

Perception and Reality

Pastor Larry Hoskins, Th. M.



John Maxwell, a former pastor and trainer of business and church leaders has said, ***"He that thinketh he leadeth and hath no one following him, only taketh a walk."***

Whenever he says it, the crowd he is addressing always laughs because of the obvious disparity between perception and reality. It reminds me of a plaque that a father of one of my students gave me once when I was a youth pastor which read, ***"Which way did they go? How many of them were there? What did they look like? Quick! Tell me! I must find them. I am their leader!!!"***

Sometimes what we think is real and what is real are not remotely similar. This is especially true when it comes to the spiritual realm. We are born into a physical universe as people who have a physical body that the Bible describes as mortal and corruptible. It further says of us as believers that though our "outer man" (our physical body) is decaying, yet our "inner man" (the eternal, spiritual person who is rightly related to God through Christ that resides in his or her physical body) is being renewed day by day. Changes in our outer man are readily apparent. If we eat a wholesome diet and exercise properly, our bodies are usually fit and look great. If we become ill, we become weaker and often lose weight and color. On the other hand, changes in our inner man are harder to see. How does one see a "sinner" from physical birth become transformed into a "saint" with imputed righteousness at one's spiritual birth? At one minute, the person was a child of the evil one, under the wrath of God, but after trusting Christ for the forgiveness of one's sin, that person is now a child of God for whom God has no condemnation. Sometimes that change becomes evident in changed character or changed priorities, but often such changes are not readily apparent.

Because the physical world is so real to us and because it is our most obvious environment, many come to perceive that it is the only reality. It is what we see when we open our eyes at the beginning of the day. It is what clothes us. It gives us food and shelter. It's where we work. We see the money that comes with working and what it buys; and the next thing we know, we are on the hamster wheel, eating to live, to work, to make money, to eat, to live, to work . . . and the cycle continues.

Many people put up with long commutes, long hours, difficult bosses, limited vacation, plus financial bondage to debtors — purchasing expensive clothes, cars, and houses to attain the American dream in the physical world. Such a life is summed up in the words, ***"He who dies with the most toys wins!"***

Others see the excesses of such a materialistic world and retreat to a simpler lifestyle. The Denver Post recently highlighted a man who rejected money altogether. He lives in a cave and resorts to dumpster diving for food and clothing. He bathes and washes his clothes in a nearby river. If someone gives him money, he gives it away. Regardless of which way we live, we all have to live in a real physical world.

But what about the spiritual world? The Bible tells us that we did not even begin to perceive certain things from the spiritual world until God revealed them, as Paul wrote to the church at Corinth: ***But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; but just as it is written, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, And which have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him." For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. (1 Corinthians 2:7-10 NASB95)***

Do you see how the lack of spiritual perception led a group of people to crucify the Lord? But if they had seen the greater spiritual reality, Paul notes that they would have never done so. Their spiritual perception of reality would have changed what they did in their physical world. What they did "made

sense," given their perception of reality, but it didn't — if that perception were adjusted to a different set of spiritual truths.

Think about that for a moment. The Bible says a number of truths about our presently unseen future:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21 NASB95)

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (Romans 8:18 NASB95)

According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Corinthians 3:10-15 NASB95)

These verses tell us that our physical world is not the only reality. One day, we will receive new resurrection bodies — immortal and incorruptible. We will be freed from death and from the presence of sin. We will enjoy the presence of God in a new heaven and a new earth. It is then that our physical reality and our spiritual reality will be most fully realized. However, what we do now, in our mortal bodies in this fallen world, determines the quality of our inheritance in that ultimate reality. What does that say about where and with whom we invest our time, talents, and treasures? As we begin 2010, may each of us make the proper distinction between what is perceived and what is truly real. May we invest ourselves in a life's work for that which remains and for that which God rewards!

Only one life, 'twill soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last.