

## THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

In Christianity today there are generally two schools of thought concerning the subject of salvation. One group of Christians believes that you can lose your salvation. Those who hold this belief think that you can “get saved” or born again and then later on, because of sin, lose your salvation. Many of them also believe that you can “get saved” again if and when you repent. This process can be repeated any number of times. This view was propagated many years ago by a man named Jacobus Arminius, forming a part of what is known as “Arminianism.” This doctrine is usually held by the Pentecostal or Charismatic churches.

The second school of thought on the subject of salvation is that once you are born again, you are “saved,” and nothing you or anyone else can do will change that fact. If you sin or if you fall away, none of this has any impact upon your eternal security. They feel that you cannot “lose” your salvation. Further, they teach, there are little if any consequences for your actions. Once you receive Jesus you are going to heaven and that is that. This view was expounded by John Calvin and so forms part of “Calvinism.” This is the position of most Fundamentalist churches.

Interestingly, both camps produce some very significant and convincing scriptures to make their case. Each side cites verses which seem to prove what they teach. However, from the preceding chapter we see that each side of this debate is making a fundamental error. They are arguing their points from scripture as if “salvation” was the same as being “born again.” They have not seen that biblical salvation is not only the new birth but a life-long process of being changed from glory to glory into the image of Christ Jesus. (If you have any confusion about this, please review chapter 6 regarding “The Salvation of the Soul,” for a more complete explanation of this truth). When you read the Bible with this in mind, many scriptures make more sense. Much confusion is resolved simply by understanding that “salvation” is more than a one time event, but also a process by which we are transformed.

As we are seeing, both of the views stated above have missed something very important. But we also need to see that BOTH also contain a good deal of truth when seen in the proper light. All the scriptures used by both sides of this debate are true. God made no mistakes when writing His holy book. For a better understanding of this, please pay careful attention the following statements.

The salvation you have received from God is indeed eternal and you cannot lose it. But the salvation which you have not yet experienced you will lose, if you do not press on to enter into it. You see, both things can be and are true. You cannot lose and yet you can lose your salvation. The problem is that people have defined “salvation”

simply as “being born again,” but in the Bible and in the mind of God there is much more to it than that. Biblical salvation is God’s complete work in and for man, beginning with His cleansing and the experience of the new birth, continuing with the transformation of the soul and ending with the glorification of the body.

What you have gained of eternal (ZOE) life is indeed eternal. By definition what God is is absolutely indestructible. If you have allowed the Eternal One into your spirit and been “joined” (I Cor 6:17) to Him, there is no way to lose or destroy this fact. Life can only be lost in one way. It does not evaporate or leak out of us. In the entire universe God has shown us only one way to get rid of any kind of life, that is, to kill it. But you see, God’s life is impossible to kill. The Jews and the Roman soldiers tried, but it was impossible that death could hold Him (Acts 2:24). God will not just disappear out of you. What has been saturated and permeated with His life and divine nature has become eternal and absolutely indestructible. The word “eternal” means exactly that, eternal.

But on the other hand, if we have not allowed God to fill us and change us, there remains in our being much which is not indestructible. If we refuse to allow the Holy Spirit access to all of our soul, if we resist the discipline and work of God within us, this old, natural part will be lost. When Jesus comes and our time for transformation is finished, then what we have gained will be ours but what we have not gained will be lost, since there will be no second opportunity to gain it.

This understanding corresponds exactly to the teaching of Jesus when He was on the earth. He plainly said: “Whoever desires to save his life shall lose it” (Mt 16:25 also Mt 10:39, Lk 9:24, 17:33, Jn 12:25). This word “life” here is PSUCHE or “soul life.” Significantly, this verse is recorded five times in the Bible. Nothing could be more clear. If you love yourself, and resist the transforming, purifying work of the Holy Spirit within you, then this natural PSUCHE life will be lost! This does not refer to your physical life. It does not mean physical death. It is not talking about being a martyr. It means your soul. In fact, some translations say just this: “He that saves his soul shall lose it.” The natural, sinful elements which remain in your being will be consumed by the presence of an intensely holy God at His coming. They will be lost. It is one of the promises of God! Count on it being true.

## **THE LAND OF PROMISE**

To further illustrate this point, let us go back again to the children of Israel and the land of promise, Canaan. God gave them this land. He gave it freely and without cost. He defined the boundaries beforehand, showing them the length and breadth and width of the land which they could inherit (Num 34:3-12). Yet, there was one condition. These people had to day by day, step by step, according to the leading of the Holy Spirit enter into this land and take possession of it. They could not simply sit on the far side of the Jordan river and proclaim that they owned it. They could not just stay on the east side worshipping and thanking God for this great gift He had given them. In order to actually get it, they through faith and obedience had to go in and possess it. The same is true for us today in relation to our souls. Jesus explains, “By your endurance you shall be acquiring your souls” (Lk 21:19 Concordant Literal Translation). It is essential for every child of God to know and understand this truth.

Truly Jesus Christ has purchased for every believer a complete salvation. His death on the cross was sufficient to change us from one degree of glory to another into His exact image. He has defeated sin, death and the power of the devil. All His work

has been done. On the cross He stated: "It is finished" (Jn 19:30). Yet there remains a part for us to do. We must through faith and obedience enter into and possess that which He has freely given. It will do us no good simply to praise and thank God for His gift, while making no spiritual progress. These are not promises for a future "someday." Today is the day of salvation (II Cor 6:2). Today is the day to become "partakers of the divine nature" by laying hold of these "exceeding great and precious promises" (II Pet 1:4). We have before us a good land, let us go in and possess it!

If, on the other hand, we are unwilling to face the enemy, fight the battles, confront the giants in our lives and manifest His victory, we will not gain what is rightfully ours. Even though God had already given Israel their territory, they never did fully enter in and possess it. They failed to obey God and through fear and disobedience failed to enter completely into the promise. That which they gained, they had, but that which they did not conquer was lost to them. It is the same way with us today. There is no second chance. There is no magic transformation of the soul later on. If we do not gain Christ today and fill our soul to overflowing with Him, it will be too late when He comes. What we have gained is ours, but what we have not gained will be lost to us unless we repent and press on into it today. "Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it" (Heb 4:1).

As far as I can tell, almost all Christians believe in some degree of transformation. That is, they believe that they can be changed to some extent or other by the work of the Holy Spirit. Many admit the necessity to be delivered from some outward, more "gross" sins. Some even speak of a further holiness. However, many believers in today's church also seem to think that this process is optional or not really that important. Many believe that no matter what the state of our inner being or soul is when the Lord returns, all problems will be resolved and all sinful tendencies and habits changed "in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye" (I Cor 15:52). Although few will admit it, this tends to lead to an attitude something like this: "Well, it doesn't really matter if I am not completely holy. It doesn't really matter if I am still "a little" envious, lustful, untruthful, angry, greedy, gossipy, jealous or any of these other things. When Jesus comes, all this will be changed instantly, so why bother worrying about my condition now? After all, everyone else seems to be full of sin too. God forgives me. Why should I try to be holy now when I will get it all without effort later?" Although some teach that there is still a question of "rewards," this factor does not seem to motivate many in our present society.

But surely some will ask, "What about being changed in a twinkling of an eye?" This is a wonderful verse, but it is not referring to our soul. If you read the context, you will realize that it is speaking about our bodies. Truly, our bodies will be changed instantly to be like Jesus. They will be glorified immediately when Jesus comes. But concerning the soul, the scriptures are also clear, "Now is the day of salvation" (II Cor 6:2). This should make perfect sense to a right thinking person. Why should Paul for example "die daily," deny himself, "press forward," "discipline his body" and all these other things if all he really needed to do was wait for the magic day when he would be instantly changed to be like Jesus? I have even heard Christians teach that they have a "deeper revelation" than Paul and that he didn't need to suffer at all. This sort of nonsense will stop quickly when Jesus appears in power and glory. Those who are spouting such foolishness will begin to pray to the rocks and mountains to fall on them and hide them from the intense, burning presence of God Almighty (Rev 6:16). "Knowing, therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (II Cor 5:11).

With this in mind, let us now investigate further what the word of God says about this subject. We know without a doubt that when Jesus returns we will all appear before His judgment seat (II Cor 5:10) and there we will give account concerning what we have done. On that "Day" our works will be "revealed by fire." If our works pass the test, we will "receive a reward" but if our works are defective, they will be burned up (I Cor 3: 12-15).

### **YET SO AS THROUGH FIRE**

But let us look more closely at verse 15. We read that the person whose works were lost was indeed saved, "yet so as through the fire." So we see that not only do our works pass through the fire, but we also will be tested by the flame! We too will go through the fire. What fire is this? It is nothing less than the presence of God! "For our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:29). The burning intensity of what He is will analyze and reveal the contents of what we are. This is the true test. If what we are inwardly is pure—that is, full of the life, nature and essence of God—it will pass. Nothing could destroy this. If instead we are full of the old life and nature, it will be consumed by His fiery presence. Remember that He is not just a fire, but a consuming fire. Without a doubt what will be consumed before His throne is anything which is not holy and righteous and pure—anything which does not correspond to what He Himself is. In fact, if you stop to think about it this must be so. Obviously nothing which is unholy could endure in God's presence.

God must eliminate all sin from His people. When God created the world of Adam and Eve, it was without sin. However, just one sin, just one, destroyed forever the whole creation which He had made. In the same way, if the sinful life and nature is allowed to enter into the new creation of God, sooner or later it will produce sin (See Chapter 4). And this one sin would pollute forever this new creation. Therefore, when He comes, if we are still full of our own sinful life, something must be done.

The Scriptures ask "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings" (Is 33:14, 15)? The answer is given: "He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, he who despises the gain of oppressions, who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes, who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed, and shuts his eyes from seeing evil." This indicates righteous people, those who are filled with God and allowing Him to live His life through them.

In the book of Revelation we are presented with an amazing spectacle. We see a group of men and women standing on a sea of glass mingled with fire (Rev 15:2). They are standing in the middle of a fiery inferno. But what location is this? In fact, it is the transparent pavement directly in front of the throne of God (see Ex 24:10, Ezek 28:14). They are in the very presence of God. And in this awesome Presence it is as though everything is burning with fire. Yet these special people are comfortable there. They are unaffected by the flame. In fact, they are worshipping, singing the song of Moses in the presence of God Almighty. Remember also the three young friends of Daniel the prophet who were thrown into the fiery furnace. These were holy people. They had given their lives completely to God. Therefore, by the grace of God, they were unaffected by the flame. These things still speak to us today.

### **THE BAPTISM OF FIRE**

John the Baptist declared: "I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier

than I am coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His threshing floor" (Lk 3:16,17). Here we find a strange pronouncement. John says that God's Son, Jesus Christ the Savior of the world, is coming and when He comes He is going to baptize men and women with fire. What is the meaning of this fire? Why is it that God would want to pour out fire from heaven upon those who believe in Him? God desires to purify His sons. He not only wants to gather from among men those who will believe, but He also desires to purge and purify them so that when they appear before Him, they will be holy. I believe that this baptismal fire is the same as the refiner's fire mentioned elsewhere in the scriptures (See Mal 3:2,3; Zech 13:9) which is an intensely hot, glowing bed of coals. It is this kind of fire that a gold or silversmith would use to purge all the impurities from the metals with which he is working. In this same way God is baptizing us with His fire to cleanse us, to purify us and to make us ready for His appearing.

Jesus said: "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled" (Lk 12:49 NIV)! There is no doubt that God wants to purify His children. He not only wants to save them from what they have done but also from what they are. He wants to purify them inwardly so that they will be of the same nature and substance as He. Ephesians says "that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish." Such a thing requires the baptism of fire. Not only must we be baptized with the Holy Spirit to fill us with God's life and power, but we also must be baptized with fire—that purifying, refining, inward burning which melts us, changes us, burns away the dross and causes us to be like Him.

You see, every believer will experience the fire of God, today and in the future. If we spend time in His presence, this will occur now because truly He is "a consuming fire." However, if we avoid intimate contact with Him, then this essential experience will be reserved for the future when there is no possibility of gain. The fire of God is something through which we can pass today if we are willing and ready. This will prepare us for the fire of His presence in the future. If we allow Him to do His purifying work within us now, then at His appearing we will have nothing to fear. If we allow Him to thoroughly search and purify our soul, then we will have become transformed like the petrified wood in chapter 6 and therefore immune to any further burning.

Does this mean that a believer will "go to hell?" No, we are not saying any such thing. Neither does the Bible. Here we read nothing about losing eternal ZOE life. At the judgment seat of Christ no one is "thrown into the lake of fire" but the antichrist and the false prophet. The question here is not one of "heaven or hell." What we are seeing here is that there is some serious "loss" for unprepared Christians. It is the loss of the soul or PSUCHE life. This is the irrevocable destruction of all the natural life with the sinful nature.

So then a reasonable question might be: "What is the end result of such a judgment? How does this ultimately affect a believer?" It is clear that with every believer who stands before the judgment seat of Christ, at least something will be saved (I Cor 3:15) regardless of the loss. At the minimum, it will be the human spirit which has been reborn and joined with the Spirit of God. Paul speaks of someone who was to be delivered "to satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (I Cor 5:5). Also, most believers will have attained at least some degree of spiritual growth. That is, some amount of supernatural transformation will have taken place, some quantity of eternal substance will have been

deposited. This also will not and indeed cannot be burned. Any and every part of the soul which has been transformed will endure. Whatever has been saturated and permeated with God's life is by definition eternal. What we have gained surely is gained forever, but the old life and nature will be lost.

## SPIRITUAL MATURITY

But how will this affect us? How can we understand these things? Various places in the scriptures, we read about levels or stages of spiritual growth. (See: Eph 4:15, I Pet 2:2, II Pet 3:18 and I Jn 2:12-14.) We read of "babes in Christ," spiritual "young men" and even "fathers," thus indicating "levels" of maturity. I believe that these things are not just figures of speech, but refer to spiritual realities. Therefore, it is logical to suppose that the degree of spiritual maturity which we attain in this life by faithful obedience to the Holy Spirit will be our eternal state when Jesus comes. In other words, if we remain "babes" in Christ, we will be forever babes. If we press on a little to gain some maturity, this too will be our eternal state. All the rest will be lost and burned up by His presence. If on the other hand, we press on to know the Lord and reach some degree of adulthood spiritually, we will forever be thankful and suffer little if any loss at His coming.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is our reward. We will not receive silver or gold or other material rewards in eternity. God Himself is our reward. He said to Abraham, "I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward" (Gen 15:1). Do you understand this? In His presence, nothing else has any value. He is the One whom we will supremely enjoy. The psalmist clearly says: "In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Ps 16:11). Believe it, it is true. He is and will be our reward. But think about this also. Everyone's ability to enjoy this glorious experience and therefore their reward, will be governed by their maturity.

This is just exactly as it is in this present life. I remember going to a sports event with my children and another large family. Everyone had fun but not everyone had the same experience. The little children enjoyed crawling around under the seats finding interesting stuff. The somewhat older children had fun playing around with each other. The older children and the adults actually enjoyed watching the sport. You see, in eternity everyone will enjoy God, but each one's reward will be based upon their spiritual maturity. And this spiritual maturity goes hand in hand with their "works" which they did while they were on the earth.

Did you know that all believers will be with the Lord forever, but not everyone will be the same? The spiritual maturity of which we spoke will manifest itself in splendid, radiant glory. Daniel 12:3 reads: "Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever." Further each one will have a certain quantity of this glory. Each one will shine with his or her own degree of brightness, depending upon their degree of faithfulness and transformation. Remembering that the original texts were not separated into verses with numbers, let us read from I Cor 15: 41,42. ". . . for [as] one star differs from another star in [the degree of] glory, so also is the resurrection of the dead." What is gained of Christ today will be revealed when He comes. For eternity, each one will exhibit a different degree of glory.

It may be that these thoughts are new to you and that you find them somewhat startling. Therefore I would like to urge you not to simply react to this emotionally. Search the scriptures for yourself. Pray about these things. Review these thoughts after

some time has passed. I believe that God will give you grace to see that there is more to “salvation” than we have thought in the past. There is more to the Divine revelation in God’s word than has been preached. Truly, we need to press on to know the Lord and give our attention to spiritual things lest at any time we drift away from them (Heb 2:1).

## WHAT ABOUT PERFECTION?

Undoubtedly some will ask, “What about perfection. Is it possible then for a Christian to become perfect? Could it be that when Jesus comes, some will suffer no loss whatsoever?” To answer these questions we must look closely at what the scriptures have to say. We cannot look around us and judge this issue from the condition of others. Neither can we look at ourselves to decide what is right. Our answer must come from the word of God, which we know to be true. Let us read from I Thessalonians 5:23, 24. “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it. (NKJV)” Paul here is uttering a kind of intercession—a prayer for these Christians whom he loves. And praying in this way, he shows that he has faith that as they are faithful to God, God also will be faithful to perform this glorious work within them.

Let us think about it in this way. If the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus were not powerful enough to completely transform us, then we need to ask Him to come back and complete the job. If all that He accomplished on the cross was only good enough to change us partially, then we must immediately begin a world-wide prayer movement and ask Him to please come back and do what is necessary to finish the work. To deny the power of God to change any and every human being completely is to deny that His work was sufficient. This is not the case. Indeed, “It is finished” (Jn 19:30)! On His side, Jesus has done everything necessary for our transformation and sanctification. On our side, we only need to continue to seek His face until the coming day. We can be confident that “He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him” (Heb 7:27).

This, in fact, was Paul the apostle’s goal. He says: “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me” (Philip 3:12). You see, Paul had seen something. He had seen the glorious, risen Lord and he was focused with every fiber of his being on “laying hold” of the perfection he had seen. Not only was he pursuing this but he was also consumed with helping and urging others to arrive at the same place too. In Colossians 1:28,29 we read: “Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to the working which works in me mightily.”

Jesus Himself exhorts us: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Mt 5:48 KJV). This is the standard, the perfection of God Himself. While we have seen that the efforts of the flesh will never and in fact can never meet this lofty goal, we have also been seeing that it is indeed possible. It is accomplished simply by receiving and living by another Life. We must be careful not to take our example from those around us but from God Himself. Paul plainly rebukes this type of error saying: “But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise” (II Cor 10:12). If we aim at nothing, we are sure to hit it.

It is unfortunately true that we see very few Christians who are living a life free from sin and exhibiting the supernatural Life. Sadly, most believers are not entering in and possessing all that God has for them. Perhaps one reason for this is that they do not know that there is this possibility of being made perfect. Beyond the new birth, they have no notion that there is anything more to be gained or lost. Truly God has said: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6). There is most certainly a great darkness covering the church of our day. While many think that they are perhaps the most spiritually enlightened generation, even this most essential truth about the salvation of the soul is almost completely lacking and/or misunderstood.

Let us be very clear here that I am not teaching "sinless perfection"—the thought that we might arrive at a place in this life where we could never sin. One factor that makes this impossible is that we still have a fallen body. This body is a "body of sin" (Rm 6:6). It has natural, fleshly appetites. The desire for food, comfort, sex and many other things will always be with us as long as we are in this body. This will only be changed when Jesus comes. This is why Paul teaches that we must exercise spiritual dominion over our body. He says: "I discipline my body and bring it into subjection" (I Cor 9:27). Also we read that he longed to be free from this sinful body and receive another heavenly, pure body (II Cor 5:2,4). This is because the more he became purified inwardly and filled with God's life, the more he realized that this earthly body is not a worthy container for this precious substance. The sinful body became an increasingly weary burden.

Dear brothers and sisters, the salvation of the soul is indeed a serious subject. The consequences of what we have been discussing here are eternal. There is no time to waste. There will be no second chance. Therefore, we need to be encouraging one another more and more as we see the day approaching (Heb 10:25). By the grace and mercy of God may we not be among "those who draw back to destruction, but of those who believe to the [complete] saving of the soul" (Heb 10:39).