

1 - What Do We Mean by the “Book of Life“?

2 - “Judgment Seat of Christ”

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1 - What Do We Mean by the “Book of Life“?

What happens to Christians who once came to the Lord but then later deny Him and stray off into unfruitful paths of life? What provision has God made for them? They are His, after all, and Jesus Himself promised in John 6:37, *“the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.”* And in John 10:28, *“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.”* Nevertheless, we also learn that those who deny Christ like this, or those *“who practice lawlessness”*, will find themselves denied before the Father. ([Matthew 10:33](#), [2Timothy 2:12](#), [Matthew 7:23](#)) The *“branch”* who *“does not bear fruit He takes away... is thrown away and withers... thrown into the fire, and burned.”* (John 15:2,6 - BSB)

The question then is, in what way will they be *“denied”* or told to *“depart”* or be *“thrown away”*? Will it be like what happened in the Parable of the Foolish Virgins who were denied the privilege of partaking in the marriage celebration? ([Matthew 25:1-13](#)) Celebration scenes, similar to what the wise virgins were to experience, are pictured in the *Book of Revelation*, chapters 7, 14, 15, and 19. In these passages, the *“elect”* are pictured celebrating their victory in the Halls of Heaven. This is a great reward, bestowed at Christ’s Second Coming, and it is given to those who are faithful and whose names are written in the *Book of Life*. Does that mean that those who fall away, like the *“five foolish virgins”*, will have their names blotted out from the *Book of Life*? (See [Appendix 1](#) for more information about the *Book of Life*.)

For we read in [Revelation 3:5](#) that those who have *“defiled their garments”* face the possibility of having their names blotted out from the *Book of Life*. And at the end of the *Book of Revelation*, we learn that *“if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall*

take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” (Revelation 22:19) [Most newer Bible versions translate “book of life” as “tree of life”. Regarding this, see [Appendix 2.](#)]

As Christians, we are called to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” (Colossians 1:10). We are to “walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us,” and to “walk as children of light.” (Ephesians 5:2, 8)

If we choose to neglect or forsake the path the Lord is showing us to take, there will be a price to pay. (And there is no one who can say they have never had to pay that price due to some failure along the way to follow the call of God in their life.) What counts, though, is not a spotless record, but did a person remain steadfast? Did they continue in spite of failures and mistakes?

In the Parable of the Sower, some seed started to grow but was later abandoned out of fear of adversity or the cares of this life. But some seed, which “fell on good ground”, grew - some “a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty”. ([Matthew 13:3-9,18-23](#)) If we continue to “be faithful unto death” - throughout life - Christ promises, “I will give you the crown of life.” (Revelation 2:10)

Now, although there may be “a price to pay”, at the same time we cannot lose sight of Jesus’ promise in John 6:37, “the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.” Once a person is “born again”, he or she has entered the Kingdom of God. There is no possibility of being “cast out” of the presence of God into *Hell* or the *Lake of Fire*. Could it be then that our concept of what the Kingdom of God is like needs some stretching? Maybe the Kingdom of God encompasses a more comprehensive set of regions and stations of blessing, reward, and even chastisement than we realize.

If, as Jesus said, He “will by no means cast out” the one “who comes to Me”, we can understand better what it means for a person’s name to be erased from the *Book of Life*. It could resemble the situation of “Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward,

when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.” (Hebrews 12:16-17)

Like Esau, they lose the rewards, the inheritance that could have been theirs. And in this way it seems safe to say they are “blotted out”; nevertheless, they are still citizens of the Kingdom. As the Prodigal Son parable illustrates, even though the younger son had wasted all his wealth and lost his share of the inheritance, nevertheless, his father gladly accepted him back into his household.

It seems understandable then that the *Book of Life* is the register of those who are elite overcomers in the sense of how they are described in Revelation 2-3:

- *To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life (2:7)...*
- *Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life... He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death (2:10-11)...*
- *To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written (2:17)...*
- *He who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations... and I will give him the morning star (2:26-28)...*
- *He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. (3:5)*
- *He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name. (3:12)*
- *To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame (3:21)*

In addition, there is the passage in Malachi 3:16-18,

Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written

before Him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His name.

“They shall be Mine,” says the Lord of hosts, “On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.”

Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.

If this “*book of remembrance*” is talking about the *Book of Life*, then we can understand that it is possible for a name to be blotted out from it. When Moses told God, “*blot me out of Your book which You have written,*” God told him, “*Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.*” (Exodus 32:32-33) Although the Hebrews were the chosen people back then, it was quite possible for individuals, because of sin, to lose that privilege and be blotted out of the “*book*”.

From these Scriptures, it seems clear enough that, to be written in the *Book of Life* is a special privilege given to those who remain faithful during their lives on Earth. But somehow that doesn’t seem to jibe well with [Daniel 12:1-2](#), where it is said that in the End of the Age those who are “*written in the Book*” shall be delivered and raised, even though some of those people are raised to “*shame and everlasting disgrace*”. (12:2, NLT) We may well wonder, if they are in a state of shame and disgrace, how is it that they are also written in the *Book of Life*?

“Everyone of your people whose name is written in the book will be rescued... some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting disgrace” (Daniel 12:1-2, NLT)

The passage here draws special attention to the ones who are “*written in the book*”. Certainly, they will be “*rescued*”. But there is an obvious difference between those who are raised to “*everlasting life*” and those raised to “*shame and disgrace*”. But the reference to those “*written in the book*” here in Daniel 12:1-2 includes, it would seem, the whole body of believers - “*everyone of your people*”. That would include even those who have “*defiled their garments*”, even those who are raised to “*shame and everlasting disgrace*” at the End of the Age when the Lord will gather His people to spare them from the Plagues of the *Wrath of God*. (Revelation 16) But sadly, they have forfeited the privilege and honor given to those

who will be raised to “everlasting life“: the “wise” and “those who turn many to righteousness”. (12:3) But like the Prodigal Son, they are still members of God’s family and “will be rescued”.

So who might these people be? An answer to this question may lie in the fact that there is a level of overcoming, not as rigorous as that of the overcomers in Revelation 2-3:

For whatever is born of God OVERCOMES the world. And this is the victory that has OVERCOME the world - our faith. Who is he who OVERCOMES the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1John 5:4-5)

Anyone who comes to Christ, “who believes that Jesus is the Son of God,” has placed the world and what it has to offer into the background; he recognizes that there is a higher realm beyond this earthly one - one that is under the authority of Christ and far more valuable than this present world. And because he has reached out for it by coming to Christ, he has “overcome the world”. And those who have made this step, Christ promises that they cannot lose that victory, that salvation; they cannot be kicked out of the Kingdom, separated from God and sent to the *Lake of Fire*. Like the shepherd who leaves the 99 sheep in search of that one lost sheep, Christ does not lose those who have come to Him, even the ones who have strayed away.

So whatever the *Book of Life* means, it appears there is room somehow for what could be thought of as an introductory level of overcoming. We may ask then, does the *book of Life* have two sections, one for the faithful “elect” and one for those who were saved but became unfaithful? That could explain how a name could be blotted out without actually being thrown out of the Kingdom. Some teachers suggest that there are two different books: the *Book of Life* and the *Lamb’s Book of Life*. In Daniel 12:1 the passage only calls it “the book”, whereas other passages call it the *Book of Life*. And in Malachi 3:16 we read of something called the “book of remembrance”. So could it be that there are two different “books”?

Well, there does not seem to be any clear answer to this question - except perhaps for the twice-repeated phrase: “The books were opened”

(in [Daniel 7:10](#) and [Revelation 20:12](#)). Not just one Book but several, opened in the time of Judgment at the end of the present Age and at the end of the coming future Age of Peace (known as the Millennium).

The “*books*” (βιβλία — *biblia*, plural) were opened first — possibly records of deeds; and then separately, “*another book*”, the *Book of Life*. This suggests a distinction between different heavenly registers.

Both these passages about the End of the Age Judgments use the plural word “*books*”. This suggests that there could be different Books of Life. What exactly those are and how it all works is God’s business. But perhaps it is safe to conclude that the term *Book of Life* is a sort of umbrella term and covers different categories of those who have come to Christ.

Sometimes we have to consider, how does God see things? He is not restricted to our finite realm of understanding. In our minds either the *Book of Life* has the names of those who exhibit lifelong faithfulness, or if that is not the case, then it is a sort of general register of names of those who came to Christ at some point in their lives, regardless of their level or commitment. For us it’s a question of either/or, but to God maybe it’s a question of both/and.

To Him the *Book of Life* could be a sort of multi-dimensional, multi-level thing, covering a wide panorama of cases and situations. Well, we can’t expect to know everything about how these mysteries of the Heavenly Realm operate; some things we just have to admit that we don’t know how they work.

Anyway, it is enough to know that God knows and is keeping records. There is the example in Psalm 56:8 “*You number my wanderings; put my tears into Your bottle; are they not in Your book?*” That particular “*book*” is probably not the same as the *Book of Life*. And then there is also the “*book of remembrance*”. (Malachi 3:16) So it seems there are many different books or records that God is keeping of us, His beloved creations. And this is suggested in Daniel 7:10 and Revelation 20:12 where we read, “*the books were opened*”.

Well, since God is keeping so many “*books*” or records, it should be

safe to assume that there could be two *Books of Life* - one for what we might call a general level of salvation, and the other for those who remain faithful during their lives on Earth. And who knows? Maybe there are other Books as well.

Anyway, it seems these passages about the “*book*” are meant to assure us that there is no possibility of going to Hell, yet at the same time God gives us the incentive to remain steadfast. To slip backwards into complacency, even apostasy, will have the dire consequence of being blotted out. Whatever that means, it is a destiny that one should want to avoid.

Again, there is no worry about going Hell; but it does mean having to face the chastening rod of God’s correction, of shame and disgrace. But at least that happens within the Kingdom of God, and not in the *Lake of Fire* where God’s Presence will not be available to offer comfort, release, and forgiveness. The Lord is very merciful and understanding of our weaknesses. And He appreciates it when we act wisely and continue to move forward with Him in spite of our blunders, weaknesses, and sins. And if we remain steadfast in our faith, then there is no possibility of missing out on the rewards and honor that the Lord will generously bestow.

We could speculate that this shame-and-disgrace realm is reserved for the worst offenders: the Judases and betrayers, the hypocritical persecutors of the true Christians, those who even fought unjust wars in the name of Christ, those who have led others astray. Even those not guilty of such betrayal, but who buried their talents rather than making use of them for the Kingdom of God, are going to feel the shame of a misspent life. Not only will they be deprived of the honors and rewards given to those who “*shall awake to everlasting life*”, but they will have to undergo the painful and shattering realization of their errors - agony of spirit as suggested in the phrase “*weeping and gnashing of teeth*” (Matthew 8:12, 13:42, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30; Luke 13:28)

A good question to ask now, are these who experience “*weeping and gnashing of teeth*”, are they still in the Kingdom or are they in Hell? These Scriptures speak mostly of those who were connected in some distant way with the Kingdom of God. These individuals, we learn, are those who

practice lawlessness and oppressive behavior, or bury their talents, or make a pretense of their religion, or feel entitled because of their ancestry or (superficial) association with Christ. We could speculate as to where these souls will end up: but mostly, it sounds like it's in the *Lake of Fire*. If some were born again and yet were guilty of some of these things, we can imagine that their chastisement will be severe. So grave will be the remorse for some that Jesus remarked, *"Woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born."* (Matthew 26:24)

It seems utterly paradoxical that some who have come to Christ could fall so low. Yet it does happen. The Devil attacks more fiercely those who have started on the road to being followers of God. Some Biblical examples might include king Saul, king Manasseh, Judas Iscariot. These all committed grievous sins. Yet, in the case of Saul and Judas, they did show remorse when the truth of their errors was made plain to them. King Manasseh, towards the end of his life and after suffering much ill treatment from the king of Assyria, repented (although it was too late to undo the damage caused by his misrule). ([2Chronicles 33:6,9,11-13](#))

Such individuals will suffer greatly because of the damage they have done, either in this life or the next. But that does not have to mean that they get sent to the *Lake of Fire*, which is reserved for the incorrigibly rebellious. This is the destination of those who show no repentance or remorse for what they have done, are committed to the forces of Darkness, and refuse to submit to Christ's authority. But for His own children, God is quite capable of offering the blessing of chastisement, especially if He knows it will have long-term benefit in the life of one of His children. Anyway, this is a big subject and will be explored further in Part 2.

At the End of the Age, as God's Judgments are being poured out, we learn that, even during that time of total cataclysm and dire pain and sorrow, the world will be full of unrepentant souls:

But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent... They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds. (Revelation 9:20, 16:11)

Even at this late stage of the game, however, during the final *Plagues of God's Wrath*, the Lord speaks and holds out hope that some will repent:

“Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.”
(Revelation 16:15)

It is at this pivotal moment in history - when the *Plagues of God's Indignation* against evil are about to be sent into the Earth - that the entire body of believers will be rescued.

Now, just to be clear about it, what exactly do we mean by the body of believers?

The prophetic words [in Daniel 12:1] treat of the people of Daniel, by which we are to understand the people of Israel. But the Israel of the time of the end consists not merely of Jews or of Jewish Christians, but embraces all people who belong to God's Kingdom of the New Covenant founded by Christ. (from Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament, 1864)

And that body of *New Covenant* believers is composed of all sorts of people and levels of dedication.

For Jesus came not *“to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”* (John 3:17) And *“The Lord... is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”* (2Peter 3:9) *“For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”* (Romans 10:13)

What the *New Testament* tells us, in other words, is that the Lord has greatly enlarged the boundaries of His Kingdom in this present Gospel Age. Yet He still says, *“Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”* (Matthew 7:13-14) That all sounds strangely contradictory: some Scriptures depict open acceptance into the family of God; while others imply a restricted entry. So how do we resolve this apparent contradiction between inclusivity and exclusivity?

The following quotes may offer some helpful perspective on this issue:

“When a man who accepts the Christian doctrine lives unworthily of it, it is much clearer to say he is a bad Christian than to say he is not a Christian.” (C.S Lewis, Preface to *Mere Christianity*)

“Since there will always be a mixture of hypocrites with true saints, it is but some of those who are *raised to life*, but others will be raised by it *to shame and contempt*, to whom the gospel of Christ will be a *savour of death unto death*... The net of the gospel encloses both good and bad.” (from a commentary about Daniel 12:1-2 in *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, first published 1706)

So what are we to make of this? Although the *Book of Life* appears to be the register of all those who come to Jesus, yet it also seems to be a special register for those who remain faithful to God during their lives. Like the five *“wise virgins”*, they have maintained their oil lamps and are ready to participate in the celebrations when the Groom (Jesus) makes His arrival. And many of the Scriptures about believing and being saved were written in a verb tense that suggests the idea *“to keep on believing”*. What this means, probably, is that one can believe and be saved at one point in time, but to continue believing (and obeying) results in a greater salvation - or as Hebrews 11:35 says, *“a better resurrection”*.

There are several passages in both *New and Old Testaments*, suggesting that, among believers, there are at least two classes. There is, of course, much variety in the Heavenly Realm, so there may be many more classes. But there seems to be a basic distinction between those who are faithful to God, for which they are well rewarded, and those who turn their backs on Him. This seems to be the separation that is to happen at what is known as 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.”* (2Corinthians 5:10)

And yet, despite this apparent division in the Kingdom into different classes and rewards, there is, paradoxically, an overwhelming unity that prevails. This we may gather from Jesus’ Parable of the Laborers. Regardless of how long they had been laboring, each received the same wage. ([Matthew 20:1-16](#)) See also [Appendix 3](#): excerpt from *“Grace Exalted - Boasting Excluded”* sermon by *Charles Spurgeon*.

Here it might be helpful to ask, can some who are non-Christians be included in the *Book of Life*? There are many, whom we might call pre-Christians, who in God's eyes are His children. Even without knowing Christ, they gave heed to their conscience, they obeyed the nudges of the Holy Spirit, and their lives were a good influence in their circle of friends and co-workers. But because of their cultural surroundings, the Name of Jesus was closed off to them. The Scriptures do seem to offer plenty of hints that the Lord has a most welcoming view towards those who do not know Him very well:

Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him." [Acts 10:34-35]

[God] "will render to each one according to his deeds": eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God. (Romans 2:6-11)

Even Gentiles, who do not have God's written law, show that they know his law when they instinctively obey it, even without having heard it. They demonstrate that God's law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right. (Romans 2:14-15, NLT)

What these Scriptures are telling us is that many pursue Christ-likeness without knowing that's what they're doing. They are, we might say, "pre-Christians" (saved in God's mind, one of His children). We may feel uncomfortable at the thought of widening like this the boundaries of the Church (the fellowship of the saints).

The possibility of greater inclusivity undermines that special feeling we all secretly like of thinking we're special and better than everyone else. True enough, we are "special" - a "*royal priesthood, a holy nation*" - in the eyes of God. (1Peter 2:9) But that shouldn't make us lose our sense of

humility.

And we don't want to forget the Lord's frequent admonition: ***"But many who are first will be last, and the last first."*** (Matthew 19:30, 20:16, Mark 10:31, Luke 13:30) And the Apostle Paul's admonition, ***"I give each of you this warning: Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us."*** (Romans 12:3, NLT)

It is true that a person must come to Christ in order to enter the Kingdom. That decision is ours, and ours alone, to make. And better for that decision to be made in this life rather than later. For, as Jesus said, ***"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*** (John 20:29)

Anyway, God knows who these "pre-Christians" are even if we don't. But we do know from Scripture that ***"everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him"*** (1John 2:29) and ***"he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."*** (John 3:21) Although they may not have had the intimate personal relationship with Christ that, hopefully, most Christians have, they did the best they could with the limited knowledge available to them.

In this regard, we might consider the example of Mahatma Gandhi, who lived an exemplary life and was a genuine peacemaker who worked tirelessly to bring about a peaceful transition of power in India. Will God deny him a place of honor in the *First Resurrection* because he didn't know Christ personally the way most Christians do? For we know God is fair in how He exercises judgment. Gandhi truly admired Christ and even tried to model his life according to His example. But Gandhi was disappointed in the example of many he knew who were called Christians. So he never claimed to be a believer in Christ, he never wanted to identify himself with those whom he knew to be Christians.

Well, since there seems to be a good deal of variety inherent in whom the *Book of Life* accounts for, it should be safe to say that Mahatma Gandhi has his name written in it somewhere. And the same would be true for many others who, even though they don't fit nicely into what we may

think a Christian is supposed to be, nevertheless, in God's eyes, they are one of His children.

APPENDIX 1: THE *BOOK OF LIFE*

What does it mean, this mysterious "*Book of Life*"? Well for one thing, the "*book*" is an important sign of God's interest in human society. We human beings do not live in a void. Our actions in this life are not empty of meaning, purpose, or consequence. We may feel that way during our earthly lives when it is more difficult in this realm to perceive the reality of God's presence. But He is there, intimately concerned with us, and He has a "*book*".

Books were rare in ancient times. Amongst the Israelites they could serve as a register of the names of members of the different tribes, or in the *New Testament Age* as a roll of the members of various churches. Similarly, God's "*book*" lists the names of those who are truly His people.

Furthermore, if God has a "*book*", that should indicate to us that in some way records are being kept, and our actions in this life will not be forgotten. In fact, we get a hint of this later in Revelation 20. John the apostle observes that "*the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.*" (20:12)

These "*books*" are connected to and have a great bearing on who will get written into another book, the "*Book of Life*", which contains the names of those who are truly God's people, His *Elect*, and are spared from any of the negative effects of the "*second death*". Is this "*Book of Life*" the same "*book*" in Daniel 12:1, the one that has the names of those who will be "*delivered*" at the end of Earth's final "*time of trouble*"? That is a difficult question, which this Post will be exploring.

For many of those who do not have their names written in the *Book of Life* at the *First Resurrection*, they will have a "grace period", it seems, of 1,000 years. If there's a *First Resurrection* (20:5), then there must be a second one. Those who never came to the Light before, were not "saved", they will have the opportunity, during their lives in that mysterious realm

known as Purgatory, to show by their works their commitment and readiness to embrace the Light and to have their names written in the *Book of Life*. And if at the end of the Millennium, their names have been written, then they will take part in the *Second Resurrection* and enter the glorious Age of the *New Heaven and Earth*.

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APPENDIX 2: *BOOK OF LIFE? TREE OF LIFE?*

In Revelation 22:19 most newer Bible versions use the phrase “*tree of life*” instead of “*book of life*”. “*And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the TREE OF LIFE and in the holy city, which are described in this book.*” (ESV) This Scripture is talking about having access to the *Tree of Life* and to the *Heavenly City*. And this is hardly any different from what the *Book of Life* grants access to: 1) entrance into the *Heavenly City*. “*But there shall by no means enter it [the Heavenly City] anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.*” (Revelation 21:27) And of course, 2) if it is a *Book of LIFE*, then it must also grant access to the *Tree of LIFE*.

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APPENDIX 3: “*Grace Exalted - Boasting Excluded*” sermon by *Charles Spurgeon*

Oh, brothers and sisters, I think we can serve God from some other motive than that base one of trying to be greater than our brethren in heaven!...

Surely, brothers and sisters, if any of you can have brighter places in heaven, and more happiness and more joy than I, I will be glad to know it. The prospect does not excite any envy in my soul now, or if it did now, it certainly would not then, for I should feel, that the more you had, the more I should have!...

I believe that our union with each other will be so great that distinctions will be utterly lost, and that we shall all have such a joint communion, and interest, and fellowship, that there will be no such thing as private possessions, private ranks, and private honors—for we shall there, to the fullest extent, be one in Christ!

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Continue to: [2](#) - *“Judgment Seat of Christ”*