Part A: Salvation, Part B: Judgment, Part C: The Ages to Come

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B-7: Life – a Continual Learning Process

The Lord says, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will abundantly pardon. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." (Isaiah 55:7, 1:18)

You can start from scratch with the Lord, for when you receive Jesus as your Savior you are spiritually "born again" and are a "new creature in Christ Jesus." God says He will "blot out thy sins as a cloud, and as a thick cloud, He'll put them behind His back, and will remember them against you no more." (John 3:3,7; 2Corinthians 5:17; Isaiah 44:22, 43:25)

(from article "Born Again—Are You?", 1 June 2015)

It is true that when one is *"born again"*, the slate is wiped clean; past sins, done in ignorance of the reality or will of God, are forgiven, and the believer has a new start in life. (See "Slate Wiped Clean" article.) The apostle Peter on one occasion acknowledged to those who had *"denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer… I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers."* And then he offered them a fresh start: *"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out."* (Acts 3:14-15,17,19)

Another prime example is the apostle Paul's testimony. He was *"formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man"* but says that he *"obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in*

unbelief." **(1Timothy 1:13)** ***"The times of this ignorance God winked at."*** **(Acts 17:30, KJV) And when we are enlightened, He graciously sets us on a new path.**

It often happens, however, that the new start becomes the end of the road. The apostle Peter exhorts believers to *"supplement your faith"* by continuing to grow and be *"diligent to make your calling and election sure."* (2Peter 1:5-11, ESV) The apostle Paul says much the same: "[God] *will render… to those who by patient continuance in doing good… glory, honor, and peace."* (Romans 2:6-10) This general rule should apply to anyone, whether Christian or non-Christian.

Although we can understand that God will extend great mercy towards those who have not had opportunity to know Christ during their earthly lifetimes, it should also be understood that those who do come to know Christ during their earthly lives are greatly advantaged.

His overpowering love is able to motivate their minds and spirits and enhance their efforts as they labor to establish the Kingdom of God on Earth during their lifetimes. And they can look forward to being *"richly provided for"* upon their *"entrance into the eternal kingdom"*. (2Peter 1:11) They have the advantage and opportunity to go beyond the basic entry-level reward of entrance into the Kingdom.

Or they may also go the other direction, ending up with very little, and instead of hearing the Master's *"Well done, good and faithful servant"*, they may wind up feeling ashamed before Him. Instead of being *"first"* as they may have thought was their right, they wind up coming in *"last"*.

> ***"Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation."* (Hebrews 2:1-3)**

When one comes to Christ, the past is forgiven and forgotten by the grace and mercy of God. But life is a continual learning process. And just because our sins are forgiven when we come to Christ, this doesn't give us the license to go downhill into a state of corruption. *"What shall we say*

then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not!" **(Romans 6:1-2)**

It's as if the slate is wiped clean for the born again believer; he gets a new start. But after that much depends on how he or she advances, continues the learning process. And if they go back, become a bad example, lead others astray, etc., then there is a place for them – a kind of reformatory in Heaven called *"shame and everlasting disgrace"*. (Daniel 12:2, NLT) (More on this subject later.)

To be one of God's chosen requires being ready for life in a Realm where truth, sincerity, honesty, fairness, love, and other such godly virtues reign supreme. Now what kind of people would this include? Well hopefully, most of those who call themselves Christian.

But does that have to exclude people who are not yet Christian? There are probably many sincere folks in our world today who are living their lives according to the same godly principles, which the apostle Peter exhorts believers to practice: *"to supplement your faith with virtue… knowledge… self-control… steadfastness… godliness… brotherly affection… love."* Peter goes on to say, *"For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."* (2Peter 1:5-8, ESV)

And if non-Christians practice these virtues, they would be as those Gentiles whom Paul says *"show the work of the law written in their hearts"*. (Romans 2:15) And for all we know, God would see them as "pre-Christians" and would be happy to welcome them into the Kingdom, or at least make it easy for them to enter the Kingdom.

But if believers do not keep growing (*"increasing"*), Peter says, *"Whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins."* But then he promises that if they are *"diligent to make your calling and election sure"* and *"if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."* (2Peter 1:9-11, ESV)

There is no complex method to follow by which one may stay faithful

and reap a full reward. It is nothing more than a simple matter of continuing to stay close to the Lord. From the parables we see examples: to the five foolish virgins locked out of the groom's chamber, the bridegroom declared, *"I do not know you"*; and to the ones whose great works were nothing more than a veneer over their corrupted lives, Christ will have to say, *"I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"* (Matthew 25:1-13, 7:21-23)

The common factor in these cases was that the Lord did not *"know"* them; it was the loss of that intimate connection with the Lord. And it was one of the last things that Jesus, near the end of His earthly life, taught to His disciples: *"abide in Me"* for *"he who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit."* (John 15:4-5)

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