

THE BELIEVER'S REWARD IN ETERNITY

In the previous lessons, we have studied the meaning of salvation...the provision of salvation...the struggle between the believer's two natures...God's divine program for reproducing His sons. As we progressed through these studies, not only did God's overall intention for man become increasingly clear to us, but, also, these truths brought us to the place where we could have a practical lesson on practicing the presence of Jesus in order to bring the reality of His indwelling within us to our awareness...an awareness that is needed if we are to know victory through surrender. Now, in this final lesson, we will discover why it is vital...and urgent...for Christians to have victory ...as opposed to failure...in their lives.

Only one life...
 'T will soon be past,
 Only what's done
 For Christ will last.

One must admit that it is awesome to face the enormity of the significance of this statement, however, this vital theme must grip our minds with its heart-pounding challenge because facing the **finality** of the Christian life is the unavoidable climax of the course that God has set before us.

This life...which so soon passes...is not
 only brief, but it is also very *final!*

The process of passing from this life into the next is called "death" simply because the body must die in order to release the indwelling person. The Christian should not anticipate this event with fear, but rather, he should look forward to a glorious transition as, in the same split second, this present phase of life ceases and the eternal one commences. (Were it not for the grief that attends the loss of friends, Christians could almost shout with joy when "death" approaches).

Death, for the Christian, is not only the time when he will be with his departed... saved...loved ones, but it is also the time when the promised rest...and bliss...of heaven is ushered in ...because it is at death that the struggle between the Christian's two natures is finally over and he can enjoy the delights of God's riches! If this is so, why, then, does Paul... in his thrilling resurrection message...refer to death as the Christian's last "enemy" rather than referring to it as the Christian's last "friend"? The following pages will endeavor to answer this question.

Many Christians feel that, regardless of how they have wasted their lives here on earth, heaven will suddenly offer them the fruitful end of the "horn of plenty"...which means that they believe that it really doesn't matter what has happened here on earth because the experience of death will make everything somehow turn out all right...

However, this is not what the Bible teaches us!

The reality is that there is an aspect of death that makes it the "*last enemy*"...even for the child of God...because death **ends all opportunities** for growth...and, therefore, investment in eternity!

We have just this life here on earth to grow and be like Christ...just one chance to obey and serve Him with our talents. Personal growth and personal investment come to an end at physical death...and wasted opportunities of this life become a permanent loss because they can never be made up on the other side of death.

A believer, who serves Christ during his time on earth, accumulates "treasures in heaven", and everything that he does for the Lord...that is, everything he has done out of love for Him...adds that much more to his heavenly "treasures" ...his eternal rewards. This wealth will be waiting for the Christian when he gets to heaven...and it will be enjoyed forever...and forever!!

Jesus referred to our earthly lives as an opportunity for investment. When speaking of those who invest their time, money, talent, and energy, in Him, He said, "*...they shall receive a hundredfold*" ...(a fold is 100%...Jesus is speaking of ten thousand per cent interest ...that's some interest!)

Some Christians, unfortunately, think that, after coming to Christ, they can live this life on earth any way they want to live it because they feel that salvation is good enough by itself. They seem to feel that it is not necessary to serve Christ with all of their talents ... despite the fact that they've received these talents from Him...because they believe that, if they are "saved", somehow God will make everything turn out all right when they finally go to be with Him.

WHAT A TERRIBLE BLINDNESS THIS CONCEPT OF SALVATION IS BECAUSE:

God has ordained that this life is where man can:

- (1) freely elect to know Him,
- (2) grow to be like Him, and
- (3) serve Him.

And this life here on earth is the single golden opportunity that man has to know Him ...serve Him...and become like Him... because, at the moment of physical death, the opportunity will pass away forever! To ignore this fact...and to indifferently throw away this opportunity hoping that God will overlook our half-heartedness...is to possess an ostrich-like "*head in the sand*" attitude that will bring its terrible consequences at the time of judgment ...because the nature and character of one's life on earth will determine the nature and character of one's life in heaven!!!

The Scripture unequivocally asserts that there is a judgment for each one's life at

the time of his physical death, "...it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the *`judgment'*" (Hebrews 9:27). For the Christian, this judgment is called "*the Judgment Seat of Christ*"...for the unsaved man, this "*judgment*" will be "*the Great White Throne Judgment*" mentioned in Revelation 20:11-15. For the believer, the "*Judgment Seat of Christ*" (taken from the Greek word "*bema*") is the time when each one "*may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad*" (2 Corinthians 5:10) because...

the past will definitely determine the future!

During his lifetime on earth the believer is completely responsible for the development of his own person into the likeness of Christ, and the degree to which he sees the seriousness of this responsibility will determine how he invests his talents and substance. God entrusts him with certain talents and abilities and expects him to be faithful in that trust ...Christ calls this trust "*stewardship*" and this stewardship brings with it a responsibility for which the believer will have to give an account for at the time of his death...the time that his life-development...and works...will suddenly cease and will be evaluated to determine his future status.

Paul, more than once in his epistles, tells us that the Christian's whole life is to be looked upon as a stewardship, just as though his life belonged to the Lord Jesus Christ, for which he is to be held accountable for. Just as a bank undergoes examination of its books and operational policies when the examiner arrives so, also, will the Christian undergo a similar examination when he stands before the Lord, because just as bank officials are responsible for the way they handle funds that belong to other people, we are, likewise, responsible for the way we handle our person, time, talents, and substance, which all belong to the Lord.

In II Corinthians 5:10, when the apostle Paul says..."*We must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ; that everyone (Christians) may receive the things done in his body (time on earth), according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*"...he makes it clear that we are judged for what we have **done**. If our deeds have been "*good*", we will receive reward, but if they have been "*bad*", we will suffer loss. The Greek word... which is translated "*bad*" here...is "*Kakon*" and more properly means "*evil*". The idea, then, that, once one accepts Christ's invitation to be saved, everything will, somehow, work out all right, is not what Paul tells us...God's Word teaches us, "*Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*"

Our lives...the way we live here on earth...our thoughts and actions...will affect our future status and our eternal rewards! **What** a terrifying thought to realize that something we do...or don't do...**NOW** is going to affect us for all of eternity...which is exactly why Paul says, in II Corinthians 5:11 (The verse following the one on the Judgment Seat of Christ), "*Knowing the `terror' of the Lord, we persuade men*"...what Paul is saying is that he would plead with men to invest themselves and take advantage of every moment of life because of the seriousness and finality of the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The evil that the Christian does...and his failure to invest...and use...his life for the Lord Jesus Christ...results in tragic loss for him in that day when rewards are given

out. The Holy Spirit, through the apostle Paul, paints a picture of a man being saved from a fire...his life is saved, but he loses everything else...I Corinthians 3:13-14 says, "...he shall suffer loss ...a permanent loss...an eternal loss!"

Peter also warns the believer when he writes, "Pass the time of your sojourn here in fear" (I Peter 1:17), and John, too, adds his solemn statement of warning when he writes, "Now my little children abide in Him (Christ), and do not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (I John 2:28).

Christians cannot just live any old way they want to live and then expect that they will never have to give an account for their lives, substance, and talents because that would flaunt God's grace and make His justice look ridiculous. The apostles urged believers to live so that they would be glad for the coming of the Lord...instead of dreading it.

The Christian's judgment will be on the basis of his "faithfulness" and his "attitude" ...each person will be dealt with for what he has done as compared with what he could have done...which simply means that God's "medium of measurement" ...in determining the quality and extent of a Christian's growth and service...will be on the basis of the Christian's own, individual, potential...How much a Christian has grown and matured will be measured, not by how much "other" Christians have grown and matured, but, rather, by how much he grew and matured compared to how much he could have grown and matured...in view of what was his innate capacity for growth and maturity. Jesus' parables make this point unmistakably clear (See Luke 19:11-26, for instance) and, therefore, when we fail to serve and grow, the fault is squarely our own and we can blame no one but ourselves.

God has provided every person on earth with forgiveness for his sins and, when the believer accepts Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior, he is forgiven of all his sins...he is not guilty of anything! Christ, who paid the penalty of the whole of mankind's sin, becomes the believer's forgiveness because God forgives his sins on the basis of Christ's atoning work. The believer is not punished for his sins because Christ has already been punished!!!

However, God has arranged life on earth so that a Christian can be just as "good" as he wants to be...He can grow in this life only as much as he wants to grow...and he can serve the Lord only as much as he wants to serve Him. If a Christian does not grow...and use his talents...to his full potential, it is not because of any restrictions that have been placed upon him, but, rather, it is simply because it has not pleased him to do so. This means that, in a very real sense, the child of God holds the key to his future eternal state in his own hands.

Back to our original question...

WHY IS "DEATH" CONSIDERED THE CHRISTIAN'S LAST ENEMY?

And the answer to this question is...because death brings an end to **all** of the Christian's personal development and investment...a personal development and investment which will affect his heavenly life with Christ...a reality which makes the matter of (physical) death...dying...a most urgent one:

1. Only in this life, on earth, are believers afforded the opportunity...by the enabling ability of the Holy Spirit within...to grow into the likeness of Jesus. The only reason that believers are left on the earth after they are saved is because God's divine intention for man is that he "*should be conformed to the image of His Son*"...which means that God has not only designed man to be **with** Him, but also to be **like Him**...so that man can participate in future fellowship with Him.
2. Only in this life, on earth, are believers afforded the opportunity to make wise use of their talents that God has entrusted them with...talents that they will someday have to give an account unto God for.

The two things that will be taken into account...when we, as Christians, stand before God in judgment...are: **(1) Who we ARE in Christ**...our character...how much we have been conformed to the image of Christ, **and, (2) What we have DONE for Christ**...our works ...how much we have done...and how wisely we have used our talents...for Christ.

Because the opportunities to grow...and serve...come to an end at physical death, the whole process of the Christian's life can be compared to what takes place in a "*photo lab*" in the process of developing an exposed film: In a photo lab, an exposed film is first put into a fluid referred to as the "*developer*" and stays there for an appointed time until it is removed and placed into a solution referred to as the "*fixer*". This chemical bath... "*the fixer*"... ***stops the developing process***, which means that, from then on, the negatives will always remain the same. These negatives are then used to make wonderful prints which, when displayed, show off the skill of the photographer.

So... like that exposed film...

the believer, now on earth...in this life...is in the "*developer tank*" until death...the "*fixer*"...takes him out of this life here on earth and brings his growth and development to an ***abrupt halt***. Then, from that point on, the "*product*" will stay like it is and the Master Craftsman Himself will take it and display it to its best advantage...or, as Ephesians 3:10-11 tells us, "*His intent was that now, through the church (that is, all believers) the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to His eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

HALLELUJAH!!!

May you hear Christ's "*Well, done, thou good and faithful servant*"