

Is This the Only Day of Salvation?

By Rod Reynolds

Is it true, as has often been taught within professing Christianity, that the question of eternal salvation is sealed at the time of one's death? Are some of your loved ones, simply because they did not profess faith in Christ during their earthy pilgrimage, destined to suffer eternal torment forever?

It's commonly believed among professing Christians that one's eternal destiny is determined by the choices he makes in this lifetime. It's been widely taught that if a person professes faith in Christ as his or her personal savior, then the person "goes to heaven" (or according to some, perhaps "purgatory") at the time of "death." According to a common belief, the dead aren't really dead, because every human has an "immortal soul" that cannot die. So the "soul" continues as a conscious entity, and the person, as a "soul" without a "body," migrates to either "heaven" or "hell," as hell is imagined, a place of fiery torment.

Eventually, according to a common belief, the "soul" will be united with a resurrected body, at the time of a resurrection. But the ultimate fate of each person who has died will have already been determined, and those not "saved" in this lifetime are damned forever to eternal torment in hell. The "saved," on the other hand, will remain with God in "paradise," usually conceived of as heaven.

The vast majority of people in mankind's history who have lived and died, have never professed Jesus Christ as personal savior, and vast numbers have never or at best barely heard of Jesus Christ, nor had much if any significant knowledge of the true God. The majority of people alive today do not identify themselves as Christians, and according to the doctrine outlined above, are destined for eternal suffering in hell, unless somehow they profess faith in Christ in this lifetime.

This concept, widely taught for many centuries in popular "Christianity," is summed up in a comment on II Corinthians 6:2 in *Barnes' New Testament Notes*: "**Now is the accepted time**; at some future period it will NOT be. If men grieve away the Holy Spirit; if they continue to reject the gospel; if they go unprepared to eternity, no mercy can be found. **God does not design to pardon beyond the grave. He has made no provision for forgiveness there; and they who are not pardoned in this life must be unpardoned for ever.**"

The Bible makes it very clear that saving faith in Jesus Christ founded on a knowledge of the truth is necessary for salvation. Speaking of Jesus Christ, Scripture says, "**Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved**" (Acts 4:12). In writing to a predominately Gentile congregation of believers Paul wrote that prior to conversion they had been "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1). They had been, "without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, **having no hope and without God in the world**" (Ephesians 2:12). But, speaking of those who had been converted to genuine faith in Christ, "In Him [Jesus Christ] **you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation**; in whom also, **having believed**, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13).

Frequently used to support the idea that one's eternal destiny is irredeemably determined at the time of death for one living in this age is the following: "For He says: 'In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you. Behold, **now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation**'" (II Corinthians 6:2).

There is no doubt, as the context shows, that Paul was exhorting the Corinthian brethren to, among other things, take immediate action to be reconciled to God, to not receive the grace of God in vain, to separate themselves from idolatrous practices, to be cleansed, and to seek to perfect holiness in the fear of God (II Corinthians 5:20; 6:1, 14-18; 7:1). The letter is full of pleadings and warnings.

Paul was concerned that some of those associated with the Church in Corinth were unstable, in danger of coming under the influence of false teachers (II Corinthians 11), and that there were many in the congregation who needed to repent of corrupt and unclean practices (II Corinthians 12:20-21).

Seeing the danger, Paul applied words from a prophecy in Isaiah 49:8 in a context somewhat different from that of the original, to encourage the Corinthians to not let salvation slip from their grasp. In a similar manner, but under different circumstances, he exhorted Timothy, "... pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, **lay hold on eternal life...**" (I Timothy 6:11-12).

Those in Corinth to whom the letter was originally addressed had heard the gospel proclaimed, they had responded and had professed faith in Christ and had been baptized (I Corinthians 1). But there were serious problems among the Corinthian brethren manifested in carnal behavior, including sexual sins, engaging in idolatrous conduct, and other heretical practices, and false teachings (I Corinthians 5:1; 10:1-14).

Thus the pleadings and warnings in both First and Second Corinthians not to let salvation slip from their grasp. For them, it was a day of salvation, if they took Paul's warnings and exhortations seriously, and repented of their sinful conduct.

God holds us accountable for the decisions we make, and for our behavior. Paul wrote: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (II Corinthians 5:10). The phrase "he has done" in this verse is from the Greek word πράσσω (*prasso*), which in this case is in the aorist tense, and should be translated "he practices." The Greek word *prasso* means "to practice, i.e. perform repeatedly or habitually" (*Strongs Real Greek Bible Dictionary*).

A person who deliberately and willfully practices sin is following in the path of Satan, and will be judged accordingly. "The one who practices sin is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was revealed: to destroy the works of the devil" (I John 3:8, New English Translation). The Greek word translated "practices," ποιέω (*poieo*) is in the present tense here and implies present and continuing

action. It is speaking of one who persists in transgressing God's commandments. "Sin is the transgression of the law" (I John 3:4, KJV). "Now by this we know that we know Him [Jesus Christ], if we keep His commandments" (I John 2:3).

Paul, Timothy and Titus, all mentioned by Paul as having been teachers to the Corinthians, had taught them God's commandments (cf. I Corinthians 7:19; 14:37). They are warned in Paul's epistles concerning certain sins being practiced among them, especially idolatry and sexual sins, but others as well, including allowing themselves to be influenced by false teachers (I Corinthians 15:12; II Corinthians 11). Those who are a part of the Church of God, who have knowledge of God's requirements, are being judged, as are others (I Peter 4:17-18).

False teachers abound in the world, and have subverted the Word of God, posing as apostles or ministers of Christ, teaching a false gospel and a false Jesus (II Corinthians 11:3-4, 12-15). A common teaching accepted by many is that Jesus did away with God's commandments, and that Christians are not obligated to obey them, even though this teaching is contradicted by numerous Scriptures. Jesus himself said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore **breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so**, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but **whoever does and teaches them**, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:17-20).

In saying he came to fulfill the law, Jesus did not mean that he came to do away with the law, as many suppose, which is not only contrary to the plain meaning of the words he used, as well as the context in which he spoke, but contrary to many other Scriptures as well. A common definition of the Greek word used in the above passage, translated "fulfill," is to "fill full" (Robertson's *Word Pictures in the New Testament*). *The New Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon* explains the meaning further as used in this context: "...to cause God's will (as made known in the law) to be obeyed as it should be, and God's promises (given through the prophets) to receive fulfillment."

To make it clear, one **does not earn salvation** by keeping the commandments. Salvation—eternal life in God's kingdom—is a gift, and it cannot be earned (Romans 6:23). On the other hand, God does not grant the gift of salvation to those who refuse to submit to and obey his commandments (Matthew 19:17; 7:21-27; Romans 2:2-13, 21-23; 6:16; Hebrews 3:18; I Peter 4:17-18; I John 3:22; Revelation 12:17; 14:12; 22:14-15).

We are informed by prophecy that God is going to send Jesus Christ to judge the earth, and all mankind will be affected (John 5:22; Acts 17:31; Revelation 16). Those who come to a knowledge of the truth in this age, and overcome their own fleshly nature, the evil influences of the world, and Satan, through the power of God's Holy Spirit working in them, Christ living in them through his Spirit, will be resurrected to eternal life at the time of the second coming of

Jesus Christ, to be given a place as children of God in his kingdom, and of responsibility in the government he will establish over the earth at that time.

“Therefore, brethren, we are debtors--not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Romans 8:12-14).

“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?--unless indeed you are disqualified” (II Corinthians 13:5).

“...the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory**. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily” (Colossians 1:26-29).

“To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7).

“To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Revelation 3:21).

“He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son” (Revelation 21:7).

“Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (Revelation 20:6; cf. I Corinthians 15:22-23; I Thessalonians 4:16-17).

But what about the rest, those who for one reason or another did not overcome, but failed to find and obey the truth? The Bible tells us that the vast majority of people in the world, historically and today, have been deceived by Satan. “And the great dragon ... that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceives the whole world...” (Revelation 12:9). Through human lusts, false religion, the deceitfulness of sin, all nations are deceived and are cut off from a saving relationship with God (Isaiah 59:2; II Corinthians 4:3-4; Hebrews 3:13; James 1:14-15; I John 5:19; Revelation 18:23; 20:3).

Are all these vast numbers lost forever? Are they, as some believe, to be tortured forever in an ever burning hell, cut off forever at the end of their physical lives from any hope of salvation?

The good news is, the Bible speaks of a yet future time of salvation, of hope for redemption of those who died in their sins. It's never safe to take for granted God's patience and mercy, and believe one can refuse to do God's will with impunity.

Refusing one's opportunities for repentance in this age will not only deprive him or her of a place in the first resurrection, but may also lead to becoming hardened to the point of being incorrigible. A time of judgment is coming, and those who know God's will and refuse to do it are judged worthy of greater punishment than those who did not have access to such knowledge (Luke 12:47-48). Persistent and stubborn refusal to repent of sin if carried too far will eventually end in the "second death," through being burned up in a lake of fire (Revelation 21:8).

But God is merciful. His desire is to save, not destroy, mankind (I Timothy 2:4; II Peter 3:9). He has allowed human beings to go their own way from the time of Adam and Eve, being subject to Satan's deceptions, and victims of their rebellion against the Creator. But the period of the age of man, cut off from God and under Satan's sway, is drawing to a close.

II Corinthians 6:2 has been mistranslated in most English translations of the Bible. In the Greek in which it was originally written, there are no definite articles in the verse. It **does not say** what is implied by the errors in translation: "now is **the** day of salvation." Of the various translations I have consulted, only a few have translated the verse properly, not as "**the** day of salvation," but as "**a** day of salvation" (as in the Rotherham translation and Young's Literal Translation).

Paul, writing of the Israelites as a people, reveals that only a relatively small number of elect had obtained salvation, "but the rest were blinded" (Romans 11:7). They were given over to spiritual blindness by their refusal to believe and obey God (Isaiah 29:9-16; Jeremiah 5:21, 23; Ezekiel 12:2; Romans 11:8-10).

Scripture says, "A good understanding have all those who do his commandments" (Psalms 111:10). God had revealed his commandments to Israel from Mount Sinai, had sent them prophets to teach his ways, and call them to repentance. But they refused to listen (Nehemiah 9:9-35; Jeremiah 6:16-17; 18:12; 22:21; 44:16; Daniel 9:10-11). So they were given over to spiritual blindness and were captive to their sins.

"I ask then, **they did not stumble into an irrevocable fall, did they? Absolutely not!**" (Romans 11:11, New English Translation). Paul remarks: "They also, **if they do not continue in unbelief**, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again" (Romans 11:23). It's revealed that "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26, hyperbole, nearly all, or most). "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins" (Romans 11:26-27).

Scripture pictures a future resurrection to physical life of the people of Israel. The prophecy begins with a valley full of bones of those long dead. God says to the bones, "Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. I will put sinews on you and bring flesh

upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the Lord" (Ezekiel 37:5-6).

God said to the prophet, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!'" God says to them, "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it and performed it" (Ezekiel 37:11-14).

The Bible reveals a future time when the dead, not only of Israel, but of all nations, will be resurrected to physical life. Jesus said, "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which **all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth**--those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation [judgment as in several translations, not necessarily condemnation]" (John 5:28-29).

Paul wrote, "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits [Greek: firstfruit] of those who have fallen asleep [metaphor for death]. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ **all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order**: Christ the firstfruits [Greek: firstfruit], afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power" (I Corinthians 15:20-24).

So is revealed a series of resurrections, Christ having been resurrected to eternal life, then the faithful of this age at this second coming, and others later. Further details are given in the book of Revelation. Satan will have been put away, no longer present to lead human beings astray. "And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades [the grave] delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works" (Revelation 20:12-13).

Note that "books" are opened, the Bible will be opened and taught to them. Scripture assures us, "They shall all be taught by God" (John 6:45). Note that the "Book of Life" is also opened, meaning those resurrected and taught at that time will have an opportunity to repent of sin, and be granted eternal life.

That truly will be a "day of salvation" for vast multitudes of the formerly dead who will be restored to life, taught the truth, and given an opportunity to be granted eternal life in God's kingdom at that time.

For further information about subjects touched on in this article, you may read, download, or request the following: "Are the Lost Predestined to Hell?" "Three Resurrections," "The Truth About Hell," "Did Jesus Fulfill the Law?" "What Is Death?"

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Messenger Church of God
PO Box 619
Wentzville, MO 63385
USA