

THE SALVATION OF THE SOUL

In the preceding chapters of this book, we have been investigating the eternal plan of God, which is to prepare a bride for Himself. We have seen that man was created in His image and likeness to ultimately fulfill this holy purpose. In order to comprehend this design more completely, it will be necessary for the reader to understand not only why God made man, but how He made him. Truly we were “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps 139:14). From this vantage point, we will then go on to speak further about the holy work which He is doing in every one of His children.

As the children of God, we are not supposed to walk in darkness. It is our Father’s will that we have spiritual understanding about what is going on in our lives, both around us and within us. It is important for us to understand how the Holy Spirit is working to transform us and so to be able to cooperate with Him in His important work. Therefore, we will spend a little time here in this writing to lay some groundwork for our discussion in later chapters. Some very basic revelations need to be implanted in us, some foundation stones as it were, in order for us to walk in light and understanding. Some of you readers perhaps have already been taught these things, and so they may serve as a kind of review. For others, hopefully they will become fundamental building blocks to go on to a greater degree of maturity in Christ.

Our God is a living God. He has no interest in being confined to a physical temple made with human hands. Perhaps dead, lifeless images have their place in lifeless buildings, but our God, who created the universe and is ever living, has no interest in being limited to an earthly structure. Instead, His marvelous, eternal plan includes the idea of living inside human beings. They, being sanctified and cleansed by His Spirit, are being fashioned into a dwelling place for Himself. The Bible clearly teaches that we, God’s people, are the temple of the Holy Spirit (I Cor 3:16). By living in and through living beings, our Creator can express Himself in an infinite variety of ways. Therefore, when we speak of the temple of God today and in the future, we must always keep in mind that we are really speaking about God’s New Covenant people—His church.

Equipped with this understanding, we can now look at the Old Testament tabernacle and temple in a new light. In the final analysis, God did not design these structures (or allow them to be built) as any kind of permanent dwelling place for Himself. Instead, they must be understood as symbols of, and sources of great revelation concerning His ultimate dwelling—His holy people.

Over the centuries during which the Christian church has been in existence, many of God’s people have received various revelations concerning the Old Testament tabernacle. Some have seen it as a type of Christ. Others have understood that it is a

prefiguring of the gospel or the message of redemption. I'm quite sure that the totality of the revelation contained in this holy structure will never be understood by any one man in this life. However, I am equally certain that when God gave instructions for this tabernacle, He had in mind His future dwelling place—His church. Therefore, when we examine this “tent of meeting” in detail we undoubtedly can discover something about man and how God made him to fulfill His designs. Through the tabernacle we can learn something about ourselves and about how and why God is working in us and through us.

With this in mind, when we look at the tabernacle which Moses built, one feature stands out. That is that this structure is composed of three parts: an “outer court,” the “holy place” and the “holy of holies.” Although there are various pieces of furniture and other fixtures mentioned relating to different functions and ceremonies, these three, distinct divisions form the basis for the structural plan.

Significantly, when we take a closer look at man, the present and future temple, he also is divided into three main parts: body, soul and spirit. This truth that man is made in three parts is confirmed in the New Testament where we read: “And I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Thess 5:23 KJV). Interestingly, in the original Greek language in which the New Testament was written, the word “and” separating “spirit and soul and body” is included, plainly making the distinction between them. Some Bible teachers have erred, trying to make man into only two parts, for example body and soul, but the scriptures are clear: the tabernacle has three parts and so does man—body and soul and spirit.

Some confusion has been generated by the use of the words “heart” and “flesh” in the Bible, seemingly introducing other “parts.” However, we need not be confused by this. The “heart of man” is simply the parts which are not seen. The Holy Word uses the word “heart” of man to refer to the inner parts of man, the soul and/or the soul and spirit together. The word “flesh” signifies the fallen, sinful parts of man, sometimes only the body, but most often the body and the soul together. This word then refers to one or both of the two “more outward” parts, i.e. the soul and/or the body. These words “heart” and “flesh” are more general in their usage since they refer to more than one “part.” As you can see, there is some overlap in this terminology and therefore it can become confusing. However, if we think of the temple of God and its three divisions as corresponding to the three primary parts of man—body, soul and spirit—there need be no misunderstanding.

In the interest of complete clarity and a true understanding of biblical revelation, we must now spend a little time examining the word “salvation.” Please pay careful attention to this discussion. Most Christians believe that they already know what the word salvation means, but in fact very few have a proper understanding of it.

Almost all believers today equate the word “salvation” with being “born again.” To them, these words are synonymous in their meaning and usage. They take the words “being saved” and being “born again” to mean exactly the same thing. However, in the Bible, these words often have very different meanings. Please do not be surprised by this, but simply read along here and you too will see how the word of God often uses these words and phrases to mean very different things.

Perhaps the best way to understand the biblical meaning of “salvation” or “being saved” is to realize that this word is used in the Holy Text to express three different periods of time. It is used in three different ways. We could think of these as three different verb tenses: the past tense, the present tense and the future tense. This

would translate something like this: we have been “saved,” we are being “saved” and we will be “saved.” In fact, in the Greek language in which the New Testament was written this is exactly the case. There we can find verbs relating to “salvation” occurring in these three forms: the past tense, the present tense (with incomplete action still going on) and the future tense.

Significantly, the way these verb tenses are used corresponds directly with the three parts of man about which we have been speaking. As we all know, mankind has fallen into sin. Due to this fall, the human race needs to be saved, not only a little saved, but saved completely—body, soul and spirit. Through time, our God is accomplishing His salvation work in every part of our being.

SALVATION OF THE BODY

Perhaps the clearest and easiest way to begin is to speak about the “third” or most visible part of our being, our body. When Jesus died on the cross, He purchased for every believer a complete salvation. Not even our physical body was left out. However, this “salvation” of our body has not yet been manifested. It is something in the future. Someday our mortal body will be glorified. It will be “saved.” It will be changed to be like the immortal, glorious body of our risen Lord. This is probably what Peter the apostle is referring to when he speaks of a “salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (I Pet 1:5). Here Peter speaks about a future salvation which is not yet manifested. Since being “born again” has already been revealed, it is evident that he is addressing something else. Paul also alludes to the future salvation of the body when he says, “for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed” (Rom 13:11). When Jesus Christ comes in His glory with His angels, the dead in Christ will be raised up and changed in a glorious way (II Cor 5:1-4, I Cor 15:38-55, Rom 8:23). This is a part of our salvation. However, its realization is not in the past, nor in the present, but in the future.

Next we will speak about the “first” part of our being, our spirit. When God created man, He breathed into him the breath (or “spirit”) of life. (In both the Hebrew and Greek language, the word for breath and spirit is the same.) This then is the source of man’s human spirit, the breath or “Spirit” of God. This “organ,” the human spirit, was designed by God to be the leading element of man’s being. It is the part which is made to have communion with God and was intended to be the primary or chief part inside of us.

The moment Adam and Eve sinned against God, something within them died. Not only did they begin to die physically, but also something inside of them changed. It is impossible for us to know exactly what did happen, but we can see that in some way their human spirit was deadened and darkened. Their once sweet fellowship with God was interrupted. Some kind of spiritual darkness descended upon them and their lives were radically changed. This loss was devastating. Obviously, this “part” of man also needs saving.

SALVATION OF THE SPIRIT

When a man or woman believes into Jesus Christ, a wonderful salvation occurs. The Spirit of God enters into their human spirit and an eternal union is made. The Bible reads: “He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit (with the Lord)” (I Cor 6:17). In another place we are told: “that which is born of the Spirit (i.e. the Spirit of God) is spirit

(i.e. the human spirit)" (Jn 3:6). The joining of the Holy Spirit with the human spirit effects the new birth. We are "born from above" when we receive God's Spirit into our spirit. What a wonderful thing has happened to us. The Spirit of God has entered into our spirit and we have become a new kind of heavenly creature. The union of the Holy Spirit and the human spirit creates a new spiritual being (II Cor 5:17).

Being "born again" is the first event in a genuine Christian experience. This initial step, involving faith, repentance and receiving the Spirit of God is how we enter into God's eternal family. As we have seen in chapter 2, this means that we have received God's own eternal Life. Just as a child is born into a natural family by receiving the life of its parents, so we too, when we are born again, become "babes in Christ," the immature children in God's family. This experience is immediate, that is, it happens all at once. Perhaps it takes minutes or seconds, but it is very analogous to a physical birth.

This then is what most people mean when they speak of "being saved." This word "saved" is most often used in the past tense as when people say: "I have been saved" or when we ask: "When were you saved?" By this we mean, "I have been born again" or "When did you experience the new birth." At times in the New Testament, this word is also used in this way. We read: ". . . not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to His mercy, He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Tit 3:5). And also: "For by grace have you been saved through faith" (Eph 2:8). In these passages, the word "saved" is used to refer to our new birth, an event which is in the past tense for every true Christian.

AN ONGOING WORK

Significantly, the word "salvation" or "being saved" is also used many times in the Bible to describe a present and ongoing work. Frequently, it is used in a context or in a verb form which indicates that it is a work still in progress. For example, when we read that we are to "work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philip 2:12), this indicates that something is still going on. Here we see clearly that although we have been born again, there is still a part of our salvation which we need to "work out." Demonstrating a similar thought Paul says: "and this will turn out for my salvation through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Philip 1:19). Surely Paul was already born again. Yet, this verse reveals that there was an ongoing salvation work happening in Paul's life. So we see that there is a third way in which the word "salvation" is used, representing a present continuing work.

Another verse which states in a very clear manner the truth that there is today an ongoing salvation for believers beyond the new birth is found in Romans 5:10. Here we read: "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." You see here, "reconciliation" has occurred. The new birth has been effected. Yet the salvation process is still continuing.

Still another verse which shows that salvation is an ongoing process is I Cor 1:18. Here we read: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Many may read this passage with the mentality of a salvation as being a "one time only" event and therefore misread it as "to us who are being born again." However, the wording here clearly indicates a work in progress. Paul and the readers of this epistle had already experienced the new birth. Here he is referring to their ongoing experience of God's

amazing grace.

This truth that the salvation work can be a continuing thing is somewhat obscured in the English language by our use of verb forms. According to the authors of the Concordant Literal translation, in the Greek New Testament verbs are often used which indicate, not a completed act, but an action which is incomplete and still going on. Therefore, many places in the English versions where we read the words "be saved," or "are saved" in actuality could be, and perhaps should be translated "be being saved," or "are being saved." Since "be being saved" is awkward in English, most Bible translators rendered these occurrences as "be saved," thus implying a completed work. Unfortunately, in so doing, they also obscured the truth revealed in God's word.

Please allow me to cite several well-known passages of the New Testament using this different verb form indicated in the Concordant Literal translation so that you can see what I mean. When Jesus was preaching and answering the accusations of the Jews, He said: "I do not receive testimony from man, but I say these things that you may be being saved" (Jn 5:34), thus indicating a continuing work. In Romans 5:9 we read: "Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be being saved from wrath through Him." Again in I Corinthians 15:1, 2 it states: "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are being saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain."

According to the Concordant authors, these words "be saved" indicating an incomplete, continuing action which could be translated "be being saved," occur in the following verses: Mk 16:16, Lk 8:12, Jn 3:17, 10:9, Acts 2:21, 11:14, 16:31, Rm 5:9,10, 10:13, I Cor 10:33, 15:2, and I Thess 2:16. Please take some time to review all these verses, reading them with the idea of a continuing action of "be being saved" in mind to give yourself a new and truer understanding of the gospel.

SALVATION OF THE SOUL

As you might have guessed, this ongoing process of "salvation" is something which is happening in our "second part," our soul. When we are born again our first "part," our spirit, is saved. In the future, when Jesus returns in glory our third "part," our body, will be saved. But today God is doing an ongoing work in our second "part," our soul. This truth is clearly seen in Heb 10:39 where we read: "But we are not of those who draw back to perdition (destruction), but of those who believe to the saving of the soul." This is an essential truth which has been sadly neglected and misunderstood by the church of our day. The salvation of the soul is not an event, it is a process to which all of us need to give serious attention.

Going back to God's analogy of the Tabernacle, we see that the Spirit of God enters into our human spirit and resides there. It is here that the presence of God dwells permanently. He does not come and go. Whether we "feel" this presence or not, once we have received Him, God dwells within His holy temple in our spirit. But on the day when Jesus was crucified, something amazing happened. The veil separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies was torn in two from the top to the bottom. The result was that the presence of God was no longer confined to the inner Holy of Holies, but was free to move out into the Holy Place. Within us this means that God is not confined only to our spirit but can and will fill our soul with His presence.

Perhaps you readers will remember from chapter 2 our discussion of three Greek words for "life:" BIOS, PSUCHE and ZOE. There we learned that ZOE is the

word for God's eternal, uncreated life and that PSUCHE is the word used for our old, fallen "soul life." Here we arrive at a point in our teaching where this distinction becomes very important. Since the "spirit of life (ZOE) in Christ Jesus" (Rm 8:2) is now in our spirit, it is evident that we have a supernatural, eternal life in our inmost part. But in our soul, we still have a created, natural, sinful life, PSUCHE. The inner part is holy but the outer one remains sinful. How many of us can testify to this in our experience. Like Paul, we have a holy desire in the inner man, but find ourselves practicing sin with our "outer" man. (See Rm (7:15)). God's solution to this dilemma is what we will now be investigating.

A GLORIOUS SUBSTITUTION

God's plan is to substitute, little by little, His glorious eternal life for our earthly corrupted one. This is what the term "the salvation of the soul" means. When we give the Holy Spirit opportunity, He "spreads" from the inner sanctum of our spirit into our soul and gradually makes this essential substitution. The more we open our being to Him, the more He takes the opportunity to fill us with what He is. The more frequently and the more deeply we allow the Spirit access to our soul, the more profoundly we are changed. The Bible calls this process "transformation" or "sanctification." Obviously, the more we are changed or "transformed" into His image, the more sanctified or holy we become. These two things, sanctification and transformation, are part of the wonderful work called "the salvation of the soul."

Perhaps a good analogy for this might be the formation of petrified wood. Wood, in its natural state is susceptible to decay, deterioration and is able to be burned. But in certain circumstances, when a piece of wood falls into water, another process occurs. Little by little, the natural elements of the wood are washed away and various minerals are deposited in their place. The water saturates and permeates the wood, slowly removing the original ingredients, but preserving the outward appearance. I am told that not only are the growth rings in a tree preserved, but even the cellular structure is still visible under a microscope. Thus the wood is changed from being perishable to being "eternal" from a human point of view. It will no longer decay and has become "fireproof."

In a similar way when we allow Him to do so, the Holy Spirit will saturate and permeate every corner of our soul. Little by little, He will wash away the old natural elements of corruption and decay and substitute His own eternal life and nature for ours. We will be sanctified and purified by the washing of water in the word (Eph 5:26). The result is that we become "eternal" and, as we will see later on, "fireproof" as well. God does not change the external "structure" of our being, only the contents. We become different people inwardly. Instead of being motivated by a sinful, psuche life, we become dominated by a righteous, zoe life.

This is not to say that we will become some kind of different personality than we were before or that we will become someone who we are not. Instead, we find that we become who we were really made to be. We become the kind of person that fits perfectly with our personalities and capabilities. We become what our Creator really intended. As an analogy, let us say that God does not take a green stone and make it red. Instead, He takes an opaque green stone and purifies it until it becomes transparent. Then our soul (the stone in our analogy) can freely exhibit all that God is within us shining out through the "color" of who He made us to be. We will have been purified of all obstructions, made transparent like the bride of Christ (Rev 21:11), so that

He can be seen in us in all His glory in a special way in which only we can exhibit Him.

GROWTH IN LIFE

When Jesus was incarnated here on earth, He was born in a lowly, dirty place –in a stable and in a manger. So too, when we are born again by having the Life of God born in us, Jesus again humbles Himself to enter a lowly place. Yet He did not remain in the manger for long. He grew in “wisdom and stature” (Lk 2:52). He grew to manhood and maturity and also in usefulness to His heavenly Father. In the same way, the eternal Life of God grows up within believers who are seeking and obeying the Lord. As this Life matures, they also become increasingly useful to God. You see, our Lord’s desire is not to have an eternal nursery full of spiritual babies who constantly need time, care and attention. He is seeking mature sons and daughters who can be of use to Him here on the earth to accomplish His eternal purposes.

There is an urgent need for all of God’s children to grow to spiritual maturity. Our testimony to the world is not merely in words, it is also in the attitudes and actions which we express. Our “witness” is not only what we say, but also what we are. What the world needs is Jesus. He is the answer to their needs. But where are people going to find Him? How are the unsaved going to know what He is like? Only through His being exhibited through His people. And how will they know that He indeed can save them? Only by seeing that He has delivered others from what they were and changed them into His likeness. This requires that we grow in God’s Life so that His nature can be expressed through us.

As with all living things, growth takes time. Just as it is in the physical world, so it is in the spiritual. There is no such thing as instantaneous maturity. Growth in life takes time and nourishment. This is especially true of the larger, more impressive of the plant species, giant trees. To reach maturity, they require hundreds of years of growth. Only the soft, insubstantial mushroom grows overnight. These things should be instructive for us. To grow spiritually also takes time and nourishment. It will never happen instantaneously. It requires attention to seeking, obeying and knowing the Lord Jesus Christ. I Peter 2:2 reads: “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word that you may grow thereby unto salvation” (NASB). It is clear here that our ongoing salvation is the result of a growth process aided by spiritual nourishment.

Further, we are instructed in God’s word to grow. Paul urges us to “grow up in all things into Him” (Eph 4:15). This is not a small thing, brothers and sisters. We have been offered the fulness of God. He has held nothing back. He has shed His blood to open the way for us. He has poured out His Holy Spirit to make all that He is available to us. We, small insignificant human beings, have been offered the opportunity to fill ourselves to overflowing with the God of the universe.

But are we availing ourselves of the opportunity? Are we using our time to seek and knock and ask until we are satisfied that we have received all that is possible? The Galatians were rebuked by Paul for their lack of maturity. He says: “My little children, for whom I labor in birth again, until Christ is formed in you” (Gal 4:19). You see, these were “church members.” They were already born again. Yet they were failing to yield themselves to God and seek Him in a way that would lead to the full “formation” of Christ within them. They were neglecting such a great salvation (Heb 2:3).

The best way to grow spiritually and thereby enter into the salvation that is ours by virtue of being God’s children is to spend time in His presence in His holy word. II Tim 3:15 reads: “you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise

for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Dear friends, the table of God is spread. His feast has been made ready. All that is lacking is for those who are called to use their time and attention to fill themselves, more and more, again and again until the day of His coming. Nothing is lacking but our own desire and willingness. In this way we will be "receiving the end of [our] faith, the (complete) salvation of [our] souls" (I Pet 1:9). Truly, "He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him" (Heb 7:25). You see, the new birth is the beginning of our faith but the end is the full salvation of our souls. What could be more precious and valuable than this?

The salvation of the soul is an essential part of a Christian experience. It is a process through which every believer needs to pass. No one is exempt. As we have been seeing, it is not sufficient simply to be "born again." We not only need to experience salvation in our spirit but it is imperative that we go on to receive all that Jesus has purchased for us: the salvation of the soul. This experience includes such things as "transformation," "sanctification," "growing in the Lord," "purification," and the "renewing of the mind." The way this happens is mysterious. It is not possible to explain the mechanics of it in a mental, analytical way. We only know that it occurs as we day by day give ourselves completely to Him. It occurs as His Life grows within us. As we spend time in His presence beholding His glory, we are being transformed into that same image from glory to glory by His Spirit (II Cor 3:18). This is not a promise for the future, but something which we need to be experiencing day by day. It is not only for a few "mystics" but for all of God's children.

The ongoing process of the salvation of the soul is something we must experience in this life. When Jesus comes again, there will be no second chance. As we have seen, there is no such thing as instantaneous transformation later. Today we have a choice. Today we can lay aside the sin and whatever else is holding us back and run after Jesus. Tomorrow there will be no excuses. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (II Cor 6:2).