevant to those who *have* believed in Him, and will not perish (John 3:16). We too can, in reality, often pay insufficient attention to matters spiritual and eternal. Paul exhorts in Colossians 3:2, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth".

What's my priority: self or Christ?

Here's the Apostle Paul's answer: "For to me to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21). In the previous verse, he has expressed the earnest hope that "Christ shall be magnified in my body". The secret of this is given in another of Paul's letters:-

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of [i.e. faith in] the Son of God, who

loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

In Luke 9:23 the Lord Jesus teaches: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me”.

What’s my priority: appearance or reality?

In Revelation, in chapter 3, a local church (at Sardis) had to be told that they had a reputation for being alive, but were dead. In the previous chapter, another of the seven churches (at Ephesus) had to be told that – despite many commendable actions and attitudes – they had left their first love. The Lord had to rebuke His people through the prophet Isaiah: “this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men” (Isaiah 29:13). Needless to say, God looks on the heart, and we need to be sincere before Him. Others may be impressed by the length or eloquence of my public prayers, but this is not what counts. (Read Matthew 6:5-8.)

As the writer to the Hebrews exhorts, “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus...let us draw near with a true [sincere] heart in full assurance of faith” (Hebrews 10; 19,22). And may we be able to say with the psalmist, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24).

What’s my priority: getting or giving?

Of course it’s nice to receive presents, at this time of year or indeed any other month – for their own sake, and because of the kindness of others in thinking of us in this way. But we always need to bear in mind the words of the Lord Jesus, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Giving is a characteristic of God Himself – just think of John 3:16.

In 2 Corinthians 8:5 we’re told that the Macedonian Christians “first gave their own selves to the Lord”. In Romans 12:1, the apostle beseeches his readers to “present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God”. He describes this as “your reasonable [intelligent] service”. Such service is intelligent because it is a thinking response to the mercies of God, as set out in the earlier chapters of the epistle.

From this living sacrifice, the giving of our time, talents, and material resources will all result.

In conclusion

In light of what we have been thinking about in this article, we probably all need to do some re-prioritisation, and a new year is a good time to do so. May we know the Lord’s enabling in this, for His glory.