

Great Expectations

Joe Slater

I haven't read Charles Dickens' novel with the title above. I confess I borrowed his title to get your attention!

What are your expectations for yourself? You may want to obtain one or more college degrees, advance in your career, make a large income, and marry and raise a family. Perhaps you have done all these things; or you may be in the process of doing them.

The more crucial question is this: How do these expectations relate to your relationship with God? That is to say, are your expectations in harmony with His expectations?

Yes, God has expectations for you! We serve a great God, and His expectations are great. I challenge you to take your concordance and look at the word "ought." In some places it is given as "must" or "should." Not all of the 50+ places in which the word is used will apply directly to you, but many will. Space prohibits an exhaustive list, but consider a representative sample:

God expects you to obey the gospel. "You **must** be born again" (John 3:7).

God expects you to obey Him rather than men. "We **ought** to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

God expects you to live a righteous life. "What manner of persons **ought** you to be in all holy conduct and godliness?" (2 Peter 3:11).

God expects you to show compassion to others as He has shown it to you. "**Should** you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant as I had compassion on you?" (Matthew 18:33).

You can and should extend this list from your own Bible. God has great expectations for you!

Life's Rich Pageant

I recently awakened before dawn, having dreamed about a former place of employment where I had worked for over two decades. I began thinking about my former coworkers. In just a matter of moments, I thought of over thirty individuals who have passed in recent years. Some of these were people with whom I had traveled, spent quality time, and developed lasting personal relationships. My trip down memory lane suddenly had an unexpected and sad detour.

The memories of departed friends continue to occupy my thoughts, and with it, the phrase "life's rich pageant" comes to mind. The term encompasses life's daily ups, downs, and unknowns. Truly, no man knows each day's outcome or if today will be the last day. Charles Dickens describes life as "the best of times and the worst of times." John Denver sings how "some days are diamonds, some days are stones." Solomon speaks truth when he says, "*There's a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die*" (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2).

Such is the way of all flesh, and at some point, every man and woman inevitably receive his or her call to join what William Cullen Bryant describes as "death's innumerable caravan." And with each day being a gift, people should be motivated – verily, even more motivated – to look after matters of concern, be it earthly or spiritual. James calls expectations of the future "*boastful*" (4:16) and reminds us that "*if it is the Lord's will, we will live and also do this or that*" (James 4:15).

--Kenny Westmoreland (Selina, TN)

WHY SIN FEELS GOOD

Do you know why sin feels so good?

It's because your flesh doesn't care about eternity – it's not going with you.

--Roy Allen Crutcher (Mt. Carmel, IL)

No "Alone" In Salvation

When someone begins a sentence by saying, "The only thing necessary to be saved is..." you can know that they are in error and will eventually employ double-talk. There is no "alone" in the salvation process. It takes a combination of things, on man's part as well as God's part, to accomplish this wonderful event.

We are not saved by "grace alone," but we are saved by grace (Ephesians 2:5). If we were saved by "grace alone," all men would be saved, for Paul wrote that the "*grace of God which brings salvation has appeared to all men*" (Titus 2:11). Yet, the Bible teaches that some, in fact, many, will be lost (Matthew 7:13-14).

We are not saved by "faith alone," but we are saved by faith (John 3:16). However, what efficacy would faith have if it were not for God's grace? If "faith alone" could save, it would eliminate the need for God's grace.

We are not saved by "baptism alone," but we are saved by baptism (1 Peter 3:21). However, baptism without faith or without God's grace would only result in one being wet. Baptism requires faith in the working of God for it to be effective (Colossians 2:12).

According to the Bible, our salvation does not "arise" from any work that we have done (Titus 3:4-5; Romans 5:8). However, while salvation does not arise from any meritorious human effort, it must be appropriated by our cooperation (Ephesians 2:8-9). Without responding to God's grace with a living faith (James 2:26), God's grace will profit us nothing (2 Corinthians 6:1).

Brethren, be careful not to hold a position that requires double-talk. If we say we are saved by [anything] "alone," we will have to back up and deny our position if questioned. Salvation requires two parties – God and man. The scheme of redemption had its beginnings in the gracious, compassionate love of God without our help or contribution. But having said that, our salvation is not completed until we respond to the divine conditions of pardon set forth in Scripture. There is just no "alone" in the accomplishment of our salvation.

--Steve Higginbotham (Knoxville, TN)