



# CHRISTIAN DESTINY

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## Lesson One

### IF A MAN DIE, SHALL HE LIVE AGAIN?

The question heading this lesson, which was propounded in the long ago by Job, the afflicted servant of God (Job 14:14), is one that reflective, contemplative men of every race, nationality, and culture have sought an answer to throughout the ages. Recognizing the brevity of this present life, the passing, transitory nature of the world, and the certainty of death, they have been deeply concerned about the concept of immortality, of existence beyond the grave. In being true to their best instincts, they have found it exceedingly difficult to accept the conclusion that death ends it all. They instinctively rebel at the thought of the sum total of their existence being limited to the proverbial threescore and ten years, of the grave being the end of all their strivings, ambitions, and aspirations. It is the basic thesis of this series of lessons that the foundation of belief in a future life is deeply imbedded in human nature, in that part of man made in the image of God.

#### *Innate Longing for Eternal Life*

It is a truism that the Creator has made possible the satisfaction of every genuine human desire. He has provided food to satisfy hunger, drink to satisfy thirst, love to satisfy the longing for love, etc. Since the longing for unending life beyond the grave is also a genuine human desire, is it not therefore entirely reasonable to conclude that such a longing exists because there is a future life, just as there is hunger because there is food to satisfy it, thirst because there is drink to satisfy it, the longing for love because there is love to satisfy it, etc.? Can any rational human being be so blind to reality as to believe that men are so made that they hunger, thirst, and long for love, etc., but that God has made no provision for their satisfaction? But what about the conclusion some have drawn that there is no life beyond the grave, that even though there is implanted in the hearts of men an innate longing for perpetuity of life, the Creator has made no provision for its satisfaction? It would be as logical to believe that there is no food, drink, or love, etc. in the world to satisfy man's desire for them as to believe that there is no future life to satisfy man's desire for it.

#### *Incompleteness of Earthly Life*

The incompleteness of life in this world suggests a future one. Man's innate sense of justice, of what is right, causes him to feel that something is needed to complete this life elsewhere. Many have had little more than pain and sorrow in this life. Is there no possibility of something better for them beyond death? Infants and children die, never to realize any of the satisfactions of living that come with maturity. Is there nothing

else for them? Even the happiest, most useful and fruitful lives seem incomplete to those who live them, with ideals that can never be realized in this world. Can it be that death shall put the final seal of irretrievable ruin on all man's incompleting earthly life? What an utter failure life is if death ends it all!

### ***Fellowship With God***

A powerful argument that can be made in favor of a future life is based upon belief in the reality of God and the value He places on His highest creation man, with the consequent fellowship that each individual can have with Him in true religion. When a person who believes in the reality of God recognizes that he is made in the image of God, having in himself the spark of divinity and being of more worth than the entire physical universe, and that he can therefore come into fellowship with God, the idea of all existence ending at the grave is unthinkable to him. Everyone who denies the doctrine of personal immortality is denying the intrinsic value that resides in human personality. Either he is doubting the reality of the Creator God, or he is holding it possible that God should desire the annihilation of the souls He has made, which means that he does not believe that if there be a God He places any high value on human beings.

True religion is the experience of responding to the love God has for all human beings and coming into fellowship with Him. One of the meanings ascribed to the word "religion," from the Latin *religio*, is binding. In true religion man is bound to God in fellowship: spirit meeting Spirit, the love of man responding to the love of God, man and God becoming friends. That is not mere fancy; it is *fact*, the experience of every human being who has experienced such holy, sacred, intimate fellowship with his Creator. It was the experience of Enoch, who "walked with God" (Genesis 5:24). It was the experience of Abraham, "the friend of God" (James 2:23). It was the experience of the apostles of Christ and of all the other saints who have ever lived. Now, can death put an end to this holy intimacy? Can the grave rob God of His friends? Is a coffin and a few feet of earth to be the finish of this holy and blessed fellowship? It is absolutely, totally unthinkable. To admit the possibility is to deny the God that loves us and the infinite worth of human personality in His sight. It is entirely incongruous that God should love us with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3), evoke our love, call us into His friendship and fellowship, and then cast us out like rubbish.

If death could snatch us from the fellowship of God, then it would prove itself mightier than God Himself. But genuine faith in and love for the all-powerful, all-loving Creator God declare that nothing, not even death, can ever remove men from the holy intimacy they enjoy with Him.

## ***Ought We to Want Eternal Life?***

In discussing the logic of immortality, we must be concerned not only as to whether we want eternal life but also whether we *ought* to want it, not only for ourselves but also for others. When we love others, we can readily understand why we *ought* to want eternal life for them. In certain moods a person may contemplate his own death and be tempted to say, "I do not care whether that is the end of me or not." But surely in *no* mood can a rational, loving person contemplate the death of the most precious soul he knows and say, "I do not care whether that is the end of him or not; the thing does not interest me." The former might be mistaken for humility; the latter could never be taken for anything but what it really is, *treason*. The man who can see a beloved friend or member of his family dying, believing that it is forever, and say, "I do not care," is a traitor to his beloved and to all that their love has brought them. *He has no right not to care.*

The question, then, that every person who denies existence beyond the grave must ask is not whether he is such as to be content with the belief that his beloved's life is extinguished forever like a flame, but whether that belief is such that he has any right to it. Any person who has any decency at all, who has known what it means to love and be loved, knows that there is only one answer that can be given to the question. No man who was not the worst kind of scoundrel could stand by his beloved's deathbed and say, or even think, that he was not interested in immortality. Try, if you can, to picture him, saying not merely, "For all I know" but, "For all I know or *care*, this is the end of you, my dear!"

Surely, if one considers his loved ones of such inherent, infinite worth so that he must desire immortality for them, he can so consider himself also of such inherent, infinite worth that he must desire immortality for himself. The very contemplation of his beloved's immortality is found to involve the contemplation of his own. If in me is such inherent, infinite worth that I can be loved by others, and especially by God, surely I can recognize that personal worth myself so that I must desire immortality for myself.

This writer does not see, then, how it is possible to escape the conclusion that eternal life is something which it is the duty of all of us to desire for ourselves and for others. To be complacent about any prospect of extinction at death is to be disloyal to ourselves and to others. Not to wish that eternal life were available is without rhyme or reason.

## ***The Assurance of Love***

But do we have any reason to believe that the demand of love for continuity of life beyond the grave will be satisfied? Obviously we have no such reason if love is merely an incident of our fleshly beings, or as

someone has described it, "sublimated lust." But if we believe that the loyal love which human beings have for each other is a reflection of the perfect love of God, whose essential character is that of love (1 John 4:8), and not merely an animal emotion, then the answer to the question before us is obviously affirmative. Yes, if it be true that when we love one another the love that is God's character is shining through within us, then it is not difficult to believe that the immortality which love finds desirable is a reality. When our hearts and souls are lifted above the love of our fellow creatures to the knowledge of the source of all love, the love of God for us, the sense of the desirability of eternal life passes into a sure and certain conviction of its reality.

*In the discovery of the love of God the assurance of immortality is enclosed.* This conclusion is the fundamental teaching of the gospel, that wonderful message of eternal life in Christ Jesus which is predicated on the basis of God's love for all mankind. What Bible reader is unfamiliar with that text of texts, called the golden text of Bible, which expresses the heart of the gospel: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16)? Essentially the same thing is affirmed in 1 John 4:9,10, "Herein was the love of God manifested in us, that God hath sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

We who have responded by faith and love to the love God has for us in Christ, who believe in the Christian destiny of eternal life with God in heaven, must not only proclaim to all men the consummate tragedy of gaining the world and losing the soul, but also the infinite love God has for them and thus His desire that they enjoy eternal life with Him. As Paul declared in 1 Timothy 2:3,4, "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth." See 2 Peter 3:9. Preaching which is not saturated with the love of God for men that yearns for their salvation is not *gospel* preaching, not preaching that points men to heaven.

It is in God's love for us through the giving of His only begotten Son that we find the affirmative, unequivocal answer to Job's question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" The early Christians, whose triumphant faith in an eternal world with God has been such a wonderful inspiration to the church throughout the ages, definitely knew that they had found this answer in the gospel. They firmly believed that in the love of God which filled the heart of Christ and sent Him to His death they discovered the answer to the age-old question as to whether man would find eternal life beyond the grave. They believed that here the universal pattern of love was shining through. They could not think of the love of Christ as a merely human thing, but they were certain that *God was in it*. And because they knew that God was in the love of Christ they knew that it

would last forever. Behind the love of Christ they could discern the love of God, and in that discernment was the pledge of eternal life. Thus eternal life was from the very beginning of Christianity what some modern writer has called "a function of the friendship of God."

Nowhere is divine love, the grounds and quality of eternal life with God, more beautifully expressed than in Romans 8:35-39, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Even as it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we were accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The connection of Jesus Christ with the Christian destiny of heaven, whose coming to this world was the ultimate expression of God's love for mankind, is so basic and significant that we shall elaborate upon it in the next two lessons. The reader is requested to prepare his heart and mind for these lessons and the rest to follow by prayerfully and gratefully meditating upon the so great a love that caused God to give His only begotten Son as the means of saving him from his sins and giving him eternal life.

### ***The Present Mood***

In discussing the logic of existence beyond the grave in the Christian destiny of heaven, we must be aware that the present mood which so widely prevails in our materialistic society is time-oriented rather than eternity-oriented, that the innate desire for perpetuity of life beyond the grave has been squelched by many whose conscious thoughts are virtually entirely placed upon the life they are living in this present world. There are those who will plainly say, "I have no desire for immortality. I do not want eternal life." Others will vary the sentiment a little and say rather, "Eternal life does not interest me. My concern is with the life I know, and I cannot persuade myself to take an interest in an unknown future." While others have said, "It is morbid to think about death and what comes after death. There was something radically unhealthy about our forefathers' concentration on the prospect of another world. The only healthy temper is one which is resolved to make the best of our present passing day, looking forward not to a new dawn in another kind of world but to an improved condition of the present world in which our children and our children's children will have part after we ourselves have gone out into the dark."

In expressing his personal attitude concerning immortality, Clement Webb has undoubtedly voiced the feelings of many others in our society:



“My imagination is not easily persuaded to reach forward into a world so different from this as must be any reserved for us after death; it is rather repelled rather than attracted by the phraseology, so familiar to us in our religious literature, which expresses exultation in the expected catastrophe and overthrow of the present order of nature.”

### ***Responsibility of the Church***

It is with this mood that the church must contend in its preaching of the Christian destiny as revealed in the New Testament, of the hope that is held out by the gospel of Christ. The appeal that it makes in proclaiming the divine word must continually stress the infinite, inherent worth of human personality in the eyes of Him who made us and loves us; it must therefore unequivocally affirm that our prospect of perpetuity of life beyond the grave is based upon this perfect love and care our Creator has for us. It must unhesitatingly declare the words of our Lord, “For what shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? or what shall a man give in exchange for his life?” (Matthew 16:26).

### **Questions**

1. Discuss the truism that the Creator has made possible the satisfaction of every genuine human desire as an argument in favor of unending life beyond the grave.
2. Why does the incompleteness of our earthly life suggest a future one?
3. Discuss the fellowship that men can have with God as a powerful argument in favor of future life with Him.
4. Why *ought* we to want eternal life, both for ourselves and for others?
5. Discuss the assurance that love gives of eternal life.
6. Discuss the widespread mood in our materialistic society that has squelched in many the innate desire for perpetuity of life beyond the grave. In this regard, what is the responsibility of the church?

## CHRIST THE ANSWER (1)

As we pointed out in the preceding lesson, it is in the gospel, revealing the love of God in Christ, that we find the affirmative answer to the age-old question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" Since it is Christ's work on man's behalf that makes possible eternal life with God, His saving work being the essence of the gospel and expressing God's infinite love for mankind, it is obvious that Christ Himself is the answer to the question before us. If any person enjoys fellowship and life with God in this world and finally finds himself at home with Him in heaven, it is because he has accepted Christ as his Lord and Saviour. That is the unequivocal thesis of the gospel.

The New Testament is saturated with references to Jesus as the means of eternal life, that expressly designate Him as the way to God and heaven. One such reference which especially deserves our attention here is John 14:1-6, "Let not your heart be troubled: believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go, ye know the way. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; how know we the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am *the way*, and *the truth*, and *the life*: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me." Let us carefully consider each of these italicized words, which portray Jesus as man's only access to God and heaven.

### *The Way*

A way is a road between two points. Jesus claims to be the bond that unites man to God, the highway uniting earth and heaven. Everything involved in man's salvation, both in this world and in heaven, depends on Christ. Thus He declared, "I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and go out, and shall find pasture" (John 10:9).

Since Christ is *the way*, His saving work being the centrality of God's revelation to men, the entire gospel system is referred to in the divine word as "the Way" (Acts 19:9,23; 24:22). Thus when "the way of salvation" (Acts 16:17) is preached, Christ is exalted and portrayed as the *only* way that man has to the fellowship and friendship of God and to eternal life in heaven; for He alone can reconcile sinful man to God, making possible life with the Creator that can exist throughout all eternity. "But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses, and having committed unto us the word of reconciliation"

(2 Corinthians 5:18,19). When a person therefore accepts Christ as *the way*, he gives heed to the exhortation, "We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

Concerning Jesus as *the way*, Samuel Leathes wrote, "Our Lord says, 'I am the way,' and therefore the first thing we must do is to place the living Christ before us. If it is possible for Christ to be with us now, as His own word promises that He would be, then we cannot understand how He is to be the way unless we first have the eyes of our mind opened to behold Him. If I am to come into the presence of God, there must be some person who can come between me and God, who can lay His hand upon us both and make us one. That person is the Lord Jesus Christ. He it is who joined together in Himself heaven and earth, God and man."

### ***The Truth***

Unless men are made free from sin they can never have fellowship with God. Sin separates men from God: "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God" (Isaiah 59:2). Sin leads men to eternal death: "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Sin excludes men from heaven: "And there shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie" (Revelation 21:27). Therefore, in order for men to be made free from sin, to be brought into God's fellowship and to be prepared for heaven, it is necessary that they be brought to the truth: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Yet, Jesus declares in John 14:6 that He Himself is the truth; hence, the power of truth to make men free from sin is the power of Jesus Himself, who said, "If therefore the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). And so the sanctification which Jesus speaks of in John 17:17 as being "in the truth" is equivalent to the sanctification which Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians 1:2 as being "in Christ Jesus."

The truth that makes men free is certainly contained in the revelation of Christ, but that revelation centers on the person of Christ and all He has done to reconcile us to God and to give us the hope of heaven.

When certain of the Lord's disciples departed from Him and He then asked the question of His apostles, "Would ye also go away?", Peter immediately replied, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou has the words of eternal life. And we have believed and know that thou art the Holy One of God" (John 6:67-69). In describing Jesus as the one having the words of eternal life, Peter did so in connection with his belief in and knowledge of the *person* of Jesus, the Holy One of God. Indeed, when anyone accepts the words of Jesus concerning eternal life, he primarily accepts His holy person as the source of eternal life. Thus when Paul referred to his expectation of being resurrected from the dead unto the heavenly prize of eternal salvation, he did so in connection with the

declaration, "That I may know him [Christ]" (Philippians 3:10).

Those who seek the truth by seeking only to know *about* Jesus and His teaching, but fail to know Him *personally*, will never find freedom from sin, fellowship with God, and the heavenly home. It is only as they come to His holy person through the teaching of His word, to know Him personally, that they will find the freedom that He alone can give from all that separates them from the Father and everlasting life. Plainly confirming this conclusion is John 17:3, "And this is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ."

True, the so-called "plan of salvation," the means by which sinners accept Christ as their Saviour through faith, is part of the divinely-revealed truth which all must know who would be made free from sin and come to God; but its meaning and significance is solely related to Him, the sin-offering, who is *the truth*.

### *The Life*

In describing Himself as *the life*, Jesus expressly declares that He is the source of unending life with God. Here and in other passages, He teaches that apart from Him men are spiritually dead and that the only life they can have by which they can be knit to God is the divine life which is in Himself, of which He is the source and principle for the whole world. He evidently had this at least partially in mind when He said, "Apart from me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). He alone has the power to take souls dead in sin and revive them so that they can live with God forever. It is little wonder, then, that He is called "the Prince of life" (Acts 3:15), "the bread of life" (John 6:35), and "the eternal life" (1 John 1:2).

Note the description of Jesus as *the life* in John 1:4, "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." He who through whom "all things were made" (John 1:3), the Creator of all living things, has given those who accept Him as "the way, and the truth, and the life" such wondrous spiritual life that it is described as *light*—light to illuminate their way as they travel to the heavenly Zion. As Norman Smyth observed, "This Scripture discloses God's way of illuminating our lives. Christ alone is equal to all human needs. He alone touches human nature in all its chords; beats all life's music out; lights up all our history. Christianity alone is the truth sufficient for the life of the whole world. Christ renews man at the center, and then through the whole circumference of his powers and possibilities."

Jesus also spoke of the unending life to be realized through Him when, after referring to Himself as "the life," He declared, ". . . he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die" (John 11:25,26).

Remember, that in considering the spiritual life we receive from Christ,

we do not have in mind mere *existence*. Those who are in sin *exist*, but they do not really *live*; that is, they do not live with God, which is life on the highest plane possible. Animals exist, but they do not live as men who are "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). And the unending life men receive from Christ beyond the grave must not be thought of as merely conscious existence. Those who lose their souls in perdition, to be separated from God forever, have conscious existence beyond the grave, but they do not have everlasting *life*.

Jesus had in mind more than mere existence when He said, "The thief cometh not, but that he may steal, and kill, and destroy: I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly" (John 10:10). The English Bible renders the latter part of this passage: "I have come that men may have life, and may have it in all its fullness." Men can glibly speak of "living it up," of "living life to the hilt," when they indulge in worldly pleasures and pursuits, but they can never enjoy life in all its fullness until they come to Christ, until they receive His "unsearchable riches" (Ephesians 3:8), until they "lay hold on the life which is life indeed" (1 Timothy 6:19). Paul had in mind this abundance of life to be realized in Christ when he said, "In him ye are made full" (Colossians 2:10).

Christ is indeed the life *now* as well as in the hereafter. The unending life with God promised in the gospel is not altogether a future blessing, which we are to get from God through Christ in heaven, but a present blessing as well, which we can also receive through Christ. Truly, eternal life begins, in a sense, in this world when men accept Christ as their Saviour and thus come into fellowship with eternal Deity, a fellowship that need never be broken. This happens simultaneously when they obey the gospel, to "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4) and to become new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Note the following New Testament passages which refer to eternal life as a present reality:

*"Jesus therefore said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day"* (John 6:53,54). We observe that the phrase "hath eternal life" is equivalent to "have . . . life in yourselves." Those who eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ, which means imbibing His words (John 6:63), have life in themselves now, in this world. Thus we see that the life with God which need never end, even eternal life, has its inception during man's earthly state.

*"We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him"* (1 John 3:14,15). The apostle John plainly affirms here that a person comes into life when he has passed out of the death

of sin, and that this life is "eternal life *abiding* in him," a *present* possession which he enjoys.

*"And the witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life. These things have I written unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, even unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God"* (1 John 5:11-13). That the initial, earthly stage of eternal life is described here is plainly evident. God gave us eternal life when we came to His blessed Son, not just something He will give us in the afterworld. John further declares that eternal life is possessed by every person who "hath the Son." Having the Son is a present reality to every faithful Christian, which thus means that having eternal life is also a present reality to him. And so the apostle declares that he has written these things "that ye may know that ye have eternal life." See also John 3:36; 5:24; 6:47; 10:28; 1 Timothy 4:8.

All the passages that affirm the Christian's present possession of eternal life pertain to the initial stage of perpetual fellowship with God. But the passages we are now to consider pertain to the perfectional stage of eternal life, in the supreme blessedness of heavenly fellowship with God. Note the following:

*"In hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before times eternal"* (Titus 1:2); *"That, being justified by his grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life"* (Titus 3:7). Since "hope that is seen is not hope: for who hopeth for that which he seeth?" (Romans 8:24), these references to eternal life as something the Christian hopes for can only pertain to the state of eternal life with God in heaven.

*"And this is the promise which he promised us, even the life eternal"* (1 John 2:25). Here eternal life is designated as something the Lord has promised His disciples, which will have its fulfillment in heaven.

*". . . receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls"* (1 Peter 1:9). In the context of the salvation designated here, Peter has in mind the "inheritance . . . reserved in heaven" (verse 4), the final state of salvation or life to be received in the heavenly mansions.

*"Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory"* (2 Timothy 2:10). Here again the word "salvation" refers to the eternal glory men will receive in the afterworld.

*"Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life"* (Jude 21). The eternal life contemplated here is something Christians are to look for, the heavenly state of fellowship with God when the final benefits of Christ's mercy are given them.

We must again emphasize, however, that whether eternal life is contemplated as something men enjoy now or something they receive in heaven, it is all made possible through God's beloved Son Jesus Christ,

who as our high priest "hath been made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life" (Hebrews 7:16). It is thus the responsibility and privilege of all those who enjoy abundance of life in Christ to unreservedly declare to all men in sin, who are without God, that if they would be saved from their sins and have unending fellowship with their Creator, they must accept Christ as their only Saviour. "And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

### Questions

1. In light of the fact that Jesus Christ is the way to God and to heaven, why is the entire gospel system referred to as "the Way"?
2. Discuss Samuel Leathes' comments concerning Christ as *the Way*.
3. Why is the power of divine truth to make men free from sin the power of Christ Himself?
4. Why can no person find freedom from sin, fellowship with God, and the heavenly home who only seeks to know *about* Jesus and His teaching but fails to know Him *personally*?
5. Discuss Jesus as *the life* in light of such passages as John 1:3,4; 6:35; 11:25,26; 15:5; Acts 3:15; 1 John 1:2.
6. Discuss the spiritual life we receive through Christ as being something other than mere *existence*.
7. Discuss the passages which refer to eternal life as a reality both now and in the hereafter.

### CHRIST THE ANSWER (2)

As we considered in the preceding lesson, it is Christ's saving work that makes possible unending life with God, affirmatively answering the question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" In the lesson now before us we shall consider the nature of this saving work of Him who is the way, the truth, and the life, who bridges the gap of sin that separates man from God. In thinking of Christ as the way to God, the truth that makes men free, the life that is life indeed, it is necessary that we focus our attention on His death, resurrection, and second coming.

#### *His Death*

One of the great affirmations of the gospel is, "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3). It was necessary in the eternal plan of God that a bloody sacrifice be made to atone for man's sins. "Apart from the shedding of blood there is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22). But the only blood that can take away sins is that of Jesus Christ, whose sinless life made Him the perfect sacrifice, who in willingly going to the cross took upon Himself the penalty for sin, even death (Romans 6:23), so that the sinner can be reckoned as righteous before God, cleared of every charge of sin. By His atoning sacrifice He thus simultaneously vindicates divine justice and extends divine mercy to all who accept Him as their Saviour. Truly divine justice and mercy meet at the cross. Read carefully the following passages that deal with Christ's sacrifice on the cross as the atonement for sin and the means of reconciling sinners to God:

"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28).

"Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

"We were reconciled to God through the death of his Son" (Romans 5:10).

"Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

"Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us out of this present evil world, according to the will of our God and Father" (Galatians 1:4).

"In whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1:7).

"But now once at the end of the ages hath he been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26).

"Knowing that ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers; but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and



without spot, even the blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:18,19). See also 2 Corinthians 5:14,15; Hebrews 2:9.

So important indeed is the cross in God's plan to save man that Paul, summing up his work of preaching the gospel, declared, "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

### ***His Resurrection***

As significant and necessary is the Lord's death in redeeming man from his sins so that he can enjoy unending fellowship and life with God, it is absolutely meaningless and inefficacious without His resurrection. The blood that was shed on the cross unto remission of sins could never have accomplished its purpose unless Christ came forth from the tomb to ascend into the heavenly holy of holies, there as the high priest to place His blood on the mercy seat before the throne of God as the acceptable atonement for man's sins. That is the sublime truth so plainly set forth in Hebrews 7:25; 9:11,12,24-26; 10:19,20, "Wherefore also he is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. . . . But Christ having become a high priest of the good things to come, through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation, nor yet through the blood of goats and calves, but through his own blood, entered in once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption. . . . For Christ entered not into a holy place made with hands, like in pattern to the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God for us: nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place year by year with blood not his own; else must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once at the end of the ages hath he been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. . . . Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way . . ."

Carefully read the foregoing passages again and see the graphic description in them of the living Saviour, who came forth triumphantly from the tomb, ascending into heaven "to appear before the face of God for us," offering the blood He shed on the cross as the atonement or satisfaction for our sins. From your understanding of these passages you will be able to see the harmony between the following declarations: "Who [Jesus Christ] was delivered up for our trespasses, and was *raised for our justification*" (Romans 4:25); "Much more then, being *justified by his blood*, shall we be saved from the wrath of God through him" (Romans 5:9). Notice that justification is said to be both by the Lord's resurrection and His blood. There is, of course, no contradiction here. The Lord's death, in which He shed His blood, is indeed the means of justifying us before God, taking away our sins; but it was only as He

conquered death in His resurrection and ascended into heaven to appear before the face of God for us that His death on the cross for our trespasses became efficacious. Thus justification is validly designated as being by the Lord's resurrection as well as by His blood. Cf. Romans 5:10.

Jesus Himself during His earthly ministry inseparably connected the unending life that men can receive from Him with His resurrection. To sorrowing Martha, the sister of Lazarus, He said, "I am *the resurrection, and the life*: he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die" (John 11:25, 26).

The Lord's resurrection to taste of death no more is the power, guarantee, and proof given to all who accept Him as their sin-offering and who continue to depend on the efficacy of His saving blood throughout their earthly days that they too shall conquer death and be raised to everlasting life with Him in heaven. To all His faithful followers He promises, "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19). Note the following passages:

"... *he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead*" (Acts 17:31). This assurance the Lord's resurrection gives that He shall judge the world is equivalent to the assurance He gives that His faithful followers will enjoy everlasting life with Him in heaven, for in the judgment He will say to them, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).

"*But now hath Christ been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of them that are asleep. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive*" (1 Corinthians 15:20-22). The reference here to *all* being made alive by the resurrection of Christ includes sinners as well as saints, just as the death passed on by Adam also includes all men. At the general resurrection all men will be raised by the power of the resurrected Lord. But the resurrection guaranteed the faithful Christian by the Lord's victory over death will be unto eternal life, in contrast to the sinner's resurrection unto eternal death. "For as the Father hath life in himself, even so gave he to the Son also to have life in himself: and he gave him authority to execute judgment, because he is a son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment [A. V. damnation]" (John 5:26-29).

"*For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in vic-*

*tory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law: but thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Corinthians 15:53-57). The victory spoken of here is over death, which will be by the power of the Lord's resurrection when His faithful ones will be raised with the incorruptible bodies that are fit habitations for their immortal souls in the heavenly realm. See 1 Corinthians 15:50 in connection with 2 Corinthians 5:1-4.

Indeed, Paul argues that if Christ has not been raised, then the entire Christian system is spurious and those who believe in Christ do so in vain: "But if there is no resurrection from the dead, neither hath Christ been raised: and if Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we witnessed of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, neither hath Christ been raised: and if Christ hath not been raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most pitiable" (1 Corinthians 15:13-19).

But being an eyewitness of the living Christ, Paul bore true witness concerning the resurrection of Christ, with its promise, guarantee, and power given to every faithful Christian for victory over death and for eternal life in heaven. Such also was the witness of the other apostles; for example, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:3,4).

"... *our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*" (2 Timothy 1:10). When Jesus, who had died for man's sins, was raised from the tomb, later to appear before the face of God for us and to send the Holy Spirit to all who obey Him (Acts 5:32), life and immortality were brought to light in the sense that all who have committed their lives to Him are empowered with life and immortality. "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, he that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies through his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Romans 8:11).

Commenting on the life and immortality brought to light through the gospel, John Pearson wrote, "... purposed by God, but manifest now first to man by Christ, who in His own resurrection has given the pledge of His people's final triumph over death through Him. Before the Gospel revelation from God, man, by the light of nature, under the most favorable circumstances, had but a glimmering idea of the possibility of

future being of the *soul*, but not the faintest idea of the resurrection of the *body* (Acts 17:18,32). If Christ were not 'the life,' the dead could never live; if He were not the resurrection, they could never rise; if He had not the keys of hell and death (Revelation 1:18), we could never break through the bars of death or gates of hell."

### ***His Second Coming***

After Jesus had informed His disciples of His impending departure to His Father's house to prepare a place for them, He said, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3). In this promise to His disciples, Jesus tacitly affirms that the redeeming work which He began at Calvary will not be finished until His second coming, when He takes with Him to the heavenly mansions all those who are resurrected unto life, as well as those faithful ones who are alive at His coming. See 1 Corinthians 15:23.

Concerning the Lord's return to take His faithful disciples with Him to heaven, Paul wrote, "But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that fall asleep; that ye sorrow not, even as the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord, Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

That the second coming of Christ is essential for our final salvation in heaven is also affirmed in Colossians 3:4, "When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with him be manifested in glory." Although Christ is our life now, the present source of our fellowship with Deity, the complete life we will have with Him in the glory of heaven will not be ours until He comes again.

After discussing the Lord's sacrifice to take away our sins and His entrance into heaven to appear before the face of God for us, the inspired writer of Hebrews states, "So Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for him, unto salvation" (9:28). It is plainly taught in this passage, as well as in others, that only those who have received the benefits of the Lord's first advent, the saving power of His death and the life-giving power of His resurrection, will receive the eternal salvation which He brings when He comes again.

## **Conclusion**

Jesus Christ is indeed the affirmative answer to the question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" The Christian destiny depends upon His death on the cross, His resurrection, and His second coming. The basic entreaty of the gospel sent out to all men is that they come to Christ, accept Him according to His will as the way to heaven, continue with Him throughout their earthly days, and finally be received by Him into His eternal presence when He comes again. The devil appeals to men to go to hell; Christ appeals to men to go to heaven. Those who accept the devil's appeal will indeed go to hell, but those who accept Christ's appeal will indeed go to heaven. Whose appeal have you accepted?

## **Questions**

1. Discuss Christ's death on the cross as the atonement for man's sins.
2. Why is Christ's death meaningless and inefficacious without His resurrection? Discuss the harmony between the phrases "raised for our justification" (Romans 4:25) and "justified by his blood" (Romans 5:9).
3. Discuss the Lord's resurrection as the power, guarantee, and proof given to all faithful Christians that they too shall conquer death and be raised to everlasting life in heaven.
4. How has Jesus Christ brought life and immortality to light through the gospel?
5. Discuss the necessity of the Lord's second coming to complete the work of redemption which He began at Calvary.
6. What is the basic entreaty of the gospel sent out to all men?
7. Have you accepted the devil's appeal to go to hell or the Lord's appeal to go to heaven?

### ACCEPTING THE SAVIOUR

That Jesus died to save all men is affirmed in such passages as Hebrews 2:9, “. . . that by the grace of God he should taste of death for every man;” but He does not become any person’s Saviour until that person accepts Him as such. Universal salvation in heaven is utterly foreign to the teaching of the Bible. When Jesus declared, referring to Himself as the access to the Father in the heavenly mansion, “No one cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6), He meant for this utterance to be unequivocal. As He had previously said, “He that rejecteth me rejecteth him that sent me” (Luke 10:16). It is either Christ or separation from God forever! *Only those accountable souls who have accepted Christ as their Saviour will be in heaven.* If there is any other way to heaven, then Christ has falsified the matter and the gospel system is to be rejected as spurious. But we who believe in the absolute integrity of the gospel, who believe that Christ alone is the way to heaven, utterly reject the false tolerance which so widely prevails in the religious world that Christ is only one among many ways to everlasting life with the Creator God.

The significant question that now confronts us pertains to what men must do in order to accept Christ as their Saviour so that they can enjoy unending fellowship with God. As we previously pointed out, the salvation from Christ that men receive in heaven (1 Peter 1:7-9) is the inevitable result of the salvation they receive from Him in this life. Thus he who would be saved by Christ in heaven must first be saved by Him in this life.

However, before we consider what men must do to be saved, we must recognize and emphasize that salvation, whether contemplated either in terms of its present or future aspect, is by God’s grace, or unmerited favor, through the sole merits of Christ. This simply means that there is nothing that men can do to deserve, earn, or achieve the salvation to be received from Christ. That being true, salvation is solely a *gift* God gives men through Jesus Christ. Anything therefore that men do to be saved, in accordance with the Lord’s will, is the means of *receiving* salvation as a *gift* bestowed upon them by divine grace and not as the means of receiving something that God owes them because of any achievement on their part. Thus any person who feels that he can receive salvation by his own merits or goodness cannot possibly believe that salvation is by God’s grace. See Romans 4:4.

Before we consider, then, how men receive the Lord’s salvation, let us carefully and reverently read the following New Testament passages which portray this salvation, both in its present and future aspects, as being by divine grace through the merits of Christ’s sacrifice, solely

realized as a gift from God:

“For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, in his blood” (Romans 3:23-25).

“For the wages of sin is death; but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

“In whom [Christ] we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:7).

“. . . God, being rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace have ye been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus: for by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, that no man should glory” (Ephesians 2:4-9).

“But when the kindness of God our Saviour, and his love toward man, appeared, not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that, being justified by his grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:4-7).

“. . . the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:13).

### ***Faith in Christ***

According to such New Testament passages as the following, the free gift of salvation that God's grace bestows on men must be received by faith in the sin-offering Christ:

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth may in him have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:14-16).

“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die” (John 11:25,26).

“. . . these are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name” (John 20:31).

“Be it known unto you therefore, brethren, that through this man is proclaimed unto you remission of sins: and by him every one that believeth is justified from all things” (Acts 13:38,39).

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16).

“Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; through whom also we have had our access by faith into this grace wherein we stand” (Romans 5:1,2). See Ephesians 2:8.

When properly understood, we will realize that there is nothing at all arbitrary about God’s requirement that we believe in His blessed Son for salvation. Faith in Christ, in its fullest sense, means that those who would be saved must look solely to the Saviour’s merits, not to any merit or achievement of their own. It means that they must look to Him who is the perfect sin-offering as the only means of taking away their sins and of making possible their fellowship with God.

Faith or belief in Christ as the means of receiving God’s free gift of salvation has two aspects, between which lies repentance: *belief in or mental assent to the fact of Jesus as the Saviour* and *trust in or dependence on Him for salvation*.

Some passages dealing with faith or belief in the limited sense of recognizing the fact of Christ’s saving power are the following: “And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number that believed turned to the Lord” (Acts 11:21); “Many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized” (Acts 18:8).

Even though belief in the fact of Christ’s saving power is the lowest common denominator of faith, the basis for this belief being the testimony of the gospel (John 20:30,31; Romans 10:17), we can readily understand the necessity for this phase of saving faith. It is certainly obvious that no one will come to Christ for salvation from sin who does not believe in the *fact* of His saving power, any more than a person would seek help in any matter from someone whom he does not believe has the means to give him that help. For example, no physically sick person will seek help from someone whom he does not believe has the power to cure him. And neither will anyone come to the Great Physician for freedom from the disease of sin who does not believe that He has the power to give him that freedom.

But we must recognize that although mental assent to or belief in the fact of Christ’s power to save is primarily necessary for one to be saved, it does not bring salvation in and of itself alone. A sick person might believe in the power of a certain physician to cure him of his ailment and still continue to suffer from that ailment. It is only when he expresses his belief in the curative power of the physician by putting his *trust* in him, *relying* or *depending* on that power, that a cure will be affected. One



might believe that a certain plane goes to a particular destination without himself ever reaching that destination. It is only when he puts his trust in the plane, relying on it by coming into it, that he will reach its destination.

Christ has indeed all power to save men from sin and to bring them into fellowship with God, but that does not mean that all who believe in this sublime truth have been saved. Only those whose belief truly trusts in Him for salvation, causing them to commit, surrender, and submit themselves to Him, are the recipients of His salvation.

### ***Repentance***

As we previously noted, lying between belief in the fact of Christ's saving power and trust in that power is repentance, which, too, is an absolute necessity for salvation in Christ. Since repentance is to be done in the name of Christ (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38), no one can possibly meet this prerequisite for salvation who does not first believe that Christ, being the Son of God and the Saviour, has the divine authority to require it of him. Since repentance, as the word is used in the New Testament as a requirement for salvation in Christ, means a change of mind concerning the practice of sin, it naturally and logically precedes the faith that trusts in the Lord for salvation. How can anyone possibly even desire, much less appropriate, Christ's saving power from sin if his mind is still inclined toward a life of sin? But when any person who believes in the Lord's saving power seriously and soberly contemplates the fact and enormity of sin in his life and the goodness of God in sending His divine Son to die for his sins, feeling godly sorrow for his sinful life with a sincere desire to receive the forgiveness and salvation that only the Saviour can give, he changes his mind or attitude toward his sins and resolves to forsake his evil ways, to seek salvation in Christ and to follow Him the rest of his days. See Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians 7:10.

### ***Baptism***

Baptism unto the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) is the trusting, relying, submitting, surrendering, committing phase of saving faith. In the act of baptism, the immersion of the penitent believer in water, one turns from self and gives his life to Christ, identifying himself with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, dying to the old life of sin and walking with the Lord in the new life of justification. Thus he begins his heavenly pilgrimage in fellowship with God. "Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection; knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him,

that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin; for he that hath died is justified from sin" (Romans 6:3-7). See Romans 6:17,18; Colossians 2:12; 2 Timothy 2:10,11.

Further teaching concerning baptism as being inseparably part of saving, justifying faith is given in Galatians 3:26,27, "For ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ." Those who deny that baptism is necessary for salvation in Christ are prone to read the first sentence of this passage and to overlook the latter. But verse 27 is a commentary on verse 26. It plainly states that justifying faith, such as makes men sons of God and puts them into Christ, includes baptism. Those who only give mental assent to Christ's saving, life-giving power, refusing to be baptized, have not repented of their sins and thus refuse to truly trust in the Lord for salvation. See Acts 2:41; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:20,21.

In accepting the teaching of the New Testament concerning the relationship of baptism to salvation in Christ, we must clearly recognize that obedience to this ordinance is not the cause of salvation, not an act in which the sinner deserves or achieves salvation. The efficacy of baptism embraces the principle of trust, of reliance on divine grace and Christ's merits for salvation.

Since only those who are baptized become sons of God, thus to become His heirs, we can understand the necessity of baptism for all who would receive the heavenly inheritance. Read Galatians 3:26,27 in connection with the following passages: "The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:16,17); "Unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:4).

### ***Conclusion***

As we conclude this lesson, we notice some further New Testament teaching which emphasizes that saving faith in Christ involves more than merely giving mental assent to the fact of His saving power, that those who so believe in Him in this limited sense must also repent and be baptized.

In Acts 2:38 the apostle Peter is recorded as saying, "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins;" but the same apostle also said, "To him bear all the prophets witness, that through his name every one that believeth on him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43). We observe that in one passage Peter affirms that remission of sins is received by those who repent and are baptized, but in the other passage he mentions nothing but belief as the prerequisite for receiving the remission of sins. Is there conflict between these two passages? Not at all. Belief in Acts 10:43 is

obviously justifying faith; it assumes repentance and baptism, which are expressly mentioned in Acts 2:38.

According to Acts 2:41, those of the Pentecostians who received Peter's message were baptized. But verse 44, designating these obedient persons, states, "And all that believed were together, and had all things common." Evidently, the term "believed" in verse 44 must be defined as saving faith to include the act of baptism mentioned in verse 41.

"And Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his house . . ." (Acts 18:8). But according to 1 Corinthians 1:14, Crispus was baptized. Obviously, the word "believed" in Acts 18:8 means saving faith since it includes Crispus' submission to the will of Christ in being baptized.

". . . and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized" (Acts 18:8). In 1 Corinthians 15:2 Paul told these baptized believers, in exhorting them to constancy in their faith, that they would be eternally saved, "except ye believed in vain." The term "believed" here means saving faith, to include the baptism mentioned in Acts 18:8.

The Philippian jailor was baptized: "And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, immediately" (Acts 16:33). Verse 34 states, "And he brought them up into his house, and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, with all his house, having believed in God." It is evident that the jailor's belief in God, which was a saving belief, included his obedience to the Lord in baptism.

See Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16; Luke 24:45-48.

### Questions

1. Discuss the fallacy of universal salvation in light of the fact that Jesus Christ is *the* way to heaven.
2. Discuss salvation, both in its present and future aspects, as being by divine grace through the sole merits of Christ, to be received as a free gift from God.
3. Why is faith an absolute necessity for salvation and not an arbitrary requirement?
4. What are the two aspects of saving faith?
5. Discuss the aspect of saving faith as giving mental assent to the saving power of Christ.
6. What is the relationship of repentance to faith and salvation?
7. Discuss the aspect of saving faith as trust in or dependence on Christ, noting in this connection the significance of baptism.

### HEAVENLY-MINDEDNESS

Those who have accepted Christ as their Saviour, who enjoy newness of life and are new creatures in Him (Romans 6:4; 2 Corinthians 5:17), will not trust in Christ for final salvation in heaven unless they unremittingly keep before them their heavenly goal, unless their hearts are set upon realizing the Christian destiny of living forever with God. Just as no one can continue to live with Christ who does not remember the salvation he has already received from Him (2 Peter 1:9), so also no one can continue to live with Christ who does not remember the final salvation to be received from Him in heaven.

On the basis of the life they have already received from Christ, Christians are exhorted, "If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth. For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with him be manifested in glory" (Colossians 3:1-4). Seeking the things above, of which Paul here speaks, is evidently dependent upon setting the mind on the things above. No one will *seek* heaven who does not *think about* heaven. We shall consider the latter in this lesson and the former in the lesson to follow.

#### ***Pertinent Questions***

When one has his mind set on the things above rather than on the things of the earth, following Paul's injunction, does this mean that he can have no concern at all about life in this world, that the sum total of his thoughts are to be on heavenly things? Does the Christian viewpoint have only a vertical orientation with no horizontal, present-world orientation at all? Is Christianity opposed to progress, as some have suggested, so that no Christian can constantly keep in sight his heavenly destiny who shows interest and engages in any pursuit that involves the improvement and betterment of human life on earth? It has been charged by many religious extremists that the entertainment of the heavenly hope must always result in an indifference to external evils during our earthly sojourn, and so prevent the progressive removal of those evils from one generation to another. There are even those in the church today who are quite indignant about a Christian advocating any movement that attacks the problems of poverty, racial prejudice, etc., which they label as "the sterile social gospel." They feel that the only business of the church pertains to heavenly things.

Because there are beauties that the Christian looks forward to in heaven, does that mean that he must forego the contemplation of the beauties of this world?

Because the faithful Christian has his mind set on the comforts of heaven, does that mean that he has no right to make things moderately comfortable for himself here?

The foregoing questions, and all similar ones, cannot be avoided if we are honest with ourselves and our God. As we live in this world we must make the most and best of our lives here. We do indeed have obligations to perform as responsible members of our family, community, and nation. Cf. Ephesians 4:28; Romans 13:1-7. There are innocent pleasures that we can enjoy during our earthly sojourn. But we must constantly be aware that there are things about this world that we cannot be entangled in. There are secular forces that would swerve us from the heavenly way. Materialism is an ever present threat to our spiritual welfare. The Christian is most certainly bound to maintain an attitude toward this world that does not conflict with his proper attitude toward heaven.

### ***Example of Jesus***

Our perfect example Jesus never lost sight of "the joy that was set before him" (Hebrews 12:2) in heaven, but He also never lost sight of the proper involvements of His earthly life. As a dutiful Son of His earthly father, He obviously worked diligently in Joseph's carpenter shop during His boyhood days. His parables are full of references to the normal human pursuits of work, eating and drinking, playing, etc. He could go to a marriage feast, where there was great joy and merriment, and lend a helping hand to the festivities by miraculously replenishing the supply of wine—hardly expressing an attitude of disapproval toward what was going on (John 2:1-9). Many times He had walked through Palestinian fields to appreciatively behold the lovely lilies, subsequently to exclaim in ecstasy to His disciples, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (Matthew 6:28,29).

Because Jesus engaged in the normal pursuits of man's earthly life, such as "eating and drinking," the religious fanatics of His day accused Him of being "a gluttonous man and a winebibber" (Matthew 11:19). Yet, He never allowed any involvement of His earthly sojourn to cause Him to sin or to lose sight of His mission "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10) and of His eventual return to heaven. Indeed, whatever involvements He had in this world were always related to His heavenly Father and to the human beings whom He came to serve and to save.

### ***Finding the Mind of Christ***

When any Christian finds the proper balance between his relationship to earth and to heaven, between hitherworldliness and otherworldliness,

he has truly found the mind of Christ. The Christian who loses sight of heaven is a materialist; the Christian who loses sight of the earth is a fanatic. Admittedly, the greater temptation involves the former rather than the latter, which we shall later consider. But the Christian who maintains a proper perspective as a responsible follower of Christ realizes that however humanly tragic may be his present life and however keen may be his desire for the more glorious fulfillment of the next, he stands firm on the principle that his immediate business can only be to serve and glorify God *where he is now*, throwing his whole heart and energy into the manning of the station to which it has now pleased the Lord, for however short or long a time, to appoint him.

Surely, such an attitude as the foregoing must be set up as a limit to an all one-sided otherworldliness. If the Christian's hope of heaven be recognized as the wonderful, glorious thing that it is, it must never lead him to be unjust to the values and demands of the life that now is. It must never have the effect of taking his mind off his present responsibilities so that they shall be done less thoroughly and efficiently; rather should it lead to their *more* thorough and efficient performance. And, lastly, it must never tempt him to think even for a moment that what particular thing he does now does not matter, that his life in time is not worth improving or this whole earthly order of things worth patching up and bettering.

But whatever the proper claims are of earth and heaven, the faithful Christian, having the mind of Christ, knows that the sum total of his life belongs to the Lord, in time as well as in eternity. "For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's" (Romans 14:8). He recognizes that he must strive to bring "every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). He follows the injunctions, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31); "Whatsoever ye do, work heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men" (Colossians 3:23).

### ***First Things First***

Looking again at our text, it is evident that when Paul exhorts Christians to set their "mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth," he forbids the latter not absolutely but relatively, simply declaring that earthly things are less important than heavenly things and that the supreme goal of life in Christ is not existence in this world but in heaven. The apostle thus affirms that Christians must put first things first, answering to the Lord's command, "Seek ye *first* his kingdom, and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33).

Martha's concern for her household responsibilities is a striking example of putting the affairs of this world before the things of eternal life. But her sister Mary, sitting at the feet of Jesus and imbibing His words,

just as strikingly illustrates the divine wisdom of seeking first the things of eternal life. That is exactly the situation as Jesus saw it when He said, "Martha, Martha, thou art anxious and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: for Mary hath chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41,42). In this rebuke of Martha, Jesus did not infer that it is wrong as such for a woman to be an efficient housekeeper, but simply that there are considerations of infinitely more importance.

Undeniably, every Christian who reverses Paul's exhortation, setting his mind on the things below rather than on the things above, is tyrannized by the material and has lost sight of His heavenly goal. But if we follow Paul's advice in Colossians 3:2, we will frankly recognize that the importance which we allow to the secular must be relative and not absolute, and that our attitude toward the world must never cause us to do anything that transgresses God's law and thus causes us to lose the vision of our heavenly destiny. Cf. 2 Timothy 2:4; 1 Corinthians 7:31; 1 John 2:15-17. We must remember that life in this world is for time but life in heaven is for eternity, that this world and all the things in it will pass away but heaven will exist forever (2 Peter 3:10-13). In so remembering, we will realize, above all, that our heavenly destiny is infinitely more important than any and all earthly goals.

### ***Pertinent Passages***

The significance of having our mind set on the things of heaven, our eternal destiny, is stressed in the following passages which we shall briefly consider in the remainder of this lesson:

*"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also" (Matthew 6:19-21).* Those who lay up for themselves treasure in heaven, which means that they seek the things of heaven, are obviously those whose hearts or affections are in heaven, who esteem their heavenly goal as being supreme above all earthly goals. They recognize that everything they have in this world will eventually be taken from them, by death if not by rust, moth, or thieves, but that they will possess their heavenly riches forever. They recognize that if they were to gain the whole world and miss heaven, they have really lost everything (Matthew 16:26).

Commenting on the expression "where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also," David Brown wrote, "Obvious though this maxim be, by what multitudes who profess to bow to the teaching of Christ is it practically disregarded! 'What a man loves,' says Luther, 'that is his God. For he carries it in his heart, he goes about with it night and day, he sleeps and wakes with it; be what it may—wealth or pelf, pleasure or

renown.' But because 'laying up' is not in itself sinful, nay, in some cases enjoined (2 Cor. 12:14), and honest industry and sagacious enterprise are usually rewarded with prosperity, many flatter themselves that all is right between them and their God, while their closest attention, anxiety, zeal, and time are exhausted upon these earthly treasures."

It is evident that those whose efforts and abilities are expended virtually entirely on seeking earthly treasures have no real interest at all in going to heaven, even though they may piously declare otherwise. Their mind is set on the things below rather than on the things above, and so they seek only the things of this world. They are worldly-minded rather than heavenly-minded, whose vision does not rise above earthly horizons.

*"For our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20).* The word "citizenship" in this passage is from the Greek *politeuma*, literally meaning "commonwealth or state." Now, when Paul declares that "our citizenship [commonwealth or state] is in heaven," he does not deny the fact of the citizenship Christians now hold in the nations of which they are part. He himself recognized his Roman citizenship and the privilege which it involved (Acts 22:28). But every Christian who is heavenly-minded, whose mind is set on the things above, recognizes that the citizenship he has in this world is temporal but that his heavenly citizenship is eternal, the latter to be far more prized than the former. We American Christians can be very grateful for the privileges we enjoy as citizens of this great country, but if we are heavenly-minded we will be infinitely more grateful for our heavenly citizenship.

Notice the two verses immediately preceding the passage under consideration here, where Paul speaks of those who are "enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is perdition, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." How strikingly different indeed are those of whom Paul here speaks from those who mind heavenly things, who, above all, prize their heavenly citizenship! Cf. Romans 8:5.

The paragraph in which the reference to our heavenly citizenship is found begins with the command, "Brethren, be ye imitators together of me, and mark them that so walk even as ye have us for an ensample." The motive that the apostle expresses in the context for obeying this command is the realization that our citizenship is in heaven and that therefore all our plans in life should be focused on realizing the benefits and privileges of this most prized of all citizenships.

*"Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day; and not to me only, but also to all them that have loved his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8).* The heavenly crown of which Paul here speaks is to be received not only by him but also by all others who have loved the Lord's appearing, when He will take His faithful ones with Him to the heavenly



mansions. Cf. Revelation 2:10. To now love the Lord's appearing is to long for His second coming, to have that heavenly-mindedness that desires above all else to be with Him forever in heaven. Every Christian who has his mind set on the things above can hopefully and joyously exclaim, "Come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20).

*“. . . having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things make it manifest that they are seeking after a country of their own . . . But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God; for he hath prepared for them a city” (Hebrews 11:13,14,16).* This confession that the faithful Old Testament servants of God made concerning themselves as “strangers and pilgrims on the earth,” desiring a heavenly country, is a confession that every faithful Christian also makes, which is another way of declaring that he is heavenly-minded. Recognizing that his eternal citizenship is in heaven, he views himself as virtually a stranger to this world who is making a pilgrimage to the celestial realm of God. And so he can never find himself quite fully and comfortably at home in this present world. He knows that there can be no ultimate basis for optimism, joy, or lightness of heart save in the hope of the perfect, unending life at the end of his pilgrimage. Therefore, while taking delight in the lovely things of the earth and fulfilling the responsibilities of his earthly sojourn, he keeps ever in mind that he is a “man of the road,” who has no continuing city in this world but seeks “the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10). See 1 Peter 2:11.

### Questions

1. Why must the Christian who would trust in Christ for final salvation in heaven constantly keep before him his heavenly goal?
2. Why must the Christian have an attitude toward this world that does not conflict with his proper attitude toward heaven?
3. What was the attitude of Jesus toward this world in relation to His attitude toward heaven?
4. Discuss the proper balance the Christian must maintain between hitherworldliness and otherworldliness in finding the mind of Christ.
5. Discuss Martha's failure to put first things first, illustrating the tyranny of things.
6. Carefully discuss each of the passages presented in this lesson that stress the significance of having our mind set on the things of heaven.

## SEEKING HEAVEN

Now that we have considered Paul's command in Colossians 3:2, "Set your mind on the things that are above," which is heavenly-mindedness, we shall consider the command of the preceding verse, "Seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God," which is the natural, logical outcome of heavenly-mindedness. When any Christian is deeply, sincerely interested in going to heaven, he will want to do anything and everything that is necessary for him to reach this glorious destination.

In discussing how Christians are to seek the things above, a pertinent text that should first be considered is Hebrews 5:8,9, "Though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became unto all that obey him the author of eternal salvation." The basic affirmation in this text is that Jesus, the perfect Son of God, is the author of eternal salvation, eternal life in heaven. The word "author" is from the Greek *aitios*, defined by Arndt-Gingrich as "cause, source." As we discussed in a previous lesson, through His sacrifice on the cross Jesus is not only the cause or source of the salvation we receive in this world but also in the world to come, in heaven. That being true, salvation in heaven is every whit as much a free gift of God, by His grace or unmerited favor, who gave His only begotten Son to die for us, as is salvation from our past sins (John 3:16; Romans 6:23; 1 Peter 1:13).

Having affirmed that Christ is the author, cause, or source of eternal salvation, the text next affirms that the access of Christians to this salvation is their obedience to Christ. That the obedience contemplated here embraces the entire Christian life is in harmony with what the New Testament plainly teaches on the subject, as we shall later consider.

Primarily, the Christian's obedience to Christ in righteous living is the result of the salvation he has already received. "For by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, that no man should glory. For we are his workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus for good works*" (Ephesians 2:8-10). It is affirmed here that the very purpose of the salvation we receive from Christ in this life is to engage in good works. See Romans 6:12,17,18. But other passages, as well as Hebrews 5:9, teach that good works in obedience to Christ are also related to eternal salvation; for example, "Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; *they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment*" (John 5:28,29); "For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righ-

teously and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:11-13).

### ***Faith and Love***

But does it not seem on the face of it that if we have to do something in order to be eternally saved, if Christian living gives us access to heaven, then eternal life with God in heaven is at least partially by our own merits as well as by the merits of Christ? How, then, can we reconcile obedience to Christ as access to eternal salvation with this salvation being a free gift of God, through His grace and the sole merits of Christ? The answer to this question involves the meaning of the Christian's faith in Christ. Most emphatically, the Christian can never earn, deserve, merit, or achieve salvation in heaven, no matter how many good works he does; but to reach his heavenly destiny he must continue to trust in or depend on Christ, to believe on Him who is the way, the truth, and the life, who is our only access to the Father in eternity as well as in time, who has gone to prepare a place for us in heaven. As Jesus declared, "I am the resurrection, and the life: *he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live*" (John 11:25). This connection of faith in Christ with eternal salvation is also stressed in 1 Peter 1:8,9, ". . . on whom, though now ye see him not, yet *believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.*"

Faith is indeed the Christian's access to eternal salvation through Christ, but it cannot exist without a life essentially lived in obedience to the will of Christ. That is the plain declaration of James 2:17,20,26, "Even so faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself. . . . But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith apart from works is barren . . . For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead." See 2 Thessalonians 1:11.

The faith that saves through Christ not only involves obedience but also love. Paul declared, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but *faith working through love*" (Galatians 5:6). See John 14:23. Then James 1:12 states, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he hath been approved, he shall receive *the crown of life, which the Lord promised to them that love him.*" It is obvious that those who do not love the Lord will not be properly motivated to live in harmony with His will, and thus they do not have a faith that truly looks to and trusts in Him for eternal salvation.

### ***Judgment by Works***

In stressing the principle of a working, living, loving faith as access to eternal life through Christ, the New Testament clearly teaches that we will finally be judged on the basis of our works: "And I say unto you,

that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matthew 12:36,37); ". . . the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his works: to them that by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and incorruption, eternal life: but unto them that are factious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, shall be wrath and indignation" (Romans 2:5-8); "For we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10); "And if ye call on him as Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to each man's work, pass the time of your sojourning in fear" (1 Peter 1:17); "And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne; and books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Revelation 20:12).

### ***Strenuous Effort***

In His command recorded in Luke 13:24, Jesus obviously had in mind that the seeking of the things above takes the strenuous effort of a living faith and that therefore no one can slip or slide into heaven: "Strive to enter in by the narrow door: for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." See Matthew 7:13,14. The word "strive" is from the Greek *agonizomai*, literally meaning "agonize." So diligent are Christians to be in seeking to go through the narrow door that leads to eternal life that they are to *agonize* as they obey the will of the Lord. Not to strive, agonize, to get to heaven is to turn away from Christ, the only one who can take us to heaven.

This need of the strenuous, hard, unremitting effort of a living, obedient faith in Christ is also revealed in the command of 2 Peter 1:10, "Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never stumble: for thus shall be richly supplied unto you the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Previously, in verse 5, the apostle commanded, "Yea, and for this very cause adding on your part all diligence, in your faith supply virtue, and your virtue knowledge." Here and in verses 6 and 7, Christians are commanded to give *diligence* to supply in their faith what are commonly known as the Christian graces, the traits of Christian character. In so doing they obey Peter's command in verse 10 to give "the more *diligence* to make your calling and election sure," to be certain of an entrance into heaven.

As is used both in verses 5 and 10, the word "diligence" is from the Greek *spoude*, meaning "earnestness, earnest application" (Harper), "earnestness in accomplishing, promoting, or striving after anything . . .

interest in accomplishing or striving after anything . . . interest one's self most earnestly" (Thayer), "bringing in all zeal and effort" (Barnes). Indeed, one who truly sets his mind on the things above, and consequently seeks those things, will have the kind of faith in Christ that earnestly, with great zeal and effort, applies itself to the building of Christian character in obedience to the will of Christ.

In Hebrews 4:11 the word "diligence" is used expressly in reference to the heavenly rest: "Let us therefore give diligence to enter into that rest." Alexander Maclaren's comment on this passage is worthy of our attention: "The main effort of every Christian life, in view of the possibilities of repose that are open to it here and now, and yonder in their perfection, ought to be directed to this one point of deepening and strengthening their faith and its consequent obedience . . . Diligence; that is the secret—a diligence which focuses our powers, and binds our vagrant wills into one strong, solid mass, and delivers us from languor and indolence, and stirs us up to seek the increase of faith, as well as of hope and charity."

The diligence or strenuous effort every Christian who seeks heaven must manifest is also expressed in the command, ". . . follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on the life eternal, whereunto thou wast called, and didst confess the good confession in the sight of many witnesses" (1 Timothy 6:11,12). See also 2 Timothy 4:7,8, where Paul connects his expectation of receiving "the crown of righteousness" with his having "fought the good fight." As the apostle uses the word "fight" in these passages, he implies that "laying hold of the life eternal," or receiving "the crown of righteousness," takes strenuous effort against every force that would swerve us from the heavenly way. Carefully read Ephesians 6:10-18. No one can stand up against the hardness of life in a world of sin, suffering, pain, and sorrow, to be victorious through Christ, who does not "fight the good fight of faith."

### ***Steadfastness***

In serving Christ, Christians cannot avoid tribulation, persecution, and suffering. If they would go to heaven they must indeed have the kind of faith, love, and hope that keeps them steadfast in the service of the Lord no matter what the stresses and strains of life may be. Note the following passages: ". . . he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved" (Matthew 10:22); "Watch therefore: for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh" (Matthew 24:42); "Confirming the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22); ". . . if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him" (Romans 8:17); ". . . to present you holy and without blemish and unreprouvable before him: if so be that ye continue in the faith, grounded

and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel" (Colossians 1:22,23); "So Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for him, unto salvation" (Hebrews 9:28); "If we endure, we shall also reign with him" (2 Timothy 2:12). See 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 2 Timothy 2:3; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:8,9; Revelation 2:26-28.

### **Motivation**

When any Christian realizes that his work on behalf of Christ is not in vain, but that as it expresses genuine trust in and love for Christ it will lead to heaven, he will be powerfully motivated to seek heaven by being steadfast and immovable, unswerved by any temptation, and by continually abounding in good works. That is the import of 1 Corinthians 15:57,58, "But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not vain in the Lord." See Colossians 3:24; Titus 3:8.

No Christian can understandingly and believingly read the following passage and not be strongly motivated to seek heaven, no matter what unhappy circumstances he may have to face in life: "Wherefore we faint not; but though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:16-18). Beautiful antithesis—decaying outward man versus renewed inward man, light affliction versus weight of glory, the things which are seen versus the things which are not seen, temporal versus eternal! When Christians consider the wonderful, abundant glory waiting for them in heaven, which shall last forever, they realize that even the worst afflictions they suffer in this world are most insignificant and only momentary. Why, then, should they allow any of the passing, transitory things that are seen to cause them to quit serving the Lord and to miss the eternal things that are not seen? See Romans 8:18,24,25; Hebrews 10:23,24; 1 John 3:3.

"We are apt to magnify our troubles rather than to diminish them. In the human mind there is strong aversion to trouble of any kind. It is indeed true that affliction, in itself, is not agreeable. 'Now no affliction for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous.' But here the apostle makes it a very insignificant thing. You think it heavy—a burden greater than you can bear, but the apostle says that it is light. And, besides, you think of the time of your affliction long, however short it may be, and anxiously desire its removal; but the apostle wishes you to view it even

as momentary. But Paul is speaking here comparatively. His eye is full of an exceeding weight of glory which language could not express; in comparison to that his affliction was levity itself, and by faith he saw the eternity of that glory, and then it seemed contracted into a point that was invisible. You cannot feel sympathy with the apostle in this exalted view of affliction, if you remain on the low ground of this world, where you are involved in darkness. You must aspire to attain the height of the subject. You must endeavor, in some measure, to comprehend the glory to be revealed" (Thomas Swan).

### ***Knowledge of the Lord's Will***

The faith that works through love in obedience to the Lord's will cannot exist without the knowledge of that will. Thus the Christian whose faith seeks to obey the Lord must primarily seek to know the Lord's will by diligent application to Bible study. Any Christian who neglects or rejects the study of God's holy word cannot possibly seek the things that are above. And it is obvious that if he has no interest in learning what the Bible teaches about heaven, he has no desire to go to heaven. Note the following commands: "Putting away therefore all wickedness, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, long for the spiritual milk which is without guile, that ye may grow thereby unto salvation" (1 Peter 2:1,2); "Ye therefore, beloved, knowing these things beforehand, beware lest, being carried away with the error of the wicked, ye fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:17,18). See Romans 10:17; Ephesians 5:17; 2 Timothy 2:15.

### ***Loving and Serving Others***

Everything that God has ordained for Christians to do, whether it be Bible study, worship, preaching and teaching the gospel, etc., is involved in the kind of faith that works through love and trusts in the Lord for salvation. Indeed, every command of the Lord is not without importance and must be accepted by all who would seek the things that are above. Cf. Matthew 23:23; 1 John 5:3. But the focal point of the Christian's relationship to Christ is manifested in his relationship to his fellow men. Indeed, no one can love and serve the Lord who does not love and serve his fellow men. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen" (1 John 4:20); "But whoso hath the world's goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth" (1 John 3:17,18).

That the service we render Christ is, in fact, the service we render

men, being unequivocally part of the faith that leads to eternal life in heaven, is elaborated upon in Matthew 25:31-46. Indeed, this graphic description of the last judgment declares in no uncertain terms that the basis for determining our faithfulness to the Lord is the service we render others. This description is quoted here in its entirety; and the reader is asked to study it carefully, reverently, and soberly, realizing that if he would truly seek the things that are above by faith in and love for Christ, he must love and serve others: "But when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all the nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, and the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, and fed thee? or athirst, and gave thee drink? And when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? And when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry, and ye did not give me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these least, ye did it not unto me. And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life."

### ***Conclusion***

Yea, verily, if any Christian would seek the imperishable things of heaven, he must have a faith in and love for Christ that cause him to strive to be loyal to his divine Master in every phase of Christian attitude, character, and living. He must not only follow Christ's teaching but also His example (1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 2:5; 1 Peter 2:21). He must learn the difference between involvement in the world for Christ's sake and entanglement in the ways of the world by the power of Satan. He must take to heart Paul's admonition to "be blame-



less and harmless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye are seen as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life" (Philippians 2:15,16). Having been saved himself by Christ and given the hope of heaven, he must labor both by word and example to point others to this wonderful salvation and hope in the blessed Saviour. See Matthew 5:13-16; 28:19,20.

### Questions

1. What is meant by Jesus being the *author* of eternal salvation?
2. Discuss the Christian's obedience as being related both to present and future salvation, noting Ephesians 2:8-10; John 5:28,29; Titus 2:11-13.
3. Discuss the relationship of faith and love to obedience in appropriating eternal salvation through Christ.
4. Discuss works as the basis for divine judgment.
5. What does the New Testament teach concerning the necessity of strenuous effort for the Christian to reach heaven?
6. Discuss the necessity of the heaven-bound Christian remaining steadfast in the Lord's service no matter what the stresses and strains of life may be.
7. Discuss the motivation the Christian has for steadfastness in serving the Lord and seeking heaven as taught in 1 Corinthians 15:57,58 and 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.
8. In seeking the things above, why is the knowledge of the Lord's will so important?

### MISSING HEAVEN

It is certainly true that as long as a child of God, a Christian, a baptized believer, continues to put his trust in the Lord and to love him, striving to obey His will, he cannot possibly fall from grace and miss heaven. But the New Testament is replete with warnings about the possibility of Christians departing from Christ, the only way to heaven, and thus forfeiting the life they have received from Him and being eternally lost. In the preceding lesson allusions were made to this possibility of apostasy; in this lesson we shall expressly deal with the possibility. Every Christian should receive these warnings of the possibility of departing from Christ as a stimulus to more faithful living and to constant vigilance over the welfare of his soul, thus to make his calling and election sure.

#### ***Moved Away from Hope***

*“Yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and without blemish and unreprouable before him: if so be that ye continue in the faith, grounded and stedfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel . . .”* (Colossians 1:22,23). For the Christian finally to be presented as approved of God, Paul states that it depends on his continuing in the faith. If, however, it is impossible for him to lose his faith and thus miss heaven, then the foregoing exhortation is needless, even absurd. But the apostle exhorts us to continue in the faith because it is entirely possible for us to give up the faith and thus to be “moved away from the hope of the gospel.”

#### ***Falling Away from the Faith***

*“But the Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith . . .”* (1 Timothy 4:1). The “Spirit saith expressly.” That is plain and emphatic. The Christian can indeed fall away from the faith; he can indeed quit believing in Christ and thus forfeit eternal life.

#### ***Overthrowing the Faith***

*“. . . Hymenaeus and Philetus; men who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some”* (2 Timothy 2:17,18). Obviously, for a Christian to have his faith overthrown is for him to quit believing. Paul affirms that this would happen to some. What access, then, can such Christians have to the grace of God and eternal salvation when they no longer have faith in Christ? Will the Lord take disbelievers with Him to heaven?

## **Example of the Hebrew Apostates**

*“Take heed, brethren, lest haply there shall be in any one of you an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God: but exhort one another day by day, so long as it is called Today; lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin: for we are become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end: while it is said, Today if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. For who, when they heard, did not provoke? nay, did not all they that came out of Egypt by Moses? And with whom was he displeased forty years? was it not with them that sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that were disobedient? And we see that they were not able to enter in because of unbelief” (Hebrews 3: 12-19).*

Consider some of the points made in this citation. Verse 12 states that brethren (called in verse 1 “holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling,” undeniably children of God, Christians) are to be watchful that they not allow unbelief to occupy their hearts, in falling away from the living God. If, as some affirm, it is impossible for Christians to quit believing and thus depart from God, then the inspired writer is here giving needless warning.

Verse 14, continuing the thought expressed in the preceding verse, counsels us that if we are to partake of the blessings of Christ, we must hold fast our confidence or faith to the end. If, however, there is no way for a child of God ever to lose his faith, then this counsel is also needless.

The writer continues by showing that the ancient Hebrews, who typify God’s children under the new covenant, were not allowed to enter the Caanan rest because of their unbelief and disobedience. These Hebrews had left Egypt believing in God and obeying His will, but in the wilderness they quit believing and obeying; therefore, they were kept out of the promised land. What reason does the writer have for using this illustration? To show God’s children under the new covenant that they, too, can quit believing and obeying, and thus fail to enter the spiritual Caanan, heaven. See Hebrews 4:11.

In this connection, the reader is asked to study 1 Corinthians 10:1-12, which we cannot quote entirely because of the limitation of space. In this reference Paul describes the disobedience of the Jews in the wilderness and their consequent rejection by God. Who were these Jews? They were God’s children (Deuteronomy 14:1). Yet, “with most of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness” (verse 5), not being permitted to enter into Caanan, the earthly land of promise—a plain case of apostasy. Why was this written to Christians? Undeniably, to show them that they, too, can fall from grace and fail to reach heaven, the eternal land of promise. “Now these things were our

examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted" (verse 6); "Now these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (verse 11).

Consider the sins that caused the Jews to perish in the wilderness and the fact that God's children today, Christians, can commit the same sins and thus fall from the grace of God: 1. *Idolatry* (verse 7). See verse 14. 2. *Fornication* (verse 8). See 1 Corinthians 5:1-7. 3. *Making trial of the Lord* (verse 9). See Acts 5:9; 15:10.

After Paul has shown his readers the danger of falling from grace by the examples of the Hebrew apostates, he bluntly concludes his warning by declaring, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (verse 12). Fall from what? The favor of God, just as the unbelieving, disobedient Jew fell from divine favor. If any of God's children think that it is impossible for them to fall from grace, Paul insists that they are in the greatest danger of falling. Can we not see, then, the need of constant vigilance over the welfare of our souls if we would continue to believe in and obey the Lord, keeping ourselves under the approbation of God?

### ***Swift Destruction***

*"But there arose false prophets among the people, as among you also there shall be false teachers, who shall privily bring in destructive heresies, denying even the Master that bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction"* (2 Peter 2:1). Those who teach the impossibility of a Christian falling from grace insist that the false teachers designated here were never actually converted to Christ and thus had never received the grace of God. But it is plainly stated that they denied "the Master [Christ] that bought them." The purchase price of these "bought" individuals was the blood of Christ. ". . . for thou [Christ] wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation . . ." (Revelations 5:9). See Acts 20:28.

Now, it is a scriptural axiom that every person who has been bought by the blood of Christ is a child of God, saved and cleansed from his past sins. Carefully read Matthew 26:28; 1 Corinthians 6:19,20; Ephesians 1:7; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 1:18,19; Revelation 1:5. And, certainly, no one can be bought by the blood of Christ who is not a true believer. See Romans 3:25. Thus the false teachers whom Peter describes as having been bought by Christ were at one time believers in Him and the saving power of His blood. But somewhere along the way they gave up their faith, denying the Master and bringing upon themselves swift destruction. This is another striking example of apostasy, of those who will miss heaven.

## **Branches Destroyed**

*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh it away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he cleanseth it, that it may bear more fruit. Already ye are clean because of the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; so neither can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for apart from me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned"* (John 15:1-6).

The branches designated here represent those who have been brought into union with Christ, who are in Him (verse 5). It is possible, however, for these branches not to bear fruit; that is, to fail to obey the Lord's and consequently to be taken away (verse 2), "cast forth as branch . . . cast into the fire and burned" (verse 6), evidently referring to their condemnation in hell. Can there be any plainer description of apostasy, of falling from grace, due to the failure of some who have come into Christ to obey his will and live fruitful lives?

After the Lord said, "Already ye are clean because of the word which I have spoken unto you (verse 3), descriptive of those who have been truly converted to Him, in the very next verse he commands them, "Abide in me." If, however, the Lord's disciples are eternally secure and cannot fall from grace, this would be a needless command. But disciples of Christ must be duly exhorted to abide in Christ because there is the constant possibility that they will quit abiding in Him and suffer eternal condemnation in the fires of perdition.

1 John 3:24 states, "And he that keepeth his commandments abideth in him, and he in him." It is plainly taught in the scriptures that a child of God can fail to keep the divine commandments, thus sinning (1 John 1:8; 3:4): and when such a one persists in the course of sin, he no longer abides in Christ, nor Christ in him, which means that he has fallen from grace and is in danger of being eternally lost.

## **A Brother Can Be Destroyed**

*"Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge ye this rather, that no man put a stumbling block in his brother's way, or an occasion of falling. . . . For if because of meat thy brother is grieved, thou walkest no longer in love. Destroy not with thy meat him for whom Christ died"* (Romans 14:13,15). This citation affirms that a brother, a child of God, can fall, that he can sin and be destroyed. Destroyed where? In hell! ". . . fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28).

The basic teaching of Romans 14:13,15 is also presented in 1 Corinthians 8:11, "For through thy knowledge he that is weak perisheth, the

brother for whose sake Christ died." The weak person designated here is a brother in Christ, a child of God; and Paul affirms that it is possible for him to perish. Cf. John 3:16, where the word "perish" is used to describe the state opposite to eternal life.

Again we see that the New Testament teaches the possibility of Christians falling from grace.

### ***Fallen Away from Grace***

*"Ye are severed from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law; ye are fallen away from grace"* (Galatians 5:4). Those to whom Paul addressed this statement were members of the church (Galatians 1:2), which means that they had been called out of sin into the service of righteousness, becoming children of God. But they had allowed themselves to be swerved from the pure gospel by false teachers, in this particular case by the Judaizers, who were endeavoring to enjoin the law of Moses on Christians. Paul thus affirmed that these Christians, children of God, who disobeyed the Lord by seeking to be justified by the law were severed from Christ and fallen away from divine grace. Will anyone who believes in the divine origin of Paul's message affirm in all good conscience that such persons as these will be eternally saved, yet having no vital connection with the Saviour and devoid of the grace of God? Read 2 Corinthians 13:5 and Ephesians 2:8.

### ***Some Who Fell Away***

*"For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the land which hath drunk the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them for whose sake it is also tilled, receiveth blessing from God: but if it beareth thorns and thistles, it is rejected and nigh unto a curse; whose end is to be burned"* (Hebrews 6:4-8).

Of whom is the inspired writer speaking in this description of certain ones who fell away? Undeniably, children of God. Note his portrayal of them:

1. *Once enlightened.* The word "enlightened" is from the Greek *photisthentes* and is defined by Thayer as "to enlighten spiritually, imbue with saving knowledge: hence . . . of those who have been made Christians, Heb. vi:4; x:32." See John 8:12.

2. *Tasted of the heavenly gift.* This description is inseparably part of the statement "once enlightened." Those who have been enlightened by the knowledge of the Lord, becoming Christians, enjoy the blessings of the new life in Christ, who is the heavenly gift of God's love (John 3:16), "the living bread which came down out of heaven" (John 6:51).

Those who hold to the doctrine of the eternal security of the believer maintain that the word "taste" here, and in the verse to follow, does not mean to eat, to actually imbibe the living bread, but simply to sense with some admiration the wonderful life and sacrificial death of Jesus, yet not to receive him as one's personal Saviour. That is not a valid definition of the word as it is used in the text. The Greek word for taste is *geuo*. One of the definitions Thayer gives to this word is "to experience." The same word is used in 1 Peter 2:3, where the writer obviously refers to Christians, children of God, those who have actually imbibed or experienced the goodness of Christ: "If ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious." See the preceding verse. Then, too, the word *geuo* is used in Hebrews 2:9, where it is said of Jesus "that by the grace of God he should taste of death for every man." In tasting of death, Jesus fully and completely experienced death. To taste, then, of the heavenly gift is actually to experience it.

3. *Made partakers of the Holy Spirit.* The Greek word for "partakers" is *metochos*. It is defined by Thayer as "sharing in, partaking of." The same word is used in Hebrews 3:1, "Wherefore, holy brethren, *partakers* of a heavenly calling . . ." All who have been enlightened and receive the benefits of Christ share in, partake of, the blessings of the Holy Spirit, who is given to dwell in God's children (Galatians 4:6; Romans 8:9).

4. *Tasted of the powers of the age to come.* The phrase "the powers of the age to come" most likely refers to the miracles wrought in confirmation of the gospel—the gospel dispensation being the age to come in Hebrew phraseology. Those referred to here had witnessed these miracles; perhaps some had even performed miracles themselves. In any case, their faith in the gospel had been fully confirmed by miraculous power.

Now notice what happened to these children of God. *They fell away!* "Fell away" in the Greek is *parapesontas*, literally meaning "have fallen away," stating an accomplished fact. Thayer defines this word as follows: "In the Scriptures, *to fall away* (from the true faith); from Christianity, Heb. vi.6." These persons who fell away were not just ordinary backsliders who had stumbled or were overtaken in a fault. They were completely apostate to the religion of Christ, who "crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." So far had they gone in apostasy, so hardened were their hearts in sin, that it was impossible for them to be renewed unto repentance. And without repentance they would be eternally lost, "whose end is to be burned." Can any description be plainer than this of God's children who apostasize and thus miss heaven?

### ***Devoured by the Devil***

*"Be sober, be watchful: your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion,*

walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). If it is impossible for Christians to be devoured by the devil, then why was this exhortation written to them? The plain fact is that they can fail to be sober and watchful, thus to be devoured by the devil. The holy scriptures therefore give due warning about this fearful possibility. Will any one affirm that a Christian who is devoured by the devil will be eternally saved?

### **Name Blotted Out of the Book of Life**

*"He that overcometh shall thus be arrayed in white garments; and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels" (Revelation 3:5).* It is surely agreed upon by all Bible believers that those whose names are written in the book of life are Christians, God's children. Cf. Philippians 4:3, "Yea, I beseech thee also, true yokefellow, help these women, for they labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life." It is surely further agreed upon that those whose names are not found in the book of life will be eternally lost. "And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15).

If it is impossible for Christians to fail to overcome and to have their names blotted out of the book of life, then the passage under consideration has no meaning at all, being a needless, wasted exhortation. But Jesus is giving this warning to Christians because it is entirely possible for them to be negligent of their responsibilities, to fail to overcome, to have their names blotted out of the book of life, and to be eternally lost.

See also Hebrews 10:26-31; James 5:19,20; 2 Peter 2:20-22.

### **Questions**

1. Discuss the possibility of Christians apostasizing and thus missing heaven as taught in Colossians 1:22,23; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 2:17, 18.
2. What is the significance to us of the example of the Hebrew apostates (Hebrews 3:12-19; 1 Corinthians 10:1-12)?
3. Why do we know that the false teachers described in 2 Peter 2:1 were children of God?
4. Discuss the possibility of apostasy, of missing heaven, as taught in John 15:1-6 and Romans 14:13,15.
5. What does Galatians 5:4 teach about the possibility of falling from grace?
6. Discuss the possibility of apostasy as revealed in Hebrews 6:4-8.
7. Why cannot a child of God who is devoured by the devil reach heaven?
8. What is implied concerning apostasy in Revelation 3:5?



### POWER TO REACH HEAVEN

As we considered in the preceding lesson, the fact that a Christian can fall from grace and so miss heaven is plainly taught in the word of God. But the divine word also just as plainly teaches that this tragedy does not have to happen to any Christian, that those who have a living, loving, obedient faith in Christ will find in Him all the power and strength they need to complete their earthly pilgrimage and reach their heavenly goal.

Unquestionably, He who has the power to give us life with God when we surrender ourselves to Him, putting Him on in baptism, also has the power to sustain and preserve this wonderful life so that we will reach our heavenly goal. As Robert Newton aptly expressed it, "We have no power to make ourselves alive, and when life is given we have no power to preserve it, and therefore we need such a one as Jesus. Nothing could continue to live, if it were left entirely to itself. Some things, when they begin to live, need a great deal more care and support than others. Look, for instance, at a babe that is just born, and a chicken that is just hatched. How different they are in the care they require! But there is nothing that requires more care than souls, after Jesus has made them alive. We are in a position of great danger. If left to ourselves, we must perish. If we have a servant working for us, we can show him the work we want him to do; but we cannot give him the strength to do it. Jesus can do both. He is like a great mountain that can support everything that rests upon it, whether an army or a fly. He is like the ocean, too. When men launch their huge iron steamers, by scores and by hundreds, the ocean supports them as easily as though they were light as a piece of cork. And so Jesus can support all His people."

Let us now consider the salient teaching of the New Testament concerning the strength and power Christ gives His faithful disciples which will keep them in the divine fellowship throughout all eternity.

#### **Looking to Jesus**

*"Therefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that hath endured such gainsaying of sinners against himself, that ye wax not weary, fainting in your souls" (Hebrews 12:1-3).*

This passage, as well as many others in the New Testament, refutes the legalistic notion that we can get to heaven by our own power alone in abstaining from sin and in running the Christian race. True, as we

previously noted, we must agonize or strive in applying ourselves to the will of Christ, being patient in the face of all temptations and trials; but, above all, we must *look to Jesus*, who is not only the author but also the perfecter of the faith that leads to eternal salvation. See 1 Peter 1:9. We must not only consider all that Jesus enjoins upon us in His word concerning Christian living, but we must also consider *Him*, who can give us the power for faithful, obedient, steadfast living.

### ***The Grace That Is in Christ Jesus***

*"Thou therefore, my child, be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus"* (2 Timothy 2:1). As we previously considered, men are saved from their past sins and in heaven by divine grace; and now this passage affirms that the strength needed to sustain them is also through divine grace.

Being strengthened in the grace of Christ is equivalent to being strengthened in the Holy Spirit, who is called the "Spirit of grace" (Hebrews 10:29), and through whom Christ dwells in the Christian: "And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he gave us" (1 John 3:24). Thus unless the Christian has the Spirit dwelling in him, divine grace cannot give him the sustaining, enabling strength he needs to fight victoriously against the powers of evil and to reach his heavenly destiny. Carefully read Ephesians 3:14-20, "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, that ye may be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; to the end that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled unto all the fulness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." See John 15:5; Romans 8:11; Colossians 1:10,11; Philippians 4:19.

The plain, scriptural truth is that the faithful Christian is not alone in fighting the good fight of faith, but he has the divine presence to sustain him. Every Christian who enjoys the empowering presence of the Lord in his life can speak the words of Paul, "I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13). As he makes the pilgrimage that will end in heaven, he receives great comfort from such passages as Hebrews 13:5,6, ". . . for himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee. So that with courage we say, The Lord is my helper; I will not fear: what shall man do unto me." See Matthew 28:20; Romans 8:31-39; 2 Corinthians 2:14.

### ***Deliverance from Temptation***

The great destroyer Satan works to tempt Christians into departing

from the heavenly way; but God, who is more powerful than Satan, offers them deliverance from temptation: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13); "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation" (2 Peter 2:9).

Jesus, our faithful and merciful high priest, who Himself had to face temptation during His earthly ministry, is the enabling power of God given us to withstand temptation: "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted" (Hebrews 2:18).

### ***Sin Made Powerless***

Since it is sin that separates men from God and thus bars them the entrance to heaven, the Christian who would be eternally saved must not be under the power or dominion of sin. Sin can indeed be made powerless in his life by God's grace as he lives faithfully to Him. That is the thesis of Romans 6:12-14, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey the lusts thereof: neither present your members unto sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves unto God, as alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under law, but under grace."

This passage does not say that the Christian who strives to obey the Lord will never sin, but that sin will have no *dominion* over him. Indeed, it is plainly taught in the New Testament that all Christians sin (James 3:2; 1 John 1:8), but sin is made powerless over them by the grace of God when they live essentially in obedience to the divine will. It is through the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus Christ, answering to Romans 6:14, that the grace of God is wrought to keep the faithful Christian free from the guilt of sin so that he is constantly prepared to go to heaven: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). See 1 John 2:1,2.

### ***Guarded by God's Power***

The faith of the Christian ends in eternal salvation (1 Peter 1:9) because it has access through Christ to the guarding power of God: ". . . an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who by the power of God are guarded through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:4,5). The word "guarded" here in the Greek is *phroureo*, defined by Thayer as "watching and guarding to preserve one for the attainment of something." Peter affirms, then, that God will not allow

the faithful Christian to fall from grace and miss heaven, but will keep watch over him, guarding him from every danger that confronts his soul so that he will be preserved for the attainment of eternal salvation. Thus we see again that it is only as the Christian turns away from God that he will fall from grace, for whoever continues his walk with God by faith can never be separated from Him and His saving grace.

As God has reserved an inheritance for His saints in heaven, so are God's faithful heirs guarded; neither shall it fail them nor they it. The heavenly inheritance is guaranteed by God to all who continue to trust in Him and His blessed Son.

A. G. Brown observed, "We are kept [guarded] always. The keeping of the text extends unto 'the last time.' We are kept 'unto the end.' What is there before us? Well, there is sickness for sure. But the promise is, 'He,' that is the Lord, 'will make his bed in his sickness.' Beyond sickness stands grim death, but that has lost all power to sting. Beyond death there yawns an open grave. But here the Lord's keeping shines forth most magnificently. Yes, kept for the resurrection morning. Kept by invincible might for re-union with the glorified spirit. Nothing short of eternal keeping before the ever-living God, or meets the requirements of our immortal souls."

"But the Lord is faithful, who shall establish you, and guard you from the evil one" (2 Thessalonians 3:3).

### ***Confirmed to the End***

The power of God through Christ to keep us in His grace throughout our earthly walk so that we will be prepared for Christ's second coming, is affirmed in 1 Corinthians 1:4-8, "I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus; that in everything ye were enriched in him, in all utterance and all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed to you: so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall confirm you unto the end, that ye be unreprouable in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." The Greek word for "confirm" in the phrase "confirm you unto the end" is *bebaioo*, defined by Robert Young as "to make firm, strong or sure." Paul affirms here that God will make firm, strong or sure the faithful Christian's relations to Him so that when Christ comes again he will be unreprouable or blameless, prepared to be received by Christ into the heavenly mansions.

### ***God Is Able***

The power of God through Christ to keep us in His fellowship and to set us before His presence in the glory of heaven is expressed in Jude 24, 25: "Now unto him that is able to guard you from stumbling, and to set you before the presence of his glory without blemish in exceeding joy, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be

glory, majesty, dominion and power, before all time, and now, and for evermore. Amen.” The word “able” here is from the Greek *dunamai* (the derivation of such English words as dynamic, dynamite, and dynamo), defined by Robert Young as “to be powerful, to have power.” The word “guard” is from the Greek *phulasso*, defined in its context here as “to guard from being lost or perishing, i.e. (with the predominant idea of a happy issue), to preserve” (Thayer). The word “stumbling” is from the Greek *aptaistos*, defined by Thayer as “not stumbling, firm, exempt from falling.”

So we see in this beautiful prayer of Jude that God has all ability or power through Christ to preserve us so that we will never fall and be eternally lost but will be eternally saved. If we avail ourselves of this power by a trusting, loving, obedient faith in Christ, we will have an absolute immunity from apostasy. Cf. 2 Corinthians 9:8; 1 Peter 5:8-11; Jude 20,21.

“Let us ask the question, Are we sufficient of ourselves to accomplish the high end of ‘being presented faultless in the presence of Divine glory’? Have we the wisdom or the ability to ‘keep ourselves from falling,’ and to attain to the blamelessness of celestial purity? Does our experience give us any ground to trust in the amplex of our natural resources for accomplishing such duties? . . . Hence, feeling that we have not the ability sufficient to secure our own perseverance, we are prepared, humbly and gratefully, to receive that aid which the gospel unfolds to us. God ‘is able.’ He made us. He knows therefore our frame. Every principle of our constitution he is ultimately acquainted with. He has all channels laid open, for gaining access to the most secret spring of action that is within us. He sees the motives that will best affect us, and how and when these ought to be touched. He is prepared to act in all circumstances, and to suit his dispensations to every variety of state, and peculiarity of want. God ‘is able’; yea, in the strict and full meaning of the word, he ‘alone is able’” (William Muir).

### ***The Need of Prayer***

No one can truly trust in the Lord for power to live as he ought and to withstand the temptations and trials of life, consequently to reach heaven, who does not expressly rely on that power through prayer. Jesus declared, “And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (Matthew 21:22); “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation” (Matthew 26:41); “Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is” (Mark 13:33); “But watch ye at every season, making supplication, that ye may prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man” (Luke 21:36).

James 5:16 affirms, “The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working.” After exhorting his fellow Christians to be “strong in

the Lord, and in the strength of his might," to "put on the whole armor of God . . . to stand against the wiles of the devil," Paul further exhorts them, "With all prayer and supplication praying at all seasons in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance and supplication for all the saints" (Ephesians 6:10-18). See Psalms 34:10; Philippians 4:5-7.

It is certainly no overstatement of the case to affirm that the basic means of victory in the life of the Christian through divine power is prayer. Augustus Neander observed concerning the writings of the early postapostolic religious leaders: "The soul of the whole Christian life is considered to be prayer. Even they who otherwise differed widely in bent of mind, or habits of thinking, were agreed in acknowledging this."

Concerning the power of prayer in the spiritual life, Origen wrote, "How much has each one among us to say about the efficacy of prayer, when we would thankfully record the benefits received from God? Souls which had long lain barren, and which became conscious of their dearth, rendered fruitful by the Holy Spirit through persevering prayer, have given forth words of salvation full of the intuitions of prayer."

The prayer which Paul offered for his fellow saints is the prayer above all others that the Christian must offer for himself as he looks to God for power to prepare him for the coming of Christ: "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment; so that ye may approve the things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and void of offence unto the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are through Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God" (Philippians 1:9-11).

### Questions

1. Why must we look to Jesus for power and strength to reach heaven?
2. Discuss the grace that is in Christ which strengthens us for the heavenly journey.
3. How do we receive deliverance from temptation?
4. What is meant by sin not having dominion over the faithful Christian?
5. Discuss the *guarding* power of God in sustaining us for the heavenly journey.
6. Discuss the immunity from apostasy that the Christian can have by God's power, according to Jude 24,25.
7. What is the significance of prayer in the life of the heaven-bound Christian?

## ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

It is certainly true, as we previously considered, that a Christian, a child of God, can fall from grace and so miss heaven. But this does not mean that he must constantly live in the fear that he will “never make it,” that at any time he may make a mistake that will send him to hell even though he essentially trusts in, loves, and obeys the Lord. We have made a great mistake in our preaching and teaching by pointing out the possibility of apostasy but failing to emphasize that no Christian need fall from grace, that in Christ he can have the blessed assurance of salvation. As Jerry A. Riley succinctly expressed it, “Over-emphasis on the possibility of apostasy is an unhealthy doctrine—a damnable doctrine that robs one of the assurance of God even in the valley of the shadow of death.”

When a Christian morbidly dwells on the possibility of losing his soul, he can become a fit subject for the psychiatrist’s couch. The constant threat of hell hanging over him can literally drive him out of his mind. Yet, there are those in the church who believe that it is a matter of doctrinal soundness not to know their spiritual status, whether they are going to hell or to heaven. They even accuse those who speak of *knowing* that they are saved of virtually denying the possibility of apostasy, of believing in the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints. But they themselves are guilty of denying the plain, simple teaching of the New Testament concerning the assurance of salvation that every Christian has who trusts not in himself but in the Lord, whose soul is committed “in well-doing unto a faithful Creator” (1 Peter 4:19), who believes in the promises of God (Hebrews 10:23).

### *Self-examination*

Since it is by the merits and power of Christ that the Christian can go to heaven, as we have already emphasized, then if a Christian can *know* that Christ dwells in him he can also *know* that he is going to heaven. “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). Thus the injunction of 2 Corinthians 13:5, “Try your own selves, whether ye are in the faith; prove your own selves. Or know ye not as to your own selves, that Jesus Christ is in you? unless indeed ye be reprobate.” If Christians cannot *know* that Christ is in them, then the apostle’s exhortation here is needless. But the apostle insists that they can *know* by *trying* and *proving* themselves. The word “try” is from the Greek *peirazo*, meaning “to try, make trial of, test: . . . for the purpose of ascertaining his quality or what he thinks” (Thayer). The word “prove” is from the Greek *dokimazo*, meaning “to test, examine, prove, scrutinize (to see whether a thing is genuine or not), as metals” (Thayer).

When a Christian really brings himself to trial by giving himself a

close, honest, candid examination to find out whether he is "in the faith," whether he is in Christ and striving to obey His will, he can know of a certainty whether Christ is in him and he has the hope of glory. If he fails the test after trying and proving himself, then he can know that Christ is not in him and that he therefore is reprobate and headed in the direction of eternal condemnation. But he does not have to be in a quandary about the matter: he can *know* where he stands spiritually and the eternal direction of his life.

When a Christian knows that Christ is in him because he trusts in Him and essentially obeys His will, then he can know that the blood of Christ continually cleanses him from the sins he commits along the way. That is the import of 1 John 1:7, "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Even though the faithful Christian realizes that he does commit sin and thus is not perfect in himself, he is not ridden by feelings of guilt and of not being good enough to go to heaven. He has confidence that he continually, every moment of his life, lives under the cleansing power of the blood shed on Calvary and that he therefore is continually saved and on the way to heaven. Not only in his prayers but in his entire attitude of dependence on Christ, he confesses his sins and thus affirms his utter need of divine grace and the efficacy of Calvary to make him fit for the heavenly kingdom. See 1 John 1:9.

### ***The Meaning of Hope***

The New Testament has a great deal to say about the *hope* of heaven, and the very meaning of this word from the Greek *elpis* (verb *elpizo*) denotes the assurance that the faithful Christian has of reaching heaven. In all of its uses in the New Testament it denotes the idea of confident, favorable expectation. Thayer defines *elpizo* as "to wait for salvation with joy and full confidence," citing Romans 8:24 as an example: "For in hope were we saved."

The confident, favorable expectation the faithful Christian has of reaching heaven because he has accepted the sure promise of God is the import of Titus 1:2, "In hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before times eternal."

The confidence and joy that the faithful Christian's hope involves, based on his justified relationship to Christ, is expressed in Romans 5: 1,2, "Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have had our access by faith into this grace wherein we stand; and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God." See Romans 12:12.

The certainty of the faithful Christian's hope is also emphasized in Hebrews 6:19,20, where the writer, after speaking of those who have "fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us," declares, "which



we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and stedfast and entering into that which is within the veil; whither as a forerunner Jesus entered for us, having become a high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." Since the faithful Christian has taken refuge in the Rock of Ages, believing that his Saviour has entered into heaven as a forerunner to prepare a place for him, his hope of reaching heaven, of "entering into that which is within the veil," is not a vain, uncertain expectation but "sure and stedfast."

So significant is the teaching of the New Testament concerning the Christian's hope, the reader who desires to have a greater grasp of this teaching is referred to the following passages: Acts 23:6; 24:15; Romans 5:3-5; 15:4,13; 1 Corinthians 13:13; Colossians 1:5,23; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:16,17; 1 Timothy 1:1; 5:5; Titus 2:13; 1 Peter 1:13,21.

### ***Earnest of the Spirit***

According to Ephesians 1:13,14, the assurance of heaven that the faithful Christian has is based on his realization and recognition that the Holy Spirit dwells in him: "In whom ye also, having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation,—in whom, having also believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is an earnest of our inheritance, unto the redemption of God's own possession, unto the praise of his glory." Here the apostle speaks of the final redemption of God's people, His possession, when they claim their heavenly inheritance. He affirms that the *earnest* of this inheritance is the Holy Spirit. In essence he affirms the same thing in the following passages: "Now he that established us with you in Christ, and anointed us, is God; who also sealed us, and gave us the *earnest* of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Corinthians 1:21,22); "For indeed we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened; not for that we would be unclothed, but that we would be clothed upon, that what is mortal may be swallowed up of life. Now he that wrought us for this very thing is God, who gave us the *earnest* of the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 5:4,5).

The word "earnest" in these passages is from the Greek *arrabon*, originally designating earnest money deposited by a purchaser and forfeited if the purchase was not completed. It eventually was used to designate a pledge or earnest of any kind. Thus we can see that the Holy Spirit is given to Christians by God as a pledge or guarantee that they will come into the possession of their heavenly inheritance when the work of redemption is finally completed.

Concerning the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Christian, Paul declared in Romans 8:9-11, "But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. But if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the spirit is life because of righteousness.

But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, he that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies through his Spirit that dwelleth in you.” When we accept the foregoing passage for what it plainly teaches, we can readily understand why those who claim to be Christians, yet deny that the Holy Spirit dwells in them, cannot possibly consistently believe that they belong to Christ; and thus they tacitly reject the hope that can only come from Him and God’s pledge of the eternal salvation that the faithful Christian shall inherit in heaven. They cannot possibly even have the assurance that they shall be raised incorruptibly to eternal life since it is by the power of the indwelling Spirit that this will happen.

But the truly faithful Christian unquestionably accepts the fact that the Holy Spirit dwells in him. Thus he has the assurance of this pledge or guarantee from God that he shall receive the heavenly inheritance. Having become a child of God by faith in Christ, such faith as caused him to be baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:26,27), he knows that he has received the Holy Spirit because of the sure declaration of God’s word: “And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:6). See Acts 5:32. As he then essentially bears the fruit of the Spirit, he can know that the Spirit continues to dwell in him (Galatians 5:22,23) and that he thus continually has God’s pledge of the heavenly inheritance that shall be his in the afterworld. This is illustrated by the reference to love, part of the fruit of the Spirit, in 1 John 3:14,15,18,19, “We *know* that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. . . . My little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth. Hereby shall we *know* that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before him.”

### ***Being Persuaded***

Paul expressed his personal assurance of salvation in heaven: “I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Timothy 1:12). Paul had committed his soul in the Lord’s care and keeping. As a faithful Christian his life was spent in laying up for himself treasures in heaven. Thus on the basis of truly *knowing* Christ in the forgiveness of his sins and faithful submission to His will, he was persuaded that the Lord was able to guard or keep his soul and heavenly treasures safe and secure. The word “persuaded” in the Greek is *peitho*, meaning “be convinced, certain” (Arndt-Gingrich). So Paul was convinced or certain of the safety of his soul and heavenly treasures through the guarding power of Christ, which all other faithful Christians can also be convinced or certain of.

We cannot fail to see the emphasis Paul places here on his personal relationship to Christ by his use of the words, "I know *him*," not just being acquainted with a set of doctrines and a code of conduct but knowing *personally* Him who is the way, the truth, and the life. As Charles Spurgeon expressed it, "Paul had trusted in a person . . . and had practically carried out his confidence, for he had deposited everything with this person. . . . We are to understand by this that Paul looked steadily at the object of his confidence, and knew that he relied upon God in Christ Jesus. He did not rest in a vague hope that he would be saved, nor in a sanguine expectation that all things would, somehow, turn out right at the end. He did not hold the theory of modernists that our Lord Jesus Christ did something or other, which, in one way or another, is more or less remotely connected with the forgiveness of sin; but he knew the Lord Jesus Christ as a person, and he deliberately placed himself in His keeping, knowing Him to be the Saviour."

The assurance of eternal life that the Christian has who truly knows the Saviour by belief in Him is also expressed in 1 John 5:13, "These things have I written unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, even unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God." Again we see the import of the word "know," not to guess or speculate but to have assurance and confidence of unending life with God.

### ***The Assurance of Things Hoped For***

Saving faith is described in Hebrews 11:1 as "*assurance of things hoped for*, a conviction of things not seen." The Greek word rendered here as assurance is *hupostasis*, literally meaning "a standing under (*hupo*, under, *histemi*, to stand). It is rendered as "confidence" in 2 Corinthians 9:4; 11:17 and Hebrews 3:14, which is its meaning also in the passage under consideration. In discussing the various secular uses of *hupostasis*, Moulton and Milligan observe, ". . . in all cases there is the central idea of something that underlies visible conditions and guarantees a future possession. As this is the essential meaning in Hebrews 11:1, we venture to suggest the following translation, 'Faith is the title-deed of things hoped for.'" This may well be a valid translation. Through our faith in Christ we possess a title-deed, God's guarantee, of that which we hope for, eternal life in heaven. It is evident from this passage and others that those who call themselves Christians, but have no assurance of heavenly things, do not really believe in Christ. Our blessed Saviour has not called us out of the darkness and frustration of sin into a life of insecurity and uncertainty, but into a life that receives from God the constant assurance and certainty that we are Christ's and possess in Him the divine guarantee of eternal life in heaven.

## Questions

1. Even though a child of God can apostasize and thus miss heaven, why is it necessary that we emphasize in our teaching and preaching that no Christian need fall from grace, that in Christ he can have the blessed assurance of salvation?
2. Discuss the self-examination that Paul commands in 2 Corinthians 13:5.
3. Discuss the confidence or assurance involved in the faithful Christian's hope of reaching heaven.
4. What is the connection between the faithful Christian's hope of heaven and his realization that the Holy Spirit dwells in him?
5. Discuss Paul's personal assurance of eternal salvation in heaven as expressed in 2 Timothy 1:12.
6. Discuss the affirmation of Hebrews 11:1 that faith is "assurance of things hoped for."

## THE HEAVENLY GLORY

What is heaven like? To this question and all similar ones we are constrained to answer that *we do not know*, that is, not precisely or literally. We must recognize that the Biblical descriptions made of the spiritual, incorruptible realm of heaven are in terms of physical, earthly, corruptible things, which, on the face of it, seems to be quite incongruous. Carefully read the description of heaven given in Revelation 21:9-27; 22:1-5. In this description the writer portrays the street in the heavenly realm, "the holy city Jerusalem," as being "pure gold, as it were transparent glass," which, from the human viewpoint, is a plain contradiction of fact. For, after all, few elements that exist are as opaque as gold. Even the thinnest sheet of gold, such as is used for certain kinds of lettering, is virtually completely opaque. And yet John describes a street of pure gold being as transparent glass! Has he lied? Is this and his other descriptions of heaven to be considered as myths? Certainly not! John has simply given us a poetic delineation of heaven in order to impress on our minds what a wonderfully glorious place it is.

### *Accomodative Description*

There is no possible way for us to have any idea at all concerning things we have never seen except in terms of things we have seen. Thus John has described heaven in terms of the loveliest, most valuable and beautiful things we can know about in the physical world where we now live. In other words, he has simply accommodated his picturization of heaven to our level of understanding. The physical things he uses to describe heaven, then, are simply symbols of that which they stand for. To conclude that John literally describes heaven is to affirm that it is a physical realm, which is to miss the point entirely. The crux of the matter is that if the things which Jesus uses to describe heaven are marvelously, beautifully, enrapturously glorious, how much more is the reality of heaven marvelously, beautifully, enrapturously glorious. The imagery, as it stands, is not to be mistaken for final, complete knowledge, but it certainly must have some significance and meaning. It *stands* for something we do not know, but something that is glorious beyond our finite ability to understand since we "walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7).

That the glory of heaven is something that we can only fully comprehend when faith shall end in sight is affirmed in 1 Peter 5:1, where the Christian is described as "a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed." See Romans 8:18. Since the full, literal revelation concerning heaven is in the future, then any description of it in the word of God must be accepted as figurative rather than literal, as accomodated to our level of understanding. But we must continually remember that the glory of

heaven shall indeed transcend all the glories of the physical universe. Every faithful Christian who has contemplated the beauty of a gorgeous sunrise or sunset, the grandeur of a star-spangled sky, the majesty of a snow-capped mountain, etc. can have a foretaste, but only that, of the infinitely greater glory that awaits him in heaven.

Samuel Hopkins observed, "The glory of heaven is such that it can never be fully known until it is fully enjoyed. And yet if heaven were made crystallly transparent to you, if ever God opened you a window into it, and then the eyes of your faith to look in by that window, think what it is that you there discovered, what inaccessible light, what cherishing love, what daunting majesty, what infinite purity, what overlooking joy, what insupportable and sinking glory, what rays and sparklings from crowns and scepters; but more from the glances and smiles of God upon the heavenly host, who for ever warm and sun themselves in his presence; and when you have thought all this, then think once again that all your thoughts are but shadows and glimmerings, that these are dust and ashes in the eye of your faith that make all these discoveries come infinitely short of the native glory of these things, and then you may guess, and somewhat near, what heaven is."

Some passages that expressly refer to the glory of heaven are the following: "For our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17); ". . . that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Timothy 2:10); "For it became him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory . . ." (Hebrews 2:10).

### ***The Divine Presence***

The epitome of heaven's glory is the presence of the Father and His beloved Son. Concerning the Father, the divine word pictures His glory as the light of heaven, thus making heaven the realm of eternal day: ". . . the holy city Jerusalem . . . having the glory of God . . . And the city hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine upon it: for the glory of God did lighten it . . . And there shall be night no more; and they need no light of lamp, neither light of sun; for the Lord God shall give them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 21:10,11,23; 2:5).

The heavenly glory of the Son is revealed in such passages as 1 Timothy 6:14-16, ". . . our Lord Jesus Christ: which in its own times he shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, the Lord of lords; who only hath immortality, dwelling in light unapproachable; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and power eternal." Hebrews 2:9 speaks of Him being "crowned with glory and honor." In Revelation 21:23 He is portrayed as sharing the light of the glory of God: ". . . and the lamp thereof is the Lamb." See John 17:24.

How glorious indeed it shall be to behold our Father and Saviour in heaven!

### ***Our Personal Glory***

1 John 3:2 refers to the personal glory we shall have in heaven: "Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is." It is plainly stated here that we cannot know what we shall be like in heaven; but since we will be like our glorious Redeemer, we shall be glorious indeed.

In a sense, we share in the divine glory here as partakers of the divine nature (1 Peter 1:4), but how much more glorious shall we be when our immortal souls will reside forever in the bodies that will be resurrected unto eternal life in heaven at the second coming of Christ. "There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. . . . And as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" (1 Corinthians 15:40-44,49).

Concerning the transforming power of the glory of Christ, 2 Corinthians 3:18 states, "But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit." If the vision of Christ transforms us now "into the same image," even though His glory be only reflected from "a mirror," what will be the effect of beholding His unveiled glory when we see Him as He is in heaven? Here the glory of Christ is only partially revealed to His disciples; in heaven His glory will be fully manifested, and, according to His own prayer for His disciples, they will behold His glory (John 17:24). And the result of this heavenly vision, according to 1 John 3:2, will be their complete transformation into the likeness of the Lord. In their completely glorified being—body, soul, and spirit—they will indeed be "like him."

"This we know: we shall be like Him. Jesus Christ was transfigured before His disciples. That was a glorious manifestation, and when the the three privileged disciples who beheld His glory on the Mount were permitted to do so, when the period of enjoined silence had passed, they testified to that glory in glowing words. And here we are told by one of their number that Jesus Christ's disciples are to be transfigured, not now and here, but in the future life, at the termination of the present dispensation, at His appearing or coming. We are told that in that day they shall be like Him, like Him whose face when He was

transfigured was like the sun, and whose raiment was white and glistening, and who will come forth in His second appearing in His own glory and in the glory of His Father and of the holy angels" (James Hastings).

When the Lord's faithful ones are received unto Him at His second coming, their faith that has endured the trials of life will "be found unto praise and glory and honor" (1 Peter 1:7). This is according to the promise expressed in Romans 8:17, ". . . heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him."

Concerning the purpose of His second coming to receive unto Himself His faithful ones, Jesus said, "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matthew 13:43). What a beautiful description of the glory of redeemed souls in heaven! As they partake of the celestial glory of Christ, who is "the sun of righteousness" (Malachi 4:2), they shall indeed shine with such resplendent glory that the nearest comparison to it from what we can behold in our solar system is the sun. The sun is truly the greatest glory of the world and far excels in glory all other things. So the eternally redeemed, glorified disciples of Christ shall shine forth in infinitely greater glory, far beyond the glory of anything in this vast physical universe.

Concerning the glory of those who will reach heaven, B. Keach wrote, "The sun is a pure, bright, and spotless creature, far brighter than the moon or stars, so the glory of the saints will be a pure, bright, and spotless glory, not like the glory of the world, nor like the glory which attends the saints while they are here in this mortal body. The sun is sometimes eclipsed by the gross body of the moon interposing betwixt us and it; but the glory of the saints shall by no dark body of sin, corruption, or of this world, be eclipsed any more forever. The sun is so glorious, that mortal cannot behold it, but their eyes will dazzle. So the glory of saints will be too great for sinners to behold, it would even put out their eyes, or confound them. O happy believers!"

### ***Stimulus for Godly Living***

The heavenly-mindedness that is a stimulus for godly living, which we discussed in lesson five, is also stressed in connection with the glory that faithful Christians shall have in heaven when they become like their glorified Saviour: "And every one that hath this hope set on him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:3). The Christian who conforms to this description is aware that though perfect likeness to Christ will never be attained until the great heavenly change has come, and he sees Him as He is, yet for that perfection the present life must be a preparation, or it will never be realized at all. Though he therefore, in a sense, is always pure as a faithful follower of Christ, who depends on the cleansing power of the Saviour's blood, his hope of this glorious transformation in heaven incites him to even a greater purity



as he strives to become more and more like his perfectly pure Saviour.

In reading in Revelation of the glory of the celestial city, with its imagery of a jasper wall, golden street, etc., we notice in the very midst of this description the declaration, "And there shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie: but only they that are written in the Lamb's book of life" (21:27). The glory of heaven will never be dimmed by the presence of sin. Only those who have striven for personal purity, who "washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:14), and thus have their names written in the Lamb's book of life, will be granted an entrance into the eternal glory of heaven.

### **Conclusion**

*Heaven—a glorious realm inhabited by a glorious Father, a glorious Son, and a glorious people!* Will you inherit this everlasting glory? As a child of God, it is your spiritual birthright. Pray to God, trust in God, work with God, so that none of the things that men consider glorious in this world will ever dim your vision of the infinitely greater glory of heaven. "How transcendent the glory of that world where there shall be no more sin nor imperfection—where all shall unite in the song, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain'! 'The glory of the Lord doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.' The idolatrous temple of Diana was so bright and splendid that the door-keeper always cried to them that entered in, 'Take heed to your eyes.' But what faculties of vision must we have to behold the glory of the temple above! If it is said that the righteous shall shine forth as the sun, what will be the splendour of the Eternal Throne? What a delightful change, from this world of darkness and imperfection to that where all shall be light and glory!" (John Slaughter).

### **Questions**

1. Why does the Bible describe the glory of heaven in terms of earthly, physical things?
2. In light of 2 Corinthians 5:7, why is it impossible for us to comprehend fully the heavenly glory?
3. Discuss the presence of the Father and His beloved Son as the epitome of heaven's glory.
4. Discuss the personal glory we shall have in heaven, according to 1 John 3:2; 1 Corinthians 15:40-44,49; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Romans 8:17; Matthew 13:43.
5. Discuss the hope of being like Jesus in heaven as a stimulus for godly living.
6. As you striving by God's grace to inherit the everlasting glory of heaven?

### THE HEAVENLY HOME (1)

In the preceding lesson we discussed heaven from the standpoint of its *glory*, both its glory as a place and the glory of its inhabitants. In this lesson and the one to follow, we shall discuss the *state* of heaven, stressing what existence will be like in the glorious new Jerusalem. In so doing we shall focus our attention on the imagery of heaven as a *home*. No word can describe the happy, joyous state of heaven more effectively than this, for, after all, among the happiest associations of life are those involved in a lovely home. Every Christian who has been part of such a home has had a foretaste of the heavenly state.

Indeed, the very thought of a lovely home brings to mind some of the sweetest thoughts that human beings can have. We heartily agree with Thomas Guthrie's observation, "'Home'—oh, how sweet is that word! What beautiful and tender associations cluster thick around it! Compared with it, house, mansion, palace, are cold, heartless terms. But 'home!' that word quickens the pulse, warms the heart, stirs the soul to its depths, makes age feel young again, rouses apathy into energy, inspires the soldier with courage on the field of battle, and imparts patient endurance to the worn-down sons of toil."

One morning during the Civil War while the Federal and Confederate soldiers were encamped on the opposite sides of the Rappahannock, the brass band of the Federals played the national song, and all the Federals resoundly cheered. Then, on the other side of the river, the brass band of the Confederates played 'My Maryland' and 'Dixie'—and then all the Southern troops resoundly cheered. But after a while one of the bands struck up 'Home, Sweet Home,' and the band on the opposite side of the river took up the strain, and when the tune was finished the Confederates and Federals all united in one great 'Hurrah' as the tears rolled down their cheeks.

Surely, if the thoughts of one's earthly home can arouse such wonderfully beautiful and sweet sentiments, how much more should the thoughts of his heavenly home arouse such sentiments as he sets his mind on the things above.

Jesus had in mind the heavenly home when He said, "In my Father's house are many mansions" (John 14:2). The word "house" denotes here more than just a dwelling place but also a state of existence best designated as a *home*. From this passage in its context, along with other passages describing the heavenly state, we will learn about the condition of existence in our heavenly home. As we study these passages, we will keep in mind the characteristics of our earthly homes which both typify and differ from our heavenly home.

## **Reality or Certainty**

Concerning the home He has gone to prepare for us, Jesus said, "If it were not so, I would have told you" (John 14:2). No one doubts the reality of his earthly home, and those who believe in God and in Christ, who truly walk by faith, do not at all doubt the reality of their heavenly home. What the Lord says about the home in the heavenly mansions is as true as what He says about everything else. Concerning this utterance of the Lord, W. Frank Scott wrote, "We have friends whose character are so genuine that we say, Their word is as good as their bond. They would not, even to please us, utter what they know to be untrue. And who that has studied the character of Jesus could think otherwise of Him? And especially will this be the case with those who know the power of Christ's gospel in their hearts and lives, and have the joy of His fellowship in their souls. Such rest on this blessed promise in implicit confidence."

## **Fellowship**

Our heavenly home is designated as the "*Father's* house." As a typical, normal earthly home has a father presiding over it, so the perfect heavenly home has the Father God presiding over it. Where the heavenly Father is, there indeed is our heavenly home; if it were possible to enter heaven and find no Father there, heaven would be a place but not a home.

In heaven we shall have the most intimate, blessed fellowship possible in our relationship with the heavenly Father. And not only will we have the perfect blessedness of fellowship with the Father but also with His Son. Regarding the home He went to prepare for His disciples, Jesus promised, "I come again, and *will receive you unto myself*, that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3). What would our heavenly home be without the presence of Him who is the only access we have to the heavenly Father and who is our elder brother (Romans 8:29)? Jesus did not just say he would take us to heaven but also unto *Himself*. This heavenly fellowship with Him will be full and complete as we behold His glory and become like Him, thus fulfilling His prayer, "Father, I desire that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me" (John 17:24). The honor and intimacy of our heavenly fellowship with Christ is portrayed in Revelation 3:21 as sitting down with Him on His throne.

Recognizing the sorrow His disciples felt concerning His impending departure from the earth, Jesus consoled them by saying, "Let not your heart be troubled" (John 14:1), as if to say, "You have had intimate and beautiful fellowship with me during my earthly ministry, but do not sorrow because I am now ready to leave you. This is not the end of your fellowship with me because I will some day return and take you unto myself so that you can have even more intimate and beautiful fellowship with me in my Father's house." And it is most comforting for the Lord's

disciples of every age to realize that death will not end their fellowship with Him but that it is simply the transition from the fellowship of faith to the infinitely more glorious fellowship of sight when they behold Jesus in His glorified state in heaven.

Not only will we have the fellowship of the Father and His Son in the heavenly home but also the fellowship of all our fellow Christians who lived faithfully to the Lord in this life. The fellowship which those in the family of God, the church, have with each other in this world is indeed wonderfully sweet and dear, but how much more wonderfully sweet and dear it will be in heaven! See Ephesians 3:14,15.

When we think of all the faithful saints on the earth being reunited in heaven, renewing their fellowship with each other, it is difficult, if not impossible, to avoid the question: Shall we know our Christian loved ones and friends in heaven? Of course, in seeking an answer to this question we must not be guilty of demanding of God what we personally believe should be the conditions of blessedness in our heavenly home. It is presumptuous for any Christian to demand of God that knowing His Christian loved ones and friends in heaven be a condition of his heavenly happiness. But, surely, every Christian who enjoys the fellowship of fellow Christians in this world cannot keep from seeking an answer to the question at hand, to find out whether those fellow saints he has known on earth he will also know in heaven.

Without being dogmatic about his conclusion, this writer firmly believes that we shall indeed know each other in heaven. First, the fact that in heaven we shall know our elder brother Jesus Christ, whom we have also known during our earthly life, makes it entirely reasonable that we shall recognize our other brethren in heaven whom we have also known here.

The Lord's description of the fellowship of the saints under the symbolism of a banquet also suggests the recognition of each other in the heavenly home: "And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 8:11). Here we find that in the heavenly kingdom, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will not lose their identity; they will still be distinct persons, symbolized by the names they wore during their earthly life. Is it unreasonable to suppose that we shall recognize these distinct persons whom we will be honored to sit down with at the heavenly banquet, whose names were familiar to us on earth from our reading of the Bible? See Matthew 17:3;22:32. And, surely, if it is reasonable to conclude that we will recognize those saints in heaven with whom we were familiar only through Bible study, who will maintain their identity in heaven, is it not as reasonable to conclude that we will also recognize those saints in heaven whom we have known personally on the earth, who also will maintain their identity in heaven? See Revelation 3:5.

Then, too, another argument in favor of knowing each other in the fellowship of our heavenly home is found in Luke 16:9, where Jesus commands His disciples, "Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when it shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles." Here we are told that the friends we have made through the material gifts we have given them will welcome us into the heavenly home. The sick, the bereaved, the hungry and thirsty, and the imprisoned whom we have extended a helping hand, and the lost for whom we have been the instruments of salvation, will be, so to speak, standing in heaven waiting to receive their benefactors into the family circle. Surely, this implies recognition and the resumption of the fellowship they enjoyed in the family of God on earth.

### ***Permanence***

All things pertaining to this world must come to an end. There is nothing permanent about even the most morally and spiritually sturdy home. Members of every earthly family are eventually separated from each other, either by the exigencies of life or by death. But the heavenly family circle will never be broken by any kind of separation. "He that overcometh, I will make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out thence no more" (Revelation 3:12).

The houses in which the earthly families dwell are all subjected to the ravages of time and the elements. But the heavenly mansions are permanent. They represent "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:4). No moth nor rust can consume our heavenly treasures; no thief can steal them (Matthew 6:20). They are safe and secure forever, world without end.

The transient nature of our earthly abiding places in contrast to heaven is depicted in Hebrews 13:14, "For we have not here an abiding place, but we seek after a city which is to come." Some scholars believe that in this passage is a prophetic view of the swift approaching destruction of the earthly Jerusalem, which had been inhabited for centuries but soon would be left desolate. But look at the other cities of the ancient world. There is Babylon, which was built by two million men over a period of several years. It is nothing but dust now. For thousands of years up to the coming of Christ, Thebes was among the largest and wealthiest cities in the world, but it is now a mass of ruin and decay. We could go on and on describing the great cities of the past that have fallen into ruins. Indeed, all about us in this physical world are the signs of change and decay. Our habitations here may continue for a while after we have passed away, but we shall no longer want or need them because we are sealed for a dwelling place in the eternal, indestructible city "which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11:10), where we shall dwell forever.

Involved in the permanence of our heavenly home is the sustaining power of God, who shall give the redeemed saints everything they need for their complete well-being so that "they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat: for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life" (Revelation 7:16, 17).

As we grow older there becomes an increasingly stronger longing for an everlasting home. As we lose our loved ones through death and see our children grow up to establish homes of their own, we become more and more aware of the transient nature of our earthly home and consequently look with a greater longing for life in the unending, incorruptible home in heaven, where there is absolute security and permanence.

### ***Sufficient Room***

When Jesus tells us of "many mansions" being in His Father's house, He implies that there will be sufficient room for all who will be part of the heavenly family of God. Everyone who accepts Christ as his Saviour and abides with Him in this life can know of a certainty that there will be ample room for him in that place where God's eternally redeemed children will dwell. Every faithful Christian has made a reservation for himself in the heavenly mansions, which Christ will honor when He receives him unto Himself in eternity.

### **Questions**

1. Discuss the observation that every Christian who has been part of a lovely home has had a foretaste of the heavenly state.
2. What is the import of Jesus' statement concerning the home He has gone to prepare for us: "If it were not so, I would have told you"?
3. Discuss the fellowship we shall have with the Father and His beloved Son in the heavenly home.
4. Discuss the fellowship we shall have with our fellow saints in the heavenly home.
5. Contrast the transient nature of the Christian's earthly home with the permanence of His heavenly home.
6. What does Jesus imply when He speaks of His Father's house having "many mansions"?
7. Have you made a reservation for yourself in the heavenly mansions?

### THE HEAVENLY HOME (2)

The state of existence in the heavenly home will be that of perfection. Hebrews 12:23 designates those who are "enrolled in heaven" as "the spirits of just men made perfect." This heavenly perfection is due to the absence of sin. "And there shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie: but only they that are written in the Lamb's book of life . . . Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have the right to come to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city. Without are the dogs, and the sorcerers, and the fornicators, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and every one that loveth and maketh a lie" (Revelation 21:27; 22:14,15).

Even the loveliest earthly home is not entirely without sin; thus no home in this world can be perfect. But the heavenly home, which is absolutely devoid of sin, will be the restored perfection of the garden of Eden, which excluded Adam and Eve because of their sin.

#### *Activity*

But when we speak of the perfection of heaven, we must not conclude that it means stagnation and inactivity. This writer decries the sentiment that the fruition of our heavenly hope will be passivity, that in heaven we should be all the time sitting down in a vast circle, singing hymns; or as one person expressed his hope concerning the heavenly state:

I'll be where loud anthems is always a-ricing,  
But as I've no voice, I'm clear of the singing.  
Don't mourn for me now, don't mourn for me never,  
I'm going to do nothing for ever and ever.

It is false to think of heaven as a mere period of relaxation, a vast holiday or the endless long vacation of some lazy person's dream. But one may object to this conclusion by pointing out those Biblical passages that plainly describe the heavenly home as a state of rest: "There remaineth therefore a sabbath *rest* for the people of God. For he that is entered into his *rest* hath himself also rested from his works, as God did from his. Let us therefore give diligence to enter into that *rest*, that no man fall after the same example of disobedience" (Hebrews 4:9-11); "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may *rest* from their labors; for their works follow after them" (Revelation 14:13).

In answer to the objection posed by the use of these passages, we first notice that the word "rest" in them does not mean the cessation of activity. The Hebrew letter expressly compares our heavenly rest with God resting from His works, that is, from the works of creation. But did God cease from all activity following His creation of the world? Not at all. Jesus declared, "My Father worketh even until now, and I work"

(John 5:17). Thus even though the heavenly rest is from the toils, stresses, and strains of life in an imperfect, sinful world, it does not mean the cessation of all activity. Even our earthly homes are places of rest from the struggle of the day, but where the weary laborer gains fresh strength for future work. So in our heavenly home "the voyager will rest from struggles with adverse gales; the Christian soldier will rest from conflict and every spiritual foe;" but we shall still be active because there will still be service to be rendered. "Therefore are they before the throne of God; and they serve him day and night in his temple" (Revelation 7:15); "And there shall be no curse any more: and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be therein: and his servants serve him" (Revelation 22:3).

This writer heartily agrees with J. G. Greenough's observation concerning our heavenly service: "When you come to think of it your hearts revolt from the heaven which is set forth in the sentimental hymns. Having nothing to do may be very pleasant for a while, but it would be intolerable for an eternity. Heaven is a place of sweet activities. The redeemed are serving God day and night before His throne. The highest life is a life of perpetual service. The reward which God confers upon His faithful ones is ability and permission to serve, and when He calls them from the lower to the higher, the higher honor is that they are enabled and privileged to serve more."

It is not difficult to believe that in the heavenly state there will be plenty of room for adventure as well as service, though it will be adventure and service of a different kind. Instead of development *toward* fruition there well may be development *in* fruition. As A. E. Taylor expressed it, "There would be no more progress *towards* goodness of environment or character, but there might be abundant progress *in* good, onward movement in the manifestation of the principle of the good life in ever more varied and richer forms."

It is thrilling indeed to contemplate the possibility of new worlds of adventure and service in our heavenly home, unsullied by sin.

### **Love and Peace**

It is not merely a *place* that makes our earthly home so dear to us, but our loved ones who dwell there. And love for each other binds the family together in the bond of peace. Selfishness is essentially excluded. The members of the family rejoice in each other's successes. Surely, there is no spot on earth where love gains greater triumphs, where it shows more prominently its power, than in a home that is faithful to the Lord. But we are all aware that even the loveliest of Christian homes, with the most faithful adherence to Christ, do not have perfect love and peace. Even though they are essentially pervaded by love and thus are essentially unified in peace, they still lack the perfection of love and peace that prevails in heaven. They are not entirely free from selfishness



and self-seeking. But the heavenly home is the abode of perfect love; thus perfect peace and harmony shall prevail there. Some day hope will end in fruition and faith will end in sight; but love will never fail because "God is love" (1 John 4:8), and His love shall reign supremely forever. "The God of love Himself dwells there, and this renders heaven a world of love; for God is the fountain of love, as the sun is the fountain of light" (Jonathan Edwards).

## Joy

Because heaven is the home of perfect love and peace, it is also the home of perfect joy or happiness. Indeed, among the happiest memories of life are those of childhood when we knew the love and understanding of godly parents. But the joy we shall have in heaven as we bask in the presence of the Father's love shall be infinitely greater than any of the joy or happiness we have had on earth.

Even the happiest of earthly homes must face the sorrow, frustration, pain, death, and remorse that bring tears. But since in heaven there shall be no cause for tears, they shall never exist in that wondrous home of perfect delight. In a passage of surpassing tenderness and loveliness, the word of God describes the heavenly state: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God: and he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more: the first things are passed away" (Revelation 21:3,4). The poet Robert Burns said that he could never read this passage without being so emotionally moved that he would break into tears. What a beautiful picture it is! The Father of mercies, the God of all grace and comfort, taking His faithful children into His everlasting arms and wiping away their tears, symbolic of the fact that in heaven He has excluded anything and everything that can cause tears.

Concerning this reference to God wiping away all tears, Albert Barnes has appropriately observed: "Of all the *negative* descriptions of heaven, there is no one perhaps that would be better adapted to produce consolation than this. This is a world of weeping—a vale of tears. Philosophers have sought a brief definition of man, and have sought in vain. Would there be any better description of him, as representing the reality of his condition here, than to say that he is *one who weeps*? Who is there of the human family that has not shed a tear? Who that has not wept over the grave of a friend; over his own losses and cares; over his disappointments; over the treatment he has received from others; over his sins; over the follies, vices, and woes of his fellowmen? And what a change would it make in our world if it could be said that henceforward not another tear would be shed; not a head would ever be bowed again in grief! Yet, this is to be the condition of heaven. In that world

there is to be no pain, no disappointment, no bereavement. No friend is to lie in dreadful agony on a sick bed; no grave is to be opened to receive a parent, a wife, a child; no gloomy prospect of death is to draw tears of sorrow from their eyes . . . it is a blessed privilege to be permitted to look forward to that brighter scene in heaven, where not a pang shall ever be felt, and not a tear shall ever be shed."

The faithful Christian's troubles are over forever when the heavenly morning arrives. "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalms 30:5). In his heavenly home the faithful Christian will find a rich harvest of joy from the tears he has sown. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him" (Psalms 126:5,6). In heaven God will give the Christian "a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Isaiah 61:3).

To His disciples Jesus said, "Blessed are ye that weep now, for ye shall laugh" (Luke 6:21); "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy" (John 16:20). We are reminded here of Jeremiah 31:13, "I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow."

It is true, of course, that life in Christ in this world brings joy, which is part of the fruit of the Spirit. Indeed, the happiness of heaven reaches down to the earth as sure as the rays of the sun to all who are heavenly-minded. But the happiness or joy the Christian has in this life does not exclude sorrow, death, and all the other woes that men are subjected to while living in a fleshly body. In heaven there is all life and no death; in this world there is both life and death. In heaven there is all joy and no tears; in this world there is both joy and tears. What rational person would want this world to be his perpetual home when by the grace of God and the merits of Christ he can live forever in the land that is fairer than day, where joy is full and complete. As Jesus endured the pain and shame of the cross "for the joy that was set before him" (Hebrews 12:2), we need also constantly to see through all pain, sorrow, and tears to the perfect joy that shall be ours in the heavenly home.

When the faithful Christian stands in judgment, he will hear the wonderful words concerning the joy that he will have with his Lord in heaven: "Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matthew 25:21,23). How striking is the contrast drawn here in the Lord's parable of the talents between the joy awaiting the faithful servant and the misery awaiting the "wicked and slothful servant": "And cast ye out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 25:30).

Concerning the basis for the Christian's happiness in his heavenly home, James Pohl has written some worthy words: "But if you now inquire what the eternity of heaven and the happiness of it is founded upon, I answer, It is founded upon the eternity and unchangeableness of God and His perfections, in covenant with His people through Jesus Christ. But particularly, it is first founded upon the eternity and unchangeableness of the love, grace, mercy, and kindness of God to them. It is founded upon the will and pleasure of God; it is His express will and pleasure that it shall be so (John 6:40). It is also founded upon the power of God, that is not only almighty, but an eternal power; and the strength of this power will endure forever, to make you happy forever, and to lengthen out your immortality. It is founded upon the holiness of God. It is founded upon the justice and righteousness of God (2 Tim. 4:8; 2 Thess. 1:6,7). Indeed, not justice to any merit in your own works, but justice to Christ's merits and His own promise. It is founded upon the everlasting efficacy of the mediatorship of Christ. His kingdom and glory, into which you shall have an abundant entrance, is an everlasting kingdom and glory."

O they tell me of a home far beyond the skies,  
O they tell me of a home far away;  
O they tell me of a home where no storm-clouds rise,  
O they tell me of an unclouded day.

O they tell me of a King in His beauty there,  
And they tell me that mine eyes shall behold  
Where He sits on the throne that is whiter than snow,  
In the city that is made of gold.

O they tell me that He smiles on His children there,  
And His smile drives their sorrows away;  
And they tell me that no tears ever come again,  
In that lovely land of unclouded day.

### Questions

1. Discuss the heavenly perfection as being due to the absence of sin.
2. Discuss heaven as a state of activity.
3. Why will perfect love and peace prevail in our heavenly home?
4. Compare the joy and happiness of our earthly home to that of our heavenly home.
5. Discuss the tearlessness of heaven in light of such passages as Revelation 21:3,4; Psalms 30:5; 126:5,6; Isaiah 61:3; Luke 6:21; John 16:20; Jeremiah 31:3.

## THE REALITY OF DEATH

In this last lesson we shall recapitulate some of the thoughts discussed in previous lessons, which propounded and answered the question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" And as we soberly consider the reality of death, which all of us must eventually face, we will climax this series of lessons by again stressing the light of God's saving grace in Christ which shines through the gloom of death and points us to the eternal home of perfect love, peace, and joy.

As hard as we may try, we can never completely dismiss from our thoughts the fact that some day we will die. The fact of others dying may seem much more real to us than our own impending death, but lurking somewhere in our mind is the constantly gnawing realization, however faint, that affirms the mortality of our flesh. Death can appear much more unreal to the young than to the old because, having bodies and minds that have yet to undergo the weakening and deterioration that inevitably come with the advance of age, life can seem to them to be so sure and perpetual. But even they cannot completely close their eyes to the signs of decay and death that surround them; they cannot entirely escape facing up to the fact that they will not live forever in this world but must some day die.

How sobering indeed are the Biblical declarations: "And inasmuch as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after that cometh judgment" (Hebrews 9:27); "So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12). *The young may die, the old must die, all will die some day! No one will be granted a reprieve from the sentence of death hanging over him. And beyond the grave we will all meet our Creator in judgment; it is an appointment that no one will be able to break. The mortal path of each one of us leads to the grave—and then the judgment bar of God!*

The reality of death is featured not only in Hebrews 9:27 but throughout the entire Bible. Some representations of death are a man on a pale horse (Revelation 6:8), man's last enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26), the king of terrors (Job 18:14), water spilled upon the ground which cannot be gathered again (2 Samuel 14:14), the folding of a shepherd's tent and a thread cut by a weaver (Isaiah 38:12). But whatever these representations may be, the idea common to all of them is the *inevitability* and *reality* of death.

When you soberly and seriously reflect upon the fact of your own coming death, what is your attitude toward it—not how *should* but how *do* you feel about it? Why not sit down in a quiet place and focus all your thoughts for a while on the inevitability of your death, realizing that you are only a single heartbeat away from eternity, that death can

come any moment from any one of a multitude of causes, that nothing is more uncertain than your earthly life? Why not candidly, seriously examine yourself to see what your actual attitude toward death is, whether fear or confidence, cowardice or courage?

### ***Fear of Death***

This writer ventures the observation that the attitude of most people toward the reality of death is fear, that comparatively few seem able to face it with Christian courage and faith. What are the factors that contribute to this fear, which is as old as the human race? Why do men tend to be repulsed at the thought of dying? Why is death without the presence of the Lord to be so dreaded?

1. *The Love of Life.* The instinct of self-preservation in man, which is also found in all forms of animal life, is very powerful. With this surging inclination to live, to continue life against all odds, the natural man will fight to the last breath, using almost inhuman strength to stave off anything that would end his life. Thus the thought of death does indeed repulse him. He tends to fear death because it is the negation of physical life and of the instinct of self-preservation.

2. *The Mystery of Death.* The basis for most kinds of fear is lack of understanding; we tend to fear most what we are most ignorant or uncertain about. We hesitate to embark on an uncharted sea. No human being has ever returned from the grave to tell us what happened, what the sensation was of the immortal spirit departing from the mortal body. Cf. 2 Peter 1:13-15. The divine record tells us of the resurrection of Lazarus from the tomb, but his lips were sealed; not a single thought he had concerning the experience of death has been revealed to us. Death is, after all, one of the greatest mysteries of all; thus the great tendency to face it with fear.

3. *The Loneliness of Death.* A tangible negation of loneliness in this life is the company of our fellow human beings. We enjoy their fellowship during our earthly sojourn, and they can be with us as we are on the brink of death—but that is as far as they can go. When we depart into eternity, we will go all alone, with no loved one or any other human being to accompany us. As we face the imminency of death, with some one very dear to us holding our hand, there can be no greater sense of loneliness and helplessness than the realization that such a one who has accompanied us in life cannot accompany us in death. The rich man must face this as well as the poor man. The high and mighty of the world must pass through the valley of death without any human company as well as the meek and lowly. When we think of the loneliness of death, we do indeed tend to be repulsed by it, to fear it.

4. *Separation from the Attachments of Life.* While we live in this world, we form strong attachments with people, such as husband, wife, father, mother, brothers and sisters, and friends. We do not enjoy being

separated very long from them in this world, but we are especially made fearful by the possibility of being separated from them in death forever. Then, too, we form strong attachments with familiar and attractive places and sights in this world. The houses in which we live give us some comfort and feeling of security. The beautiful sunrises and sunsets, the lovely face of the unscarred earth and the expanse of the azure sky, enrapture us so that the thought of no longer seeing them because of death can be most depressing and frustrating.

5. *The Sting of Death.* With all the fear that is attached to death, none is greater than the "sting of death," which is sin (1 Corinthians 15:56). Indeed, had sin never appeared in the world, there would be no death. And the guilt concerning personal sins, with the expectation of meeting one's Creator in judgment, is the most horrifying thing of all about death. How chilling it is for one to recognize his sins and to say, "I am going to a God whom I have offended, whose laws I have broken. Must He not in very justice cast me out; must I not suffer the consequences of my sins in eternal perdition? What suffering do I not richly deserve?" Great fear rankles in the heart of such a one, and his conscience wakes up its phantoms and horrors. It is indeed "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God" (Hebrews 10:31).

Concerning sin as the sting of death, M. F. Sadler observed, "The thing which makes death terrible is the sense of sin, and accusing conscience, the conviction that if there is an eternal Justice presiding over the universe there must be a future retribution, and in the case of many, a very terrible one. The word translated sting (*kentron*) is rendered 'prick' in the sense of good in Acts 9:5; 26:14, but in Rev. 9:10 is used of the venomous sting of a scorpion, which is evidently the allusion here, for the rendering 'goad,' as a sharp pointed stake to drive men, is inadmissible; whereas sting, in the sense of a sharp point conveying deadly venom, is very applicable to death."

It is true that the Bible affirms that there can be "the pleasure of sin for a season" (Hebrews 11:25). Sin can serve as an opiate to shut out from one's mind the thought of death, but only for a while. Eventually, the sinner will have to face the fear of death that his guilt-ridden conscience produces; he cannot continually avoid the fearful realization that he has affronted and insulted Him who made him and before whose judgment he must some day stand.

### ***Victory Over Death***

And now having discussed the fear of death, which men have in the unsaved, natural state, we shall emphasize the victory over death itself, and thus over the fear of death, made possible by Christ, recapitulating some of the thoughts discussed in lessons two and three. How fitting it is that this series of lessons concerning the heavenly destiny of the Christian should focus on Him who is man's only access to eternal life in the

Father's house, who alone can grant deliverance from both the power and fear of death. "Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same; that through death he might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject bondage" (Hebrews 2:14,15).

The apostle Paul is a striking example of one whose genuine conversion and faithfulness to Christ made it so that he considered death not as loss but as gain, even the gain of being with the Lord forever. He declared, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain . . . But I am in a strait betwixt the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ; for it is very far better" (Philippians 1:21,23). The words of Paul in Romans 14:8 express the confidence and courage every Christian can have in the face of death on the basis of his relationship to Christ: "For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."

As we expressly noticed in lesson three, those who receive Christ as their Saviour, continuing through life in faithfulness to Him, share in the fruits of His victory over death and the grave, made possible by the sacrifice of Himself on the cross and His resurrection from the grave. Noting again the reasons for the fear of death, we shall see how the faithful Christian overcomes this fear in his relationship to Christ.

1. *The Love of Life.* As desirable as life may be in this world, Jesus promises His faithful disciples an exceedingly better life in the world to come. Every Christian who really believes in this promise, who obeys the injunction to "lay hold on the life which is life indeed" (1 Timothy 6:19), is powerfully incited to face death without fear, knowing that it is the transition from an imperfect life to a perfect life, where no sin, sorrow, or pain exist.

2. *The Mystery of Death.* One who truly trusts in the Lord realizes that it is not his in this world to understand all mystery, to receive final answers concerning all the questions he would ask. Knowing that his life here is a "walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7), he is willing for the questions he has propounded about the mystery of death to go unanswered. Whatever the experience of death may be, his hand is in the hand of Him who will lead him safely across the dark valley of death into the bright sunshine of God's eternal presence. In the face of death he feels like a person who is walking blindfolded across a narrow plank over a deep chasm, but holding to the hand of one whom he implicitly believes has all power to take him safely to the other side.

3. *The Loneliness of Death.* Though the faithful Christian cannot have any loved one or friend to accompany him in death, he has better company than any human being could possibly be: the company of his blessed Saviour. Thus sustained in the face of death by the divine presence, he

can courageously and confidently say, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me" (Psalms 23:4). Cf. Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5. He can reverently offer the prayer expressed in Henry F. Lyte's beautiful poem *Abide with Me*:

Abide with me: fast falls the eventide;  
The darkness deepens: Lord, with me abide!  
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,  
Help of the helpless, O abide with me!

Swift to it close ebbs out life's little day;  
Earth's joys grown dim, its glories pass away;  
Change and decay in all around I see;  
O thou who changest not, abide with me!

Hold thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;  
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies;  
Heav'n's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;  
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me!

4. *Separation from the Attachments of Life.* The fear of death in the face of separation from people, sights, and places we have been attached to in this life is overcome when we set our mind on the things above, realizing that our heavenly associations will be infinitely happier than our earthly associations and that the beauty and glory of this world is as nothing when compared to the beauty and glory of heaven. Then, too, we can have comfort and courage in the face of death when we realize that the association we have had with loved ones who are faithful to the Lord will continue unendingly in heaven. Cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

5. *The Sting of Death.* The fear of death that is produced by sin, which is the sting of death, is overcome when the sense of guilt is gone because of the realization that one's sins have been forgiven through God's grace and the merits of Christ. When any Christian has the blessed assurance of salvation in Christ because of his constant trust in and dependence on Him, he can face death with the confident feeling that it will not separate him from the love of God which is in Christ (Romans 8:38,29), but that by his eventual resurrection wrought through the power of Christ's resurrection he will have final and complete victory over death. He thus can exultantly exclaim the triumphant words of 1 Corinthians 15:54-57, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law: but thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

To every Christian, who in the weakness of his flesh is tempted to face death with fear, the eternal Christ directs the comforting words, "Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the Living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades" (Revelation 1:17,18).



## **Conclusion**

Yes, beloved fellow saints, we shall all die. But let us continually pray that we will face death with Christian courage and fortitude. Let us so commit and surrender our lives to Christ and His will that we will allow nothing to keep us from reaching our heavenly destiny. Let us continually keep our mind set upon the things above, never losing sight of the crown of life the Lord has promised us if we will remain faithful to Him during the rest of our earthly days. Let us awake and put on the whole armor of God; let us press into the conflict; it is a glorious privilege; and then to us will come some day that blessed welcome from our glorified Lord, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

## **Questions**

1. Discuss the certainty of death and the judgment in light of such passages as Hebrews 9:27 and Romans 14:12.
2. Carefully discuss each of the reasons why men fear death.
3. Discuss Paul's attitude toward death as expressed in Philippians 1:22, 23 and Romans 14:8.
4. Noting again the reasons why men fear death, how does the faithful Christian overcome this fear in his relationship to Christ?
5. Discuss the thoughts presented in the conclusion of this lesson.

