

Newsletter January 2020

In this Newsletter, we shall discuss the absolute security of the redemption that is given to every believer in Christ, and which continues to prevail within them regardless of their previous lifestyle or past religious traditions that would still try to pull them back away from Him. The security of a redeemed believer in Christ is a major theme found throughout the New Testament, which begins with Jesus' initial acceptance of him. Jesus has assured us of his unconditional acceptance of all who would trust and follow after Him in these words:

“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (Jn.6:37).

All that come to Jesus Christ have been given to Him by the Father, who has drawn them to his Son (cf. Jn:6:40). For that reason, Jesus will not, indeed cannot, cast them out. They have been predestined to be his own possession through divine election by the Father. Jesus said of these whom He had received,

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one” (Jn. 10:27-30).

Every believer in Christ is fully assured of eternal life by both the Father and the Son who are one. Since God has foreknown and ordained those whom He will to receive salvation, it is not reasonable to assume that God “saves” men for a short time only to let them go. God's salvation is not temporary, nor is it merely received for the term of our mortal lives, it is eternal. As the Apostle Paul said,

“If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” (1Co.15:19).

If we could lose our salvation and repent again, could we then be saved again, only to be lost again, and saved again only to be lost again repeatedly? Shamefully, that would require Christ to be crucified afresh each time we repented. We would indeed be miserable in this life because we would find ourselves in a never-ending struggle in our service to Christ without any future hope of attaining eternal life. In the seventh chapter of Romans Paul demonstrated how in his own life the power of the flesh constantly drove him to do the very thing that he knew that he must not do inasmuch as it was adverse to the Holy spirit living within him.

“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me” (Ro. 7:18-20).

We all can relate to this continual battle that we also have with the sinful demands of the flesh, knowing that it brings forth condemnation from God. However, in the eighth chapter of Romans we read,

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Ro. 8:1).

Although at this moment we Christians live in the flesh and are subject to its demands, we must not allow them to divert us or direct our lives in accordance with those demands, but instead diligently seek to obey the bidding of the Holy Spirit who lives within us. Nevertheless, this battle is impossible for us to win in a mortal sense, inasmuch as we try to reconcile God's perfect law with our corrupt carnal mind.

“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Ro. 8:7).

Therefore, we must seek to subdue and denounce the deeds of the flesh that leads to death, and to exalt instead the deeds of the spirit in which there is life eternal. For we who are being led by the Spirit are the adopted sons of God through Christ Jesus, and as sons we are heirs with him – having received the certitude of sharing a future glory with Him.

“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Ro.8:29,30).

Even so, past and lingering sin remains in our mortal lives and there are many adversaries that would seek to level charges against us. Nevertheless, Christ constantly makes intercession for us, thus rendering all such charges without basis through his atoning death and resurrection.

“What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? *It is* God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us” (Ro.8:31-37).

The great confidence we have in Christ caused the Apostle Paul to declare that the believer cannot be separated from the love of God that is manifest in Christ by anything at all, whether it be visible or invisible, natural or supernatural, whether it be now, or anytime in the far future:

“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, 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” (Ro. 8:38,39).

All of this text concerning the permanence of our salvation in Christ is abundantly clear, but now we shall consider a commonly misunderstood passage found in the sixth chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews that many have interpreted as proving quite the opposite! As we shall see, that interpretation is without foundation.

While the author of this epistle is not named in its text, we believe by observing the familiar logical constructs used within this document, as well as other factors that we will not go into at this time, that it was written by the Apostle Paul who had wished to remain anonymous. For that reason, we shall refer to the author as Paul, rather than continually repeating the awkwardly long phrase, “the author of the epistle to the Hebrews.”

This epistle was addressed to first-century Hebrew believers in Christ while the second Temple still stood in Jerusalem. God had granted those Hebrew believers but one generation to reconcile themselves to leave the now empty religious rituals of Judaism behind, and to fully embrace Christ. Total devastation of that Old-Covenant system was soon coming. History records that Roman armies laid siege to Jerusalem in AD 70. The city of Jerusalem was laid waste and its Temple was completely destroyed. This was accompanied by a massive slaughter of all the city’s entrenched inhabitants. A small remnant of Jews that had escaped the city found themselves hunted down and were summarily killed. A very few of the more fortunate became widely dispersed into Gentile nations far away from their homeland in an effort to avoid future Roman persecution.

Hebrew believers who were living within that brief interim of some 35 to 40 years found themselves torn between their newfound life as followers of Jesus Christ and their previous religious background consisting of Temple worship that supported a fifteen-hundred-year-old sacrificial system through which they had repeatedly sought expiation from their sins. The full and final atonement from sin that they had received through the death of Christ, their Messiah, had rendered the old sacrificial system outdated and meaningless. Moreover, it had turned that once obligatory practice into a blasphemous act; for as they sought further expiation of sins through the blood of a sacrificial animal, the full sufficiency and extent of the ultimate and final atonement that they had received in Christ was being repudiated. Many Hebrew believers in Christ were so deeply steeped in the traditional Judaism yet remaining in that day that they continued to waver on this extremely important reality. In doing so they found themselves in an awkward position that was dangerously inconsistent with their professed faith in Christ. Consequently, Paul found that he needed to discuss this error of wavering with them.

Earlier in this epistle, Paul had demonstrated how Jesus was superior to angels, superior to Moses, and even superior to Aaron, the Levitical high priest. Concerning this matchless superiority of Jesus he said,

“And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec” (He.5:9,10).

The Aaronic priesthood had served its purpose under the dispensation of law as a precursor to Christ; but now that their Messiah had come, the dispensation of law had transitioned into a dispensation of grace. Accordingly, Paul purposed to discuss Jesus Christ as their great high priest in this epistle. Nevertheless, he was greatly

concerned that these Hebrew Christians would find it hard to understand inasmuch as their minds remained dull of understanding because of their continued involvement in traditional Temple worship.

“Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which *be* the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, *even* those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (He. 5:11-14).

Paul had much he wanted to say to them concerning the priesthood of Melchizedek (cf. He.7:1-28); Newsletter June 2019), as being a precursor or type of the priesthood of Jesus Christ, but he encountered great difficulty in addressing them concerning this and many other important doctrines because he had found them to be weak of mind and extremely reluctant to hear all that he had to say to them about those complex things. Apparently, these Hebrew believers were not novices concerning the Word of God inasmuch as by now Paul thought they should have been sound teachers of the great doctrines of the faith. Yet, they needed someone to teach them again – even about elementary matters concerning the utterances (Greek, *oracles*) of God made through his prophets concerning the time in which they were now living. Instead of desiring the meat of strong doctrine, they were continuing on in the “milk” of traditions that had no strength of purpose in discerning the meat of God’s Word. While a novice may revel in such trivial things, those of their advanced station in life should have matured in the Word, such that their senses would have been fully exercised to discern both good and evil. Although having confessed their belief in Christ, they were ignorantly performing an adverse act that denied their confession every time they offered up an animal sacrifice in the Temple.

Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment” (He. 6:1-3).

Paul implores them to leave behind the basic doctrine they had been taught concerning Christ, the Messiah, under the Old Covenant in order to go on to achieve perfection – to become mature in their knowledge of Him. For that reason, they were admonished not to lay again the Old-Covenant foundations, but rather to build upon them in an effort to reach perfection of thought. Under the Old Covenant they had repeatedly produced dead works in their failure to fully comply with the Ten Commandments from which they also repeatedly repented only to fail over and over again. Under the Old Covenant of law, having faith toward God meant to seek Him in the Temple and to seek his favor through animal sacrifice and other offerings made through the Levitical priesthood – not through a solid faith where one can enjoy a personal relationship with Him. The Old Covenant had its many washings (Greek, *baptismos*) as prescribed acts symbolizing purification that was not actual. Laying on of hands refers to a man who laid his hand upon the head of a sacrificial animal to symbolically identify himself with it in its death as a substitutional atonement for his own. The resurrection of the dead was also an Old-Covenant doctrine, whereupon after death all men would receive eternal judgment from God.

All of this was found within the dispensation of law in which God was seen as being distant and unreachable. Now, however, under the new dispensation of grace, Paul is admonishing them to move on from this vague shadowy knowledge, as far as God permits them to do so, in order to truly know God in Christ.

“For *it is impossible* for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame” (He.4-6).

Here is the text that many use to erroneously teach that a believer can lose his salvation. Even as we read this, we must recall that Paul had previously written that “*There is* therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Ro. 8:1). Those ‘who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come’ are without doubt genuine Christians. Although not in italics, the word “if” that begins verse 6 expressing some doubt is not in the Greek. This or another word is required by the

Greek word *kahee*, a participle that begins this sentence. Accordingly in the English Standard Version (ESV) as well as the New American Standard Bible (NASB), verse 6 begins with “and” – “and then have fallen away” The words “fall away” in this verse is *parapipto* in the Greek which literally means to “fall to the side.” Unlike apostates that fall back into unbelief, these are Christians who are not apostate, but find themselves in a very awkward position on the sidelines of their faith. Should they continue to participate in the ritual of animal sacrifice after having previously come to Christ for forgiveness of sin, they would find themselves unable to achieve repentance in order to fully turn again to Him for atonement. For to do so, they would need to crucify Christ afresh in their own minds over and over again – thus putting the final sacrifice and atonement of Christ to an open shame. We must understand that these Hebrews are still Christians and they have not lost their salvation, but sadly they will have much to answer for when one day they stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

“For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned” (He. 6:7,8).

Those Hebrews who are in Christ, being fully dressed in his righteousness, have fertile minds to receive continual blessings of God through his abounding grace, much as rain comes down from heaven. In those believers, grace brings forth useful works (i.e. “herbs”) that are well-suited for their well-being and service to Christ. However, in some of these Hebrew believers obstacles have sprung up in the form of past Temple rituals – especially the ritual of animal sacrifice that had come to an end in Christ’s death. Those “thorns and briers” have firmly attached themselves, thus greatly hindering their faith and their service to Christ. Although both groups are believers and remain secure in Christ, the hindering works of the latter are all but accursed and are fully rejected by God. They are destined to go up in smoke when these Hebrew believers stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For,

“Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” (1Co. 3:13-15).

Any reward they could have received for their faithful service to Him will be thereby forfeited. Having necessarily spoken very harshly as a word of warning to those Hebrew believers who were being tempted to return to the practice of Temple rituals, Paul hopefully and lovingly added,

“But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak” (He.6:9).

In this verse, we discover that Paul had not ever questioned their salvation, but had spoken only of things that had “accompanied salvation,” which had greatly hindered their Christian walk and witness. What had accompanied their salvation was not the works of grace gained through their growing knowledge of Christ, but hindrances that had sprung up as useless works when through tradition they were tempted to continue on in a vanishing religious system that had been completely fulfilled in Christ. Continuing on in that vanishing system would prove to be highly detrimental and costly to their continual profession of faith in Christ.

While this epistle was specifically written to first-century Jewish believers and must be clearly interpreted in that context, it also has much to say to today’s Gentile believer as well; for we all have a history of ignorance, philosophical beliefs, and sinful habits, which must be overcome in order to begin and then to unflinchingly continue our walk in Christ. For only in Christ do we truly have life – an eternal life that is firmly anchored in his Word. We find this certitude expressed in the words that Jesus spoke to Martha as Lazarus’ body lay dead in a tomb – awaiting Jesus’ call for him to “come forth.”

“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this” (Jn. 11:25,26)?

Wherefore, we must seriously ask ourselves, “do we truly believe this?” If we do, then let us likewise lay aside all ancient tradition and ritual baggage that hinders us in our Christian walk, lest we stumble over them and fall aside as did many of those early Hebrew believers. © Arthur J. Smith January 2020