

10.

FORGIVENESS AND JUDGMENT

We have been investigating in this book various truths concerning the Kingdom of God – both the present aspects of it and the coming Millennium. Among these truths is the fact that not all of God's children are living in a manner which will qualify them to participate in the coming Kingdom reign of Christ. Although they will be "saved" and be with the Lord in eternity, they will not enter into the coming Kingdom. A kind of brief summary of these things is found in II Timothy were we read:

For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we will also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself. (II Tim 2:11-13)

God will judge His people (Heb 10:30). It is not possible that God could righteously judge the world, if He does not first judge His own house. In fact, the scriptures reveal clearly that judgment will begin in the house of God (I Pet 4:17). Today we live in what is known as "the age of grace." In His marvelous goodness, God has suspended His judgment. He has overlooked our sins and is not dealing with us in the manner we deserve. The grace of God is one of the predominate features of this church age. Unfortunately, many have become deceived by this. They have begun to imagine that since our Lord is not judging their sin today, He never will. Since they do not experience the judgment of God falling on them when they sin (besides, perhaps, a troubled conscience) they suppose that God must not see or care very much about what they

do. What they are failing to understand is that the goodness of God should lead them to repentance (Rm 2:4). Instead of deluding them into thinking that there will never be a judgment, it should cause them to love Him more and give themselves ever more into His hands so that the sin within them could be removed. They should use the grace of God which is available today to be freed from their sin, not to continue in it.

We have already studied in this book some of the adverse consequences of disobedience which is unbelief. Among them are: being left out of the Millennial Kingdom of Christ (Mt 25:1-14), being cast into outer darkness (Mt 25:14-30), and being beaten with many stripes (Lk 12:35-48). As we have seen, these punishments are only for believers, since they are received before the judgment seat of Christ. Here, we can be quite certain there are no unbelievers present. These judgments are very profound and extremely prolonged.

Such things are written for us so that we have within us a healthy amount of godly fear. We read that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Pr 1:7). The fear of the Lord is one of the most important elements for a healthy Christian experience. It is essential for every believer to have within them the clear understanding that the things of God are not a game. We are not believing in some fairy tale. These precious, eternal things which are available to us are extremely important and the neglect of them has the most serious consequences. The writers of the New Testament teach about the coming judgments specifically for the purpose of generating within us the fear of God.

One of the many examples of this is found in II Cor 5:10,11. Here Paul is speaking about the future judgment of believers. We read: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." Here we read about something called "the terror of the Lord." From the context we are forced to conclude that this is not something for unbeliev-

ers but for Christians. It is not speaking here about unbelieving sinners being cast into the lake of fire (which will happen 1,000 years later) but about children of God being judged by their Father. Here there is room for "terror." Here we must have a good dose of holy fear of the consequences for our rebellion against Him and our resistance of His work in our lives. Understanding this, Paul says that he does his best to persuade men and women to repent from their present evil pursuits and serve God.

Such godly fear is an essential ingredient in every believer's life. We should serve the Lord with great "reverence and godly fear" (Heb 12:28). Without it, we will not progress spiritually, not seek the Lord the way we should and end up only deceiving ourselves. The fear of the Lord is a very healthy thing. It will cleanse our lives. It will help us in times of trial, suffering and pain to endure and persevere. It will cause us to seek the face of God with all of our heart so that we do not suffer these negative consequences in the future. Psalm 19:9 says that "the fear of the Lord is clean." It really does have a cleansing effect. When we fear God in a proper way, we orient our lives with His judgment seat in view. We both love Him and respect Him so that we live in obedient service to Him.

We should all understand clearly that the punishments which believers suffer both today and in the future (if they continue in disobedience) are remedial. This means that since God loves all His children, He will use the afore mentioned means and methods for their good in the course of time. Although it is clear and the consequences of disobedience in the Millennium are extremely severe and of long duration, in fact we really deserve worse. If it were not for the grace of God and His goodness, we would all be cast into the lake of fire. But through Jesus Christ, we have become sons of God and so are not going to be forever damned or "lost." However, it is a certainty that we will be disciplined by our Heavenly Father (Heb 12:6). Those who do not respond to this discipline in this lifetime will need further treatment when Jesus comes.

Even though there are many, many verses in the New Testament which demonstrate these things clearly, it is not

a subject which is commonly understood or taught. Since it is something very new for many people, it is possible that some may misunderstand because their previous concepts get in the way of their comprehension of the truth. Much of the church today does not have the fear of God but instead a whole series of half-truths and misunderstandings. Many are emphasizing only one side of the gospel of grace and neglect any verses which do not please them. The grace of God and the goodness of God have often been taken to an extreme where they cease to be true.

THE BLOOD OF JESUS

One modern example of such teaching is about the blood of Jesus. While the blood of Jesus is most precious and this author would never think of trying to diminish the potency and effectiveness of it, today there are some popular errors concerning this subject which need to be corrected. Some have emphasized one part of the truth and neglected the other, thus producing a lopsided and therefore incorrect teaching. For example: While meditating on the Word of God, some teachers have noticed that Jesus died for the sins of the whole world. He died once and died for all. In one act of redemption, Jesus shed His blood so that the whole world could be saved. From this they conclude that once we "accept Jesus" all of our sins are forgiven – past, present and future. They reason that since our judgment has fallen upon Jesus, God no longer can see any of our sin and could not possibly judge us in any way. Since He has died once for all, then every single sin of every person is already forgiven. All man has to do, they insist, is sort of give a nod of acknowledgement to this fact, or in other words "believe it" and then we are "saved" and on our way to heaven.

The problem with this view is that it is only one-sided. Every equation has two sides. Every relationship involves more than one person. So it is too with the forgiveness available to us through the blood of Jesus. God indeed has done His part. On His side, "it is finished" (Jn 19:30). However, there still exists our part to play. According to God's word, we also must do some things. One of the most obvious is that we must repent. If we are not repentant,

then God will not forgive us. We are taught that it is necessary for us to “draw near [to God] with a true [sincere] heart” (Heb 10:22). This means that we must be wholehearted in our sorrow and repentance. When God sees our sincerity, then our forgiveness is abundantly provided. If we are not sincere, He also will not grant forgiveness. Under the Old Testament law, God did not accept the sacrifices of unrepentant sinners. If someone was fully intending to keep on with their sin, simply killing an innocent animal would not relieve them of their just judgment before God. He considered them hypocrites. In the same way today, those who are not repentant will not be forgiven. Although, if they have received Christ they have been rescued from eternal damnation, they have not escaped the just reward which God will give them when He comes.

When you think honestly about this, it becomes clear that on our side, all of our sins cannot possibly be already forgiven. For one thing, we have not done them yet, so we have not had the opportunity to confess them and repent for them. Only by confession and repentance can the way be opened for forgiveness. In I Jn (1:9) we are told: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” The word “if” here is an important factor in the equation. On our side of the relationship, we must confess our sin to receive forgiveness. It is then on God’s side to liberate His wonderful forgiveness.

The word “confess” here does not merely mean admitting that we did something wrong. For example, we might “confess” to a friend some dark deed we have done, actually feeling somewhat proud of the fact. But the confession required here is confessing before the Judge what we have done, knowing that He has the power to pass sentence upon us. It is the kind of confession of guilt, where the confessor admits that he or she is worthy of death and is standing before the Judge hoping only for mercy.

Elsewhere in I John we also encounter another important “if.” We read that “if we walk in the light, as He is in the light...the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (I Jn 1:7). Here we see that there is a necessity on our part to “walk in the light” if we are to receive

cleansing from our sins. But what does this mean? It means that day by day we are walking in communion with Jesus and enjoying His presence. If and when we sin, we are immediately conscious of it because we sense the disapproval of God through the Spirit. Then we can repent and receive forgiveness. If we refuse to repent, then this breaks our fellowship with Him. Our relationship is damaged and we are no longer walking in the light. The "if" no longer is in force. The consequence of this is that our sin is not being forgiven and we are in danger of the coming judgment.

Another clear passage which shows that we have our part to do to receive forgiveness is where we read that if we do not forgive others who sin against us, God will not forgive us (Mt 6:14,15). If all our sins are already forgiven, how can it be that God will not forgive us? Here again, we see that forgiveness is not automatic and universal. On our side of the relationship, we need to be obedient to God, forgiving of others and repenting for the sins which we do. On His side, He gives us full and free forgiveness.

Certainly forgiveness is available for any and every sin. However, as wise children of God, we are not trying to take advantage of the situation and sin as much as we please hoping that sometime later we can repent, be forgiven and escape our just punishment. We read that: "If we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, for a certain fearful expectation of judgment" (Heb 10:26,27). You see, when we become hypocrites and not truly repentant, but merely try to take advantage of the grace of God, His sacrifice no longer is available to us. The Father will not allow us to abuse His goodness and take advantage of the precious blood of His Son. He will never think of relieving those who do not have a right heart attitude of their just punishment. These sins have not "already been forgiven" and in fact will not be.

It must be said here that "sinning willfully" is not referring to those occasionally sin, even when they know it is wrong. Most of the time when we sin, we already know that it is sin. Yet afterwards, we are convicted and repent before God. This passage is not addressing this kind of sit-

uation. However, there are those who persist in their sin. They know their error, but they continue on rebelling against God. For example, perhaps their sinful relationship with a member of the opposite sex is something they love more than God. They refuse to give it up. Possibly their drug use or excessive drinking is more valuable to them than their intimacy with Jesus. They persist in their rebellion. For some such as these, their sin has become an ingrained habit. They stubbornly refuse to repent and turn their hearts to their Maker for forgiveness. For them, there is only waiting for the day of judgment.

Only God knows where His limits are. Only He knows how the human heart works. Only He knows when we have pushed beyond the point where our sincere repentance is no longer an option. He is surely aware when we have toyed with the eternal truths, not valuing them as essential and so hardened our heart to the point where we can no longer repent in sincerity and truth. Is there such a point? John in his epistles seems to indicate this. He says, "there is sin leading to death" (I Jn 5:16). Further he indicates that even our prayers for this person will not be effective.

Esau was such a case. He sold his birthright for temporary, sensual gratification. In his situation it was food, but there are many parallels in our present evil world. Referring to Esau, the author of Hebrews specifically mentions fornication (vs 16). Afterwards, Esau sought repentance with tears but was not able to find it (Heb. 12:17). How many of God's children are today in such a state? They have gone against God and their conscience so long and to such a point that they are no longer even able to repent with sincerity. They have abused the grace of God so long that it no longer has any effect. Theirs is only a "fearful expectation of judgment" (Heb 10:27).

Further in this chapter of Hebrews (10:28-31) we read: "Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For

we know Him who said, 'vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord'. 'And again, 'The Lord will judge His people.'"

That this passage is speaking about believers is clear. These people were "sanctified" by the blood. Only born-again Christians are sanctified. Also, we read that the Lord will judge "His people." Please do not ignore these important truths. Do not make the mistake of trying to escape the obvious consequences of disobedience by misapplying these verses to unbelievers. To continue on in sin which you know is wrong is to insult God's Spirit, cheapen the value of the blood by trying to abuse it, grinding Jesus along with His sacrifice for you under your feet.

But some may argue, "what could be worse punishment than the death mentioned in this passage?" To answer this, let me tell you a little story. My wife and I were involved for a short time with a mission ship which was making trips to Haiti. Since there was some sailing time for those working with the mission, from time to time, the subject of seasickness came up. Those who were new to the mission, including myself, were often concerned that they might get sick and if they did, how bad would it be. One helpful individual there who had had a lot of time at sea explained it this way. He said, "There are three stages of seasickness. The first stage is where you begin to feel queasy, turn green and begin to vomit. The second stage is when you are feeling so bad you think that you are going to die. The third stage is when you begin to be afraid that you won't die and that this will continue on forever." You see, there are things worse than death. Among these things is suffering which never seems to end. One thousand years is a long time and I'm sure that no one will enjoy the punishment which God will give to His children who are disobedient. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:31).

Another error concerning the blood of Jesus goes something like this: "Since we have become Christians, God no longer sees our sin. We are completely covered by the blood so that the Father no longer knows when we sin, but only sees Jesus." This is plain foolishness. It has no scriptural basis. In fact, the Bible teaches just the opposite. We

read: "All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Heb 4:13). Every single thing we do, say or think is as obvious and plain as it could be to our Lord. "All things" are clear to Him. We also are taught: "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Pr 15:3 KJV). God "understands our thought afar off" (Ps 139:2). Dear brothers and sisters, we must live with the judgment seat in view. We must live and walk in the light of His countenance so that every attitude, action and word is available for His inspection and approval. It is very true that when we confess and repent of our sins, they are removed forever. However, it is just as true that they will not be removed if we are not contrite and repentant.

Forgiveness from sin is abundantly available for every believer. It is one of the most fundamental truths revealed in the Bible. It is our privilege, as children of God, to come before Him, confess our sins in true repentance, and receive everlasting forgiveness. None of our many sins which are forgiven in such a manner will ever be remembered by God. They are removed forever as far as the east is from the west (Ps 103:12). Before His judgment seat, no such sins will be a factor. We can have complete confidence in this fact and rest our conscience on His everlasting grace.

Therefore, beloved brothers and sisters, let us come continually before the throne of God and repent for our sins before it is too late. Let us take seriously His offer of mercy and grace and humble our hearts before Him while it is still "today" (Heb 3:13). God loves us. He sent His Son to die in our place. If we are weak, He will help us. When we feel unable, He can strengthen us to do His will. Our failure and weakness should not become an excuse for not seeking God's will and grace with all of our hearts. As we walk with Him in intimate communion, we should always be quick to repent for anything which He shows us is against His holy nature. Our repentance will open the way for His life to flow in us and through us to cleanse us. Not only will our God freely forgive us, but He will also work to change us from what we are into all that He is. This is a

wonderful promise. It will be for us also a great liberty. We can be forgiven and freed from sin.

UNDERSTANDING THE KINGDOM

Hopefully, this chapter will be of some help to the readers in understanding the plans and purposes of God in a clearer way. Without such revelation, it is easy to become very confused when trying to understand certain Bible passages. Some, for example, have mistakenly tried to apply the many Kingdom verses to the subject of our eternal life. Not realizing the place of the Millennial Kingdom in God's plan, they try to understand many of the verses mentioned in this chapter in light of our eternal destiny. In doing so they have devised a very insecure and confusing theology. Having read the verses about judgment and punishment, they have been honest enough to admit that these must apply to believers. But not realizing the truth about Kingdom, they have been led to suppose that a child of God can lose his or her eternal life.

Many of these teachers also see the great necessity of the fear of God. To them, the "once saved, always saved" viewpoint seems to take away all the fear of the Lord and therefore much of our motivation to flee the pleasures of the world and sin. So they cite some of these verses to try to prove that some of God's children will be lost. However, many of the verses which the "lose your salvation" teachers use to prove their points are actually passages about the coming Kingdom.

As we have said, the fear of the Lord is essential. It is an ingredient which seems to be largely lost on the church of our day. It is something which desperately needs to be restored among God's people. However, to help believers know this fear, we must teach what is true. Any doctrine which is not the truth, has no power to really change the hearts of the hearers. For example, some teach that believers can lose their eternal life if they sin. But sinning Christians often have a incongruous experience. Their conscience bothers them, perhaps intensely at times, but they do not feel "lost." They still sense something of the presence of God in their spirit. So, although they may believe

with their mind that they are lost, their heart tells them something different. Although they know what they are doing is wrong, they often comfort themselves that God has not left them completely. The teaching they are receiving and their experience do not match up. True fear of the Lord is not generated in this way.

Another problem which is encountered when teaching that our salvation can be lost through sin is, how much sin is necessary? How "bad" a sin or how many sins do we have to do before we are really lost? Seemingly, it should be a really evil sin or a great quantity of sin to qualify for such awful results. This then leaves free of much condemnation those who have few or no overt sins but are really resisting the Lord in many areas of their lives. They are disobedient, but not in any way obvious enough for others to really notice. Perhaps those close to them realize there is some problem, but most of the other believers they know think that they are O.K. This kind of teaching only touches on the most obvious kinds of sins but does not penetrate into the heart and demand complete submission to the King. It does not generate the true fear of the Lord. Many churches which believe in losing their salvation are full of gossip, lying, lust, dissension, envy, murmuring, hate, jealousy, pride and many other such things. Yet no one believes or teaches that these members have lost their salvation.

The teaching of losing our eternal life is meant to generate the kind of respect for God which will purify the lives of the adherents. But in my experience, it does not. If we were to honestly compare the amount of sin found in churches which believe in eternal security with those who do not, I think that the results would be the same. If we could leave aside such external factors such as dress codes or superficial practices, the sins of the heart are evidenced in equal quantities in both kinds of groups. Human beings are the same in every different setting.

Still another factor which enters in to this discussion is the gifts of God. When we minister to others using the spiritual gifts which our Lord has given us, there is often a powerful sense of the anointing and of His presence. When

we sin, or are living in known sin, this anointing on our gifts is not always taken away. Let us take the example of a preacher who also has a gift of healing. When he preaches, he senses a powerful anointing on his words and many people are healed through his ministry.

But let us suppose that this brother falls into sin. He begins to have a sexual relationship with one of the church members with whom he is not married. Naturally, his conscience condemns him. But when he gets up to preach, the anointing is there. He still “feels” the presence of God in the use of his ministry gift. Perhaps some people are still getting healed. So, he comforts himself with this fact. He is not lost. God has not left him. Perhaps even, he supposes, his sin is not so bad or is being “allowed by God” because of his special position, circumstance or need. Of course this is a lie, but it is easy to deceive ourselves, especially when our doctrine is faulty from the start.

While some may insist that any one living in known sin could not experience power in their areas of gifting, the experience of many believers through the years tells a different story. Countless men and women of God have found themselves in just such a position. They have fallen into sin, but still know that to some extent God has not left them. Their gifts still “work.” They still sense an anointing. So, they cling to their experiences and try to justify themselves in their own minds and hearts. What is needed in these cases is the gospel of the Kingdom. These brothers and sisters need desperately to know the truth. God is not mocked (Gal 6:7). They cannot continue to “serve the Lord” and live in known sin. They will reap exactly what they are sowing when Jesus comes. Unless they repent, they will be brought into judgment for these things and be punished by their heavenly Father for them.

It is not the intention of this book to try to address subject of eternal security in any intensive or complete way. However, it is my hope that many readers will through this text have some new light with which to interpret the Bible in a clear, cohesive way. I would also like to recommend for a better understanding of the complete picture, my book *From Glory to Glory*, which examines in greater

detail the subject of salvation.

What will cause believers to fear God is a good dose of His truth, preached under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. How much we need the revelation of the New Testament apostles concerning the Kingdom of God and His coming judgment of His people. The gospel of the Kingdom was something which was well understood by the churches of Paul's day. We will do well if we practice and preach it also.

