

## April Questions and Answers

Franklin Church of Christ  
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PM Worship

### Introduction:

As is our present custom, we take the second Sunday night of the month to answer questions. If you have a question, you may either e-mail it to me indicating that you want it to be a second Sunday night question or fill out one of the forms in the foyer and drop it in the box by my office. In this lesson we have time to cover two completely dissimilar questions.

### Discussion:

- I. What is the length of time conveyed by “forever” and “everlasting” in verses such as **Genesis 13:15; 17:7** and **Ezra 9:12**.
  - A. First, understand why this is an important question. Premillennialists and Jehovah’s Witnesses both find passages that use the term “forever” as a basis for their teachings. The Jehovah’s Witnesses use it to support their doctrine that the earth will remain eternally and only 144,000 will go to heaven. The Premillennialists use it to proclaim that the Jews should live in the Promised Land and be God’s chosen people until the end of time. However, both doctrines mistake how the Bible uses the term.
  - B. The word that is translated “forever” or “everlasting” in these passages is the Hebrew word “olam.” This word can certainly mean “eternal” in the most literal sense, as in **Genesis 21:33** when Abraham called on the “Everlasting God” (*cf. Isaiah 44:6*). However, it does not always mean that. In fact, by examining its usage we find it is actually a relative term. Just as we today may use the words “forever” and “always” relatively, so did the Old Testament. The term is used to mean a long time, but long time is relative to the circumstance discussed.
  - C. Consider several examples:
    1. In **Genesis 17:10-13**, God said circumcision would be an “everlasting (olam) covenant.” However, **Galatians 5:3-4** says that we will fall from grace if we are circumcised as an issue of having a saving covenant with God.
    2. **Exodus 12:14** and other passages say the Passover is a “permanent (olam) ordinance.” Additionally, **Exodus 31:16** said the Sabbath was a “perpetual (olam) covenant.” However, **Colossians 2:16-17** demonstrates that the Sabbaths and feasts are no longer obligatory.
    3. **Deuteronomy 29:29** says the law belongs to the Jews “forever (olam)” that they may observe it. Further, many passages like **Exodus 27:21** and **Numbers 25:12-13** provide promises of “perpetual (olam) priesthood” for the descendents of Aaron and then Phinehas. However, **Hebrews 7:12** says there has been a change both of the law and the priesthood.
    4. **Leviticus 16:34** says the annual Day of Atonement sacrifice was a “permanent (olam) statute.” However, the ultimate atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ brought that statute to an end, as **Hebrews 10:1-4, 10-14** demonstrates.
    5. **Deuteronomy 23:3** says the descendents of Moab or Ammon should not enter the assembly of Israel “forever (olam, KJV)” but limits the time to “ten generations.”
    6. A Hebrew slave could elect to serve his master “permanently (olam)” in **Exodus 21:5-6**. Also **I Samuel 1:22** in which Hannah said Samuel would stay in the tabernacle “forever (olam)”. However, both circumstances are limited to the life times of the individuals.
    7. Finally, **Genesis 6:4** spoke of men “who were of old (olam),” and **Joshua 24:2** spoke of the “ancient times (olam)” in which the Jews’ fathers, namely Terah, lived in Ur of the Chaldees. Neither of these passages mean “forever ago” literally, but simply “a long time ago.”
  - D. The Hebrew term “olam,” translated “forever”, “eternal”, “everlasting”, “permanent”, “perpetual”, etc. does not always literally mean eternal. Rather, it represents a long period of time. Depending on the context, it may mean literally eternally, until the end of time or the end of the world, until the end of the age (or covenant), until the end of someone’s life, or simply just an undetermined long period of time. In the passages in our question (**Genesis 13:15; 17:7** and **Ezra 9:12**), the context is a reference to the length of time for Abraham’s covenant with God and the period of the Law. When the law and covenant changed these promises were fulfilled.

- II. In **Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-35** the Christians sold their possessions to help those in need. With all the needs across the world today, how accountable are we going to be in regards to all the material blessings we have?
- A. First, neither of these were instances of general benevolence. Both were issues of providing material relief to Christians. While we are individually commanded to do good to all as we have opportunity (**Galatians 6:10**), the command is not that we have to sell all that we have and dole it out to the unlimited list of international charities. However, there are plenty of needs among our brethren around the world as well.
  - B. Second, **Acts 5:4** demonstrates these early donations were not a matter of communism, in which every member is obligated to sell their possessions. Ananias and Sapphira were in control of their finances. This demonstrates that no one can dictate an amount or percentage that we must give to support the work of the church or the relief of the saints.
  - C. Third, the material blessings God has provided are initially to support ourselves and our family (**I Timothy 5:8**). Do not construe anything else I say as meaning we are required to give so much to others that we become needy for material relief ourselves. Further, God certainly allows us to enjoy the material blessings He has given us (**Ecclesiastes 5:18-19**). Do not construe anything I say to mean we should feel guilty for having any enjoyments, entertainments or possessions beyond the strictest of bare essentials.
  - D. Having provided these caveats, examine how accountable we will be based on our blessings. We need to recognize the new creature we Christians are to become according to **Ephesians 4:28**. As Christians, the material blessings with which God blesses us are not for us to hoard, but to share. While we must take care of ourselves, we must balance our own enjoyment with the needs of others. If we have starving brethren that we can help but are not, we should certainly feel guilty for eating extravagantly. If we have brethren who are naked and destitute that we can help but are not, we should certainly feel guilty when we wear our designer clothes and drive our luxury vehicles. God has blessed us so we can be a blessing to others.
  - E. In **I Corinthians 16:1-2**, Paul claimed we must give as we have been prospered. God holds us accountable regarding our giving and our good works based on the resources with which He has prospered us. The principle of **Luke 12:48** applies here. To whom much has been given, much will be expected. Further in **I Timothy 6:17-19**, Paul explained that those who are rich in this world's goods must not fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches but to store up treasures in heaven by sharing. While we may all be at various levels of wealth in comparison to each other, we are all among the richest on the face of the earth. Let us not trust our riches, but share.
  - F. Finally, remember Paul's further statement to the Corinthians in **II Corinthians 9:5-8**. Paul said we must not be affected by covetousness, but be willing to give bountifully. He goes on to say God will provide His grace such that we have abundance for good deeds. In other words, when we trust God and allow His blessings to us to become blessings to others, God will continue to bless us that we might be a further vehicle for His blessing to others.
  - G. The end of the matter is, I cannot provide a number or percentage for your giving or charitable work for brethren and I believe God has good reasons for not providing those kinds of lines. I can tell you that we are responsible to share God's blessings with others and our governing principle is **Matthew 6:33**. As we decide how we will use the financial blessings God has given us, we must be certain that we are seeking first His kingdom and righteousness.

### Conclusion:

I hope these answers are helpful. As always, if you believe I have missed it on some issue. Feel free to let me know and let's discuss it biblically. I believe we can understand what the will of the Lord is (**Ephesians 5:17**). Let's study together and help one another serve the Lord and go to heaven.