

What Time Is It?

This article on Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 is taken from Ligonier Ministries

Each issue of *Tabletalk* magazine features a column by Dr. R.C. Sproul titled “Right Now Counts Forever.” Dr. Sproul has often explained that he chose the name of this column based on the rampant skepticism in postmodern society that says, “Right now counts not at all” or “Right now counts only for right now.” Christians, however, know differently. We know there is a God in heaven who will bring everything we have said and done into judgment, and render an eternal verdict. Hence, Dr. Sproul chose the title for his column because, truly, right now counts forever.

In speaking of forever, we are making a time reference, and the biblical understanding of time is vital to Ecclesiastes’ message. Many ancient cultures affirmed a cyclical understanding of time, and many Eastern religions hold this view today. The cyclical view says time is one recurring loop that has no beginning or end. History somehow gets started, goes through its cycle of events, ends, then starts again, goes through the exact same sequence with the exact same events, ends, starts again, and on into infinity. If time is cyclical, however, we are stuck in a pattern that allows for no advance and no final evaluation. No transcendent meaning is possible.

On the other hand, Scripture presents a linear view of time and history. There is a definite beginning to history at creation, and all things are moving to a final point when the kingdom of Christ will be consummated and God will be all in all (1 Cor. 15:20–28). This view of time allows for real change and real advancement, all under the watchful eye of the sovereign Lord of history. Consequently, God has determined a time and purpose for everything that happens. That is the point of today’s passage.

There is a time to be born and a time to die (Eccl. 3:2) — our Father has determined our lifespan and has appointed a purpose for each of us (Ps. 139:16). Also, God has determined that there are times to kill — the lawful execution of force against those guilty of capital crimes, the cutting away of diseased flesh — and to heal (Eccl. 3:3). He has also declared that there is a time for war — against the world, the flesh, and the Devil — and a time for peace — not with these foes but with the Almighty through Christ (v. 8; Rom. 5:1). Because the Lord has written history as “His story,” we know there is an appropriate time for all events; none of them are pointless.

Fundamentally, Scripture is concerned to answer this question: What time is it? The answer that it gives for the present era is that we are living in the last days, that period when the gospel goes forth in power to bring the nations into the kingdom of God (Heb. 1:1–4). We must be focused on accomplishing this great task, which involves times of prayer for the lost and periods in which we reach out to unsaved friends and family.