

# The Process of Spiritual Growth (Part 1)

As a pastor, I am most concerned about the ongoing sanctification of the congregation God has entrusted to my care. The bottom line: I want those dear folks to be prepared to give a good account at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

What, then, is sanctification (i.e., *progressive* sanctification)? It is the lifelong process of learning to let Christ live His life through mine. I used to say it is the process of becoming more like Christ. I don't say that any more, because it is confusing and, therefore, easily misunderstood. Some have abused the meaning of "becoming more like Christ," by mistakenly putting the emphasis on what man must do in the process, rather than focusing on the object – Jesus – and what we must let Him do in us. There is a difference, and it's not as subtle as it seems.

To be sure, sanctification is a process, but we need to yield to God's process, not superimpose our own ideas as to what the process should be. For example, Thomas a Kempis wrote a book in the fifteenth century called, *The Imitation of Christ*, that essentially says we need to learn to imitate the life of Christ. That is a focus on what we must *do*. It is not possible for us to imitate Christ, no matter how hard we try. Indeed, by "trying" we are injecting self-dependence.

Another example is the book *In His Steps*, written by the liberal theologian, Charles Sheldon. Many Christians have no idea that Sheldon did not hold to the fundamentals of the faith but rather promoted a social gospel; he was quite liberal. Yet, how many walk around quoting his statement, "What would Jesus do?" which has been popularized in modern culture by marketing experts who want to make a buck off the WWJD cliché, selling bracelets, necklaces, and other paraphernalia. Never mind that Sheldon was totally off base in his theology.

Sheldon's question is dangerous, for it puts man in the driver's seat (rather than the Scriptures), encouraging him to play a sort of spiritual situation ethics. Even a lost man can attempt to play this game. It is really no more than a modern spin on the old "imitation" model of sanctification as proposed by Thomas a Kempis. Both of these books, as noble as they sound, actually promote flesh-dependence.

Again, biblical sanctification is the lifelong process of learning to let Christ live His life through us. It is summed up well in [Galatians 2:20](#). As one submits to the process, he grows spiritually. If one does not understand the process correctly or refuses to yield to the Holy Spirit's working in his life, growth will be stunted. Ongoing, experiential sanctification and spiritual growth are, therefore, closely related concepts.

Incidentally, spiritual growth is not instantaneous. It happens over time. While I doubt any Christian would dispute that statement (after all, the

word *growth* implies a continuing process), some *essentially* argue the opposite. How? By looking to past, life-changing events (a decision during an invitation, a spiritual crisis that precipitated an “I surrender all” moment) as the building blocks of spiritual growth. Others equate participation in religious activities (Bible-reading, prayer, church attendance, etc.) with spiritual growth.

While events and religious activities may be catalysts toward change and growth, they certainly don't guarantee growth. Too often decisions are based on emotion and tend to fade in short time. In the case of religious activities, they can become ritualistic, and tend to salve one's conscience with thoughts such as “this activity makes me spiritual.” That is, of course, wrong thinking, and is a deadening form of legalism.

As Americans, we want it now, and we expect it now. The ninety-second turn-around time guaranteed by some fast-food restaurants is classic evidence of our cultural impatience. Unfortunately, we often carry our cultural expectations into our Christianity.

We want spiritual maturity now, and we expect it now. Oh, how our eternal God, who is not bound by time, must sigh at our impatience! He is the epitome of patience, and for that we should be truly grateful, because His eternal patience results in His not giving up on us.

Spiritual growth is actually a life-long process that starts when we are saved, and continues over time throughout the Christian life. It is gradual and incremental. The Scriptures beautifully define and describe the two key agents of spiritual growth in [2 Peter 3:18](#) and the process of spiritual growth in [Romans 5:1-5](#) (to be examined in a future article).

## **The Agents of Spiritual Growth**

*But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ([2 Peter 3:18](#)).*

### **The First Agent: The Engrafted Word**

Growth comes, in part, through knowledge of Christ. However, it is not merely knowledge *about* Him. It is *His* knowledge! We already have the mind of Christ, according to [1 Cor. 2:16](#). How, then, do we appropriate it? By His Spirit Whom He has given us. *Now we have received ... the Spirit which is of God; that we might KNOW the things that are freely given to us of God ([1 Cor. 2:12](#)).* Of course, the Holy Spirit uses the written Word of God to open up for us the mind of Christ.

I believe the Holy Spirit is the engrafted (implanted) Word, referred to in [James 1:21](#), *receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.* The phrase “save your souls,” in this context, does not mean to save from eternal condemnation. It means to sanctify. Thus the child of God is commanded to receive (i.e, accept) the engrafted Word – the Holy Spirit – Who teaches us the written Word and impresses upon our heart truths that we need in order to grow. In other words, He sanctifies us through the

Word. Jesus prayed, *Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth* ([John 17:17](#)). So the first agent of spiritual growth is the Spirit of God, the engrafted Word, who imparts unto us the mind of Christ through the written Word. Faith comes by hearing the word of God ([Rom. 10:17](#)).

### The Second Agent: Grace

Grace is a marvelous spiritual concept. It is a priceless commodity, yet it is entirely free, given to us by God. Ironically, grace is the very thing we most desperately need but most often spurn.

The classic theological definition says grace is God's unmerited favor, and that is certainly true. But let's get more practical. Grace is God's divine enablement to do what He wants me to do. Grace is God giving me what I need to win in every situation – to win over temptation to sin; to win in how I respond to my trials; to win in my responses to people; etc.

We need grace every moment of every day. If the righteousness of Christ is our *provision* to win, grace is God's tailor-made *application* of it in every particular situation. He always gives a big dose – *he giveth more grace* ([James 4:6](#)). His promise to every Christian: *My grace is sufficient* ([2 Cor. 12:9](#)). The well of grace never runs dry!

If that is not your experience, then you have one of two problems (incidentally, the problem is NEVER God; it is always man). The first possible problem is that you may be spurning God's grace. How do we spurn His grace? By our pride. *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble* ([James 4:6](#)). Pride comes in many forms, of course, but the kind that typically spurns God's grace is the kind that thinks, "I can do this" or "I will try harder." Any attitude of self-sufficiency or self-dependence will result in spurning God's grace.

The second possible problem is not knowing how to access God's grace, even though the answer is plainly given in the Scriptures. So you must learn the hard way, in the spiritual "school or hard knocks," so to speak. You get into a situation – a trial, a temptation, and you are failing because you have been depending on self. Indeed, you have fallen numerous times in the past, and you are tired of it. Perhaps by being overwhelmed with pressure and sorrow, you finally come to the end of your rope. In desperation, you cry out: "Help me, Lord!" Our gracious God, in His Providence, has allowed you to stumble upon the secret to victory: realizing the utter folly of self-reliance that always fails; turning in complete reliance on Christ Who always wins.

The most basic aspect of spiritual growth is learning to depend on the Lord, specifically, the Holy Spirit who lives within. He guides us in all truth, through the Word of God and dispenses grace as needed, to the extent we depend on Him. If only we would learn to continue depending! Is that not the essence of abiding in the vine?

In the next article we will explore the spiritual growth process as outlined in [Romans 5:1-5](#).

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## Inheriting the Kingdom of God

The apostle Paul, in writing to the church at Thessalonica, speaks of *the righteous judgment of God*, and being *counted worthy of the kingdom of God* ([2 Thess. 1:5](#)). Why does he use such terminology? How can one be *counted worthy* of the kingdom of God? Is Paul teaching works-salvation?

Of course not! Paul is not speaking about matters of salvation. He is speaking to saints about sanctification, particularly, the culmination of it – meeting Jesus at the Judgment Seat. On that day, the works of all who are in Christ will be tried by fire, to determine *what sort it is* ([1 Cor. 3:13](#)). If one's work abides (being of the gold-silver-precious stones type), a reward will be given. On the contrary, if one's work is burned (being of the wood-hay-stubble type), all will be lost, yet the individual will be saved eternally.

What is the reward? What is lost or forfeited? While the rewards and losses are much more complex than described in this article, I believe the primary question at hand is whether or not a born-again believer qualifies to inherit the kingdom of God. There is obviously much at stake. Consider the following Scripture passages.

*Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. ([1 Cor. 6:9-10](#))*

*Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. ([Gal. 5:19-21](#))*

*But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ([Eph. 5:3-5](#))*

I believe these verses are typically misinterpreted. Those who lean toward Arminian theology say that Paul is warning believers they will lose their salvation if they persist in grievous sins, particularly sins like those

listed. This view must be rejected on the preponderance of Scriptural evidence to the contrary. Believers are eternally secure.

Another common misconception is held by Calvinist-leaning theologians, who claim those who persist in these sins demonstrate that they were never saved in the first place. This view is based on the Calvinist tenet that insists true believers will persevere (i.e., behave) as saints throughout the Christian life.

But Paul does not assume these folks are unsaved. He assumes they are saints who have continued in sin. For example, in the Ephesians passage, he says, *let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints*, clearly recognizing the possibility that this kind of sinful behavior can persist in the lives of genuine Christians, even if it is not appropriate. His purpose, therefore, is to issue a stiff warning: if you persist in this kind of behavior, you will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Many have been taught that inheriting the kingdom of God is the Scriptural equivalent to inheriting eternal life, but it is not particularly how Paul uses the term. In the context of these Pauline passages the phrase *kingdom of God* does not merely denote the eternal realm of God. It makes no sense to admonish believers to be counted worthy of the kingdom or to live in such a way so as to not forfeit the kingdom, if by *kingdom of God* he means eternal life. Paul is not off on the doctrines of justification or eternal security. (I say that tongue-in-cheek).

No, Paul uses the phrase the *kingdom of God* in an eschatological sense, to refer to the millennial reign of Christ. Thus, at stake is whether believers who persist in unrighteousness will inherit the millennial reign of Christ. Ray Baughman, makes this point emphatically in his book, *The Kingdom of God Visualized* (Moody, 1972, p.140). Commenting on the Galatians passage, he says, "This does not refer to eternal life but to any place of responsibility in Christ's kingdom. He is speaking of a habitual way of life rather than individual acts of sin."

Thus, Paul's clear warning is that believers who persist in certain sins will not inherit the millennial kingdom. (Incidentally, the list of sins is not exhaustive, for Paul adds the disclaimer, *and such like*, leaving the list open).

The key word here is *inherit*. Thayer gives three definitions for this word that are especially helpful.

1. to receive a lot, receive by lot
2. to receive the portion assigned to one, receive an allotted portion, receive as one's own or as a possession
3. to become partaker of, to obtain

For Paul to teach that persistently sinning Christians will not inherit the millennial kingdom is not the same as saying they will not be in the millennial world. To illustrate this point, think of what Jesus said in the Beatitudes, *Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth* ([\*Matt.\*](#)

[5:5](#)). We are all physically present on earth, yet only the meek *inherit* the earth. That is, they receive it as their allotted portion, given to them by God as an inheritance. Others do not share in that blessing.

Presumably, the same is true with respect to the millennium. All believers will be physically present in that world but apparently not all will become partakers of (or participants in) Christ's millennial kingdom. They will not inherit it. No doubt, that will result in missed opportunities, shamefulness, and much sorrow. Theologians differ as to the details, but what is clear from the Scriptures is that the millennium will not be experienced in the same way by all believers.

Perhaps that is one of the reasons why, at the conclusion of the millennium ([Rev. 21:4](#)), God will wipe away all tears from the eyes of His saints prior to their entrance into heaven. Why will there be tears during the millennium, a great time of joy on earth? Understandably, many Christians will be agonizing and weeping over the fact that they persisted in sins throughout their pre-millennial earthly existence. They did not appropriate the provision of Christ for living a victorious life.

The writer to the Hebrews, like Paul, also seems to warn his audience of the dire consequences of persisting in sin, reminding that *our God is a consuming fire* ([Heb. 12:29](#)). He also uses a haunting illustration to convince his audience. In Hebrews 3 he tells of the Exodus generation – who, although they were saved people, having been redeemed at the first Passover! – chose to test God repeatedly in the wilderness due to their wicked heart of unbelief.

As a result, God swore (declared an oath) that He would not let them enter into the promised land, the land of God's rest. The promised land is not a type of heaven. It is a type of entering the realm of spiritual victory and, ultimately, the millennial rest of Christ. Nevertheless, a whole generation of wayward believers were not allowed entrance into promised rest, including Moses and Aaron! The passage ends with a strong admonition and reminder:

*Exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end. ([Heb. 3:13](#))*

In the context, being made a partaker of Christ is being a participant in His millennial kingdom. Oh, may we seek the Spirit's enablement for getting victory over sin!

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# The Wedding Garment

Will you be at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb? “Yes,” you may reply, “for I am a child of God; I have been clothed with the righteousness of Christ.” But while the imputation of Christ’s righteousness provides eternal security, does it ensure one’s inclusion at the Marriage Supper? By exploring one of Christ’s kingdom parables we can gain insight as to this important question.

*The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come ([Matt. 22:2-3](#)).*

From the parallel text in [Luke 14:16-24](#) we learn that this wedding is, more specifically, the wedding supper, or feast, which precedes the actual wedding. It is equated with the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in [Rev. 19:7-9](#), which inaugurates the Millennial kingdom.

Virtually all commentators identify the King as God the Father and His Son as Jesus Christ. Those who are bidden to the wedding by the King’s servants (likely the Old Testament prophets and perhaps John the Baptist) are the Jewish people who reject Jesus. *He came unto His own, and His own received Him not ([John 1:11](#)).*

Later in the passage the King sends out more servants (likely the apostles) to graciously summon the invitees once again. Those servants are ignored by the Jewish people en masse and, worse yet, violently abused and killed by a “remnant,” who martyr them. The King, in His anger, sends forth His armies, destroying the murderers and burning up their city. Most conservative commentators see this as the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

The King insists on moving ahead with the wedding, as everything has been meticulously and beautifully planned. So He sends His servants out again, this time outside the city (Jerusalem) into the highways and hedges (the realm of the heathen), compelling all those who will come, both bad (Gentiles) and good (Jews).

*So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless ([Matt. 22:11-12](#)).*

The wedding is finally filled with guests who respond to the king’s invitation. Those who do not come to the wedding are not saved. Those who respond favorably to the invitation are those who have received the free gift of salvation by grace through faith alone. They have accepted the invitation

of the King!

What about the man who comes to the wedding but is not properly attired? His offense is not wearing a wedding garment. This out-of-place man suggests a real rubbing point, not merely for the King but for all of us as interpreters of the passage.

Some say that the wedding garments refer to both the imputed righteousness of Christ and the imparted righteousness of the saints. They would argue that saved people live and act like it, and thus the impartation of robes of righteousness must, of necessity, accompany any persevering saint. Those who have not persevered in righteousness are not true saints and will not stand before Christ at the Judgment Seat, much less be present at the Marriage Supper, they would claim.

But is that what Jesus is saying in this parable? This man's presence before the King seems to demonstrate that he has accepted the King's invitation. In other words, he is saved. Furthermore, the King refers to him as "friend." When the King asks the man why he is not wearing the wedding garment, the man is speechless, literally muzzled. He can say nothing; he has no adequate response, for he knows better. I believe this scene is reminiscent of the Judgment Seat of Christ, when some are saved, yet so as by fire and will undoubtedly have nothing to say for themselves.

Interestingly, in [Rev. 19](#), we find the nature of an appropriate wedding garment:

*Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints ([Rev. 19:7-8](#)).*

How does a saint make himself ready (i.e., prepared) for the Marriage of the Lamb? By living for Jesus here and now. By losing his soul in this life so he can gain it in the next. See previous articles entitled, The Paradox of Saving the Soul, [Part 1](#) and [2](#). That is the only way one becomes qualified to receive robes of righteousness, the wedding garments that are required for entrance to the Marriage Supper.

All saints, it seems, are not granted automatic entrance; for the qualification, according to the end of v.8, is not Christ's righteousness, Gr. *dikaiosis*, but rather the righteous acts of the saints, Gr. *dikaionoma*. In other words, this passage implies that only those saints who are deemed worthy, based on their obedience – their righteous behavior, as determined by Christ at the Judgment Seat – will be allowed entrance to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb and, presumably, to the glories of the Millennial kingdom which is inaugurated by the Marriage.

Some tend to discount this view of [Matt. 22](#) and [Rev. 19](#) because they interpret what happens to the improperly dressed wedding guest as being cast



into hell. But does the Bible say he is cast into hell?

*Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen ([Matt. 22:13-14](#)).*

What is outer darkness? Is it hell? The term literally means “the darkness outside.” Scholars tell us these feasts would typically be held at night, so that one cast outside would be in relative darkness compared with the brightness of the banquet hall.

Furthermore, “weeping” and “gnashing of teeth” imply sorrow and conscious regret. While that *could* describe the emotional state of one in hell, could it not also describe the emotional state of one who has been excluded from the glories of the Millennium? If some true believers, based on Christ’s determination at the Bema, are excluded from the Marriage Supper, because their life is not worthy of receiving a wedding garment, will they not weep and consciously regret being cast out?

*Many are called, but few are chosen.* Could this mean that many are saved, but few of the saved will be deemed worthy of ruling and reigning with Christ in His kingdom? Will all the other saints (those deemed unworthy) regret that their millennial existence is outside of the King’s realm, far less than what it could have been if they had lived differently in this life? These are questions that all Christians need to wrestle with. It is important that we not be ashamed at His coming ([1 John 2:28](#)) and that we lose not our reward (2 John 8).

Thankfully, every child of God has been given equal opportunity to earn robes of righteousness because every saint has been given the provision of Christ’s righteousness. If you are appropriating his grace by faith ([Rom. 5:2](#)), to perform His will on earth, living a revived life, then you are a candidate for the wedding garment!

This article may seem shocking to some who have never heard this interpretation of Matthew 22 and Revelation 19. But if this view is correct, there are serious ramifications that should be considered by all Christians. May we search the Scriptures and determine whether these things are so.

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## [Millennial Security?](#)

The doctrines of eternal security and dispensational eschatology – both of which I believe are biblically correct – have been misapplied by some, leading to a serious doctrinal error involving the Judgment Seat of Christ

and the Millennium. Many who teach these doctrines have unwittingly (“I’ve never heard that before”) or naively (“I’ve always been taught something different”) or worse yet, deliberately (“I don’t believe that”), lessened the severity of the Judgment Seat, on the mistaken basis that all believers are eternally secure overcomers and, as such, will rule and reign with Jesus in the Millennium. Some will be rewarded more and some less, they claim, but all believers will inherit that world to come.

Eternally secure? Yes. We would certainly agree. Overcomers who will inherit the millennial kingdom? Not necessarily. That is not guaranteed to all believers. While all believers will be present in the millennial world, they will not all be inheritors. Inheritors are those who are granted the privileges of first-born sons, based on their submission to the King. The Judgment Seat will determine who inherits and who does not.

The doctrinal error, as I see it, is ignoring God’s plan for the glorious millennial age, by superimposing the benefits of eternity – no tears, no sorrow (guaranteed for all believers in eternity) – backwards onto millennial life (not guaranteed for all believers in the millennium). I call this fallacious doctrine “millennial security” – a teaching that is widely accepted but not biblical.

In a nutshell, “millennial security” is the belief that God’s children are all guaranteed a millennial existence on par with heavenly existence, including heavenly bliss, with the only differences being place and time. Unfortunately, that is not biblical. Ironically, how you live your life of seventy years (give or take) on earth here and now will determine how you live your thousand-year existence in the millennial world. The consequences are sobering: either reward and ruling or suffering loss and regretting. The former truly inherits the millennium; the latter merely exists in that world, and the existence will not be joyous. This truth is clearly illustrated in the parable of the pounds, [Luke 19:11-27](#).

When will God wipe away all tears from their eyes? According to [Rev. 21:4](#), it is *after* the millennium, after the first heaven and earth pass away (end of the earthly kingdom), and are replaced with a new heaven and new earth (start of the heavenly kingdom). God does not wipe away all tears immediately following the Judgment Seat of Christ, as many have suggested. No, the Scriptures seem to teach instead that many believers will consciously regret throughout their millennial existence that they did not “hate” or “lose” their soul in this life in order to “find” and “keep” it in the millennial world to come (as determined at the Judgment Seat).

Eternal security is contingent on justification, the legal righteousness of Christ. However, millennial inheritance is contingent on sanctification, the extent to which believers cooperate with God in this life. “Millennial security” is not a biblical doctrine. It is man-made.

Interestingly, inheritors do not all receive the same inheritance. The degrees of glory will be different for every inheritor. Paul makes this point beautifully in [1 Cor. 15:41-42](#):

*“There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead.”*

Oh, that we would live with the longing desire to be His brightest stars!

If this has challenged your thinking, I encourage you to search the Scriptures to see if these things are so.

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## [The Paradox of Saving the Soul \(Part 2\)](#)

### **Lose Now; Save Later.**

What a tragedy it would be for God’s children to live for themselves now, in this fleeting, vapor-like life, only to discover at the future Judgment Seat of Christ that they had forfeited many eternal blessings God had intended for them. Would it be worth it? Jesus warned on several occasions of the consequences ([Matt. 10:39](#); [16:25](#); [Mark 8:35](#); [Luke 9:24](#); [17:33](#); [John 12:25](#)).

In [Part 1](#) we studied the first half of the paradox of the saving of the soul. Those who “save” now will “lose” later. The paradox of Christ’s teaching is that a believer loses his soul at the Judgment Seat by saving it here and now, in this life; that is, by refusing to deny self, take up his cross, and follow Jesus. Instead, he caters to self, avoids hardships and pays lip service to following Jesus, not counting the cost of discipleship. The result is deprivation of millennial rewards and eternal glory.

In this article, we are going to examine the other side of the paradox: those who “lose” now will “save” later. What does this mean? Let us again focus on the teaching of Jesus in [Matthew 16:24-27](#).

*Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.*

Jesus is putting out the call for His children to “come after me” and “follow me.” That is the essence of discipleship. Of course, there is a price to pay,

here and now, but there are serious eternal consequences for those who do not heed His call.

“Coming after” and “following” imply continuation, an ongoing process. This obviously cannot refer to the initial salvation of one’s spirit, that is, justification, regeneration and positional sanctification. Those wonderful theological truths occurred at a point in time in the past – like a transaction – for those who have been born again. They are not processes. That was demonstrated in the [previous article](#).

Rather, “coming after” and “following” are the expected *results* of initial salvation, the realm of practical or experiential sanctification, which is the aspect of salvation that continues (*I am being saved.*) until we meet Christ at the Bema. Nevertheless, following Jesus is not automatic. God will never force His children to progress in sanctification. He will bring pressures to bear (i.e., discipline, [Heb. 12](#)), but God has left us with the choice to follow or not. As He does His part ([Phil. 2:13](#)), we must choose to do our part ([Phil. 2:12](#)), by cooperating with Him through our ongoing decisions of faith. Thus, Jesus warns of the consequences of not following, while clearly defining the costs and the benefits (rewards) of following. In other words, our Lord is encouraging His children to do a cost-benefit analysis and determine that it is worth it! Not to mention, as the apostle Paul points out, it is our “reasonable service” ([Rom. 12:1](#)).

## **The Costs of Discipleship**

What are the costs of discipleship? Not surprisingly, they all involve restraining the passions of the soul. Because of indwelling sin ([Rom. 7:17, 20](#)), the soul must be checked to keep it from ruling the spirit of man. If left to itself, the soul will trump the spirit and lead the whole man. The result is carnality in the life of a believer. God’s will is that the spirit of man, where the Holy Spirit resides, leads the charge – spirit directing soul directing body, in that order.

### **Denying Self**

To truly follow Jesus one must deny self. Thayer says it is “to forget one’s self, lose sight of one’s self and one’s own interests.” Watchman Nee says it is “disregarding one’s self or renouncing one’s privileges.” This qualification for discipleship goes against the grain of our natural desires and passions. Even after becoming regenerated, self is very much alive and well, desiring to be catered unto. But self must be subjected in order for Jesus to be Lord of one’s life.

The Holy Spirit always produces balance in the life of a believer by helping him to rightly divide and apply the Word of God. He will lead away from indulgence, on the one hand, and from asceticism, on the other. His way is moderation and temperance, control of self, as one depends on the Spirit for enablement.

The problem for most Christians is typically indulgence – loving the world – the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, the pride of life. These will

all pass away, but the one who does the will of God abides forever. Constantly abiding in the vine is the opposite of routinely indulging in the world. Do you love shopping? Eating? Clothing? Possessions? Personal pampering and comforts? Sensuality? Entertainment? Relationships? Some of these matters are intrinsically evil, while others become evil when they get out of balance and become the love of one's life. Fill in the blank with whatever your flesh loves and craves. It has to go in order for the soul to be saved.

Another realm of self to be renounced is a high and lofty opinion of one's self, typically at the expense of others. Oftentimes, self manifests in the form of contentions (in its many varieties) – sarcasm, insults, verbal exchanges, derogatory speech, slander, clamor, physical fighting, etc. The source of all contention is self.

*Only by pride cometh contention ([Prov. 13:10](#)).*

*From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members ([James 4:1](#))?*

*But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish ([James 3:14-15](#)).*

Wouldn't it be a tragedy to forfeit rewards at the Judgment Seat because self could not be conquered? The beauty of salvation is that we have already been made righteous and positionally sanctified in our spirit by the Holy Spirit. He lives within, providing everything necessary for us to be participants in His divine nature and thereby escape the world's corruptions through lust ([2 Peter 1:4](#)). Our positional sanctification can be – and indeed, must be! – experienced in the soul in everyday life, to the extent we will depend on the Spirit to live the Christ life.

The first cost of discipleship, denying self, demands a high price. The stakes are raised even higher in the second cost of discipleship is found in v. 24.

### **Taking Up One's Cross**

A cross is an instrument of torture and death. Jesus willingly took up his. He chose to leave heaven's glories, lay aside His divine prerogatives, and take on human flesh. He chose to endure the horrors of crucifixion, knowing it was the will of the Father.

*I lay down my life ... No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again ([John 10:18](#)).*

*My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work ([John 4:34](#)).*

He wants us to be willing to take up whatever He has for us in the way of suffering and perhaps even death. The apostle Paul prayed, *That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death (Phil. 3:10)*. That is a heart that desires to take up its cross. In [Luke 9:23](#) Jesus specified that our cross needs to be taken up *daily*.

However, it is important to clarify that a “cross” is not something you bring upon yourself – suffering as the consequence of sin or as the result of making foolish decisions. A “cross” is some form of suffering that God brings along your path. It could be a major financial reversal or a serious health condition or some form of persecution. Whatever cross God allows in your life, you must choose to take it up, which means to respond rightly to the crisis. Count it all joy when you face various kinds of trials ([James 1:2](#)). God promises His grace is sufficient to endure the trial ([2 Cor. 12:9](#)). Your responsibility is to take up the cross, not chafe at it or lean to your own understanding and try to sidestep it. Notice that “taking up” involves a decision of the will to embrace the cross – again, the realm of the soul. It does not come natural to us. We must choose to take it up.

Are you actively seeking by the power of the Holy Spirit to lose your soul now? It means letting go of that which your soul craves, the pleasures of life, the high opinion of self. It means choosing to suffer willingly for Jesus, rejoicing in your crosses. If you will deny self and take up your cross in order to follow Him, your soul will be lost now, but gained at the Judgment Seat. You will receive the true object of your heart’s affection: Jesus in all His glory.

To lose one’s soul now is far better than losing it at the Judgment Seat. Those who lose their soul at the Judgment Seat will surely regret it, no doubt to the extent of weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth (consciously regretting). Better to lose now and save later.

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## [The Paradox of Saving the Soul \(Part 1\)](#)

### **Save Now; Lose Later.**

Jesus warned of the possibility of an eternally-secure believer losing his soul at the Judgment Seat of Christ. This does not mean he will be denied eternal life, for his spirit has been justified and regenerated. Rather, losing one’s soul at the Judgment Seat is the equivalent of what the apostle Paul described in [1 Cor. 3:15](#), “saved, yet so as by fire.” It is the prospect of suffering loss, shamefully entering the millennial kingdom, and perhaps even heaven, with no reward, and no glory. The very thought should make one shudder.



In order to correctly understand the salvation of the soul, it is essential to comprehend the Scriptural teaching regarding [The Three Tenses of Salvation](#), discussed in a previous article. In summary, the *spirit* of every believer *has been saved* – justified, regenerated, and positionally sanctified. The *body* of every believer *will be saved*, when it is redeemed one day in the future. What about the soul? It *is being saved* presently in this life.

Does this mean that only one-third of a believer is actually saved? It depends on how one defines the word “saved.” From man’s perspective, the whole man is saved, because we are incapable of separating spirit, soul and body. However, God is able to divide asunder the three parts of man, and so theologically, it is accurate to refer to them independently. We have a responsibility to recognize what God has done, what He is doing, and what He will do in each part of our being!

He Who has begun a work in you will complete it ([Phil. 1:6](#)). While eternal salvation was determined at a past point in time, it is only the beginning. The work of salvation in its complete sense (from God’s perspective) continues over one’s lifetime. Though we often refer to the ongoing aspect as “sanctification,” it is technically part of God’s complete salvation “package,” and is accurately described as salvation of the soul. How one fares regarding the saving of his soul will be determined at the Judgment Seat.

Salvation of the spirit is a gift from God ([John 3:16](#); [Eph. 2:8-9](#)) that anyone can receive now, by faith alone in the finished work of Christ; whereas salvation of the soul is a reward from Jesus, based on the quality of one’s work for Him, that only believers will receive in the future ... or not. Scripture is abundantly clear that the soul is not automatically saved (i.e., sanctified). Every believer must choose to cooperate with God in the process. Those who do not make choices in accordance with the will of God will lose their soul.

### **Losing One’s Soul**

What does it mean to lose one’s soul? Let us focus on the teaching of Jesus in [Matthew 16:24-28](#):

*Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.*

The King James translators interchange the words “life” (v.25) and “soul” (v.26) in this passage, though they are translations of the same Greek word, *psyche*, which means “soul.” Thus, verse 25 could be read, *For whosoever will save his **soul** shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his **soul** for my sake shall find it.*

Some have mistakenly concluded that to “lose” one’s soul means to be eternally condemned – to “perish,” as the word is translated in [John 3:16](#) and other places in the New Testament. However, that particular definition is not suitable for this text, as will be demonstrated in the following five reasons.

First, this particular Greek word is also translated “lose” and “lost” several times in the New Testament, as here. For example, Luke 15 gives the parable of the man who has one hundred sheep but “loses” one of them. The man certainly does not perish, nor does his sheep. Rather, he is deprived of his possession, and that is how the word is used in Matthew 16. One who does not deprive himself of his soul’s desires here and now, will be deprived of his soul’s desires in the world to come. In that sense his soul will be lost. On the other hand, one who deprives himself now – by denying self and taking up his cross – his soul will not be lost (deprived or forfeited), but found (rewarded)!

Second, Jesus is speaking with His disciples here, and in all the parallel passages ([Matt. 10:39](#); [Mark 8:35](#); [Luke 9:24](#); [17:33](#); [John 12:25](#)), about the costs of discipleship. These are already saved men. They don’t need to know how to be saved. They need to know how to “come after” Jesus and follow Him. Incidentally, following Jesus is a process, not a point-in-time event like justification. Clearly, this passage has nothing to do with the new birth. Jesus is teaching here about sanctification.

Third, if the means of salvation from eternal condemnation is denying self and taking up one’s cross, then salvation would be by works, not of faith alone. Denying self and taking up one’s cross are only possible when a believer depends upon the indwelling Spirit to enable to take such radical behavioral steps. An unbeliever is dead in trespasses and sins and therefore unable to obey God.

Fourth, verse 27 ties this matter of the saving of the soul to the time when Jesus will “reward every man according to his works.” Some say that is a reference to the Great White Throne Judgment when the dead are judged “according to their works” ([Rev. 20:12](#)). However, Jesus gives a clear indication in vs. 27-28 as to which judgment is in question. The Son of Man coming “in the glory of his Father” (v.27) is equated with the Son of man coming “in his kingdom” (v.28), which is an obvious reference to the Bema, a judgment for believers only, that precedes the millennial kingdom.<sup>(1)</sup>

Fifth, defining “losing” one’s soul as eternal condemnation in the first half of verse 25 demands that it be defined the same way in the last half of verse 25. But commentators do not consistently apply the same definition, because the result is nonsensical. For example, when Jesus says, “whosoever will save his life (soul) shall lose it,” many commentators interpret that to mean

whoever refuses to deny self and take up his cross will face God's wrath and be eternally condemned. But in the latter half of the verse, when Jesus says, "'whosoever will lose his life (soul) for my sake shall find it," they do not interpret losing the soul as eternal condemnation, because to do so would imply that one must go the lake of fire in order to obtain eternal life. Furthermore, if losing one's soul means perishing in the lake of fire, then how is that done for Jesus' sake? And how does one ever find his soul if he is cast into the lake of fire? It makes no sense, and so defining "losing" the soul as eternal condemnation forces one to interpret the passage inconsistently.

In summary, losing one's soul has nothing to do with eternal condemnation. It is being deprived of it at the Judgment Seat. It is suffering loss ([1 Cor. 3:15](#)) rather than receiving rewards. It is entering the millennial kingdom without glory, not being able to enjoy the incredible wonders of that Edenic world to come, and consciously regretting that more spiritual (good soulish) choices were not made in this life.

The paradox of Christ's teaching is that a believer loses his soul at the Judgment Seat by "saving" it here and now, in this life; that is, by refusing to deny self, take up his cross, and follow Jesus. Instead, he caters to self, avoids hardships and pays lip service to following Jesus, not counting the cost of discipleship.

In Luke 17 Jesus precedes His discussion of saving/losing one's soul with an admonition: *Remember Lot's wife* ([Luke 17:32](#)). It is important to remember that this Old Testament woman was righteous (justified), as her husband Lot was, and because of her righteous standing before God, she was also delivered from Sodom. But despite the warnings of the angels, she turned and looked, and instantly became a pillar of salt. She gained the world ("saved" her soul), and thereby forfeited her soul. Lot's wife is a metaphor for saints who "lose" their soul by "saving" it.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Adding further credence to this view is Jesus' prediction that some standing there (whom we know to be Peter, James, and John) would not die until they would see Jesus coming in His kingdom. Contextually, this is a reference to the transfiguration, which is fulfilled just six days later ([Matt. 17](#)). Jesus gives His inner circle a glimpse of His glorified, millennial body.

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## [The Three Tenses of Salvation](#)

Let's begin with a "pop" quiz. Multiple choice.

**Which answer best describes your relationship with the Lord?**

- a. I have been saved.
- b. I am being saved.
- c. I will be saved.
- d. all of the above.

Of course, the correct answer for all born-again children of God is "d. all of the above. "

***I have been saved.***

At the point of conversion, you were justified and regenerated, redeemed by the blood of Christ. Therefore, you *have been* saved. You *have been* declared righteous by God, your sins *have been* forgiven, and your account *has been* credited with the righteousness of Christ. You *have been* given an entirely new nature. You *have been* positionally sanctified. All of that is in the past tense. It has already occurred, as in a legal transaction. Yet it is much more than a mere transaction. It is a reality, for Christ now lives in you by His Spirit!

*And such were some of you: but ye are (have been) washed, but ye are (have been) sanctified, but ye are (have been) justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God ([1 Cor. 6:11](#)).*

*Therefore, if any man be in Christ he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. [2 Cor. 5:17](#)*

*And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins ([Eph. 2:1](#)).*

*ye (have) put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness ([Eph. 4:24](#)).*

*ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him ([Col. 3:9-10](#)).*

Moreover, Scripture seems to indicate this past-tense aspect of salvation took place within the realm of your human spirit, which is distinct from the soul.<sup>[1]</sup> The spirit of man is reserved for God-consciousness, and prior to salvation is dead in trespasses and sins. It is made alive at regeneration.

*A new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart (the old, dead spirit) out of your flesh ... And*

*I will put my spirit within you ([Ezek. 36:26-27](#)).*

*That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit ([John 3:6](#)).*

*If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the spirit is life because of righteousness ([Rom. 8:10](#)).*

Scripture is abundantly clear that salvation has a “past tense” component. You *have been* saved, and that work of God took place in your spirit.

### ***I will be saved.***

Moving from the past to the future, you *will be* saved when you meet Jesus face to face. This will happen when your body is reunited with soul and spirit at the rapture or some time shortly thereafter (perhaps at the Bema). The doctrinal term for this aspect of salvation is glorification – sometimes referred to as the redemption of the body – when the earthly body of corruption is given an incorruptible body, equipped for eternal existence.

*Even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body ([Rom. 8:2](#)).*

*Whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified ([Rom. 8:30](#)).*

*For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality ... then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory ([1 Cor. 15:53-54](#)).*

*After that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession ([Eph. 1:13-14](#)).*

*Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption ([Eph. 4:30](#)).*

*We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is ([1 John 3:2](#)).*

Technically speaking, the realm of the body is not yet saved. Is that not obvious? The body declines throughout its earthly existence until it eventually dies and decays in the ground. Paul called it “*this body of this death*” ([Rom. 7:24](#)). Nevertheless, every believer has the assurance that his body *will be* saved one day!!

### ***I am being saved.***

You *have been* saved. At some point in your past, God justified, regenerated, and sanctified you positionally. Specifically, it happened in your spirit, which the Holy Spirit made alive. In the future you *will be* saved, when Jesus reunites your soul and spirit with a glorified body. What about the present?

You *are being* saved. This aspect of salvation is known as sanctification, particularly the progressive or experiential aspect of sanctification,

becoming more like Christ. Experiential sanctification happens in the realm of the soul, which is comprised of mind (intellect), emotions (feelings), and will (volition). You have all the provision necessary ([Gal. 2:20](#)) for progressing in the sanctification of your soul, because your spirit has already been positionally sanctified.

However, spiritual progression is not automatic. The believer must choose to appropriate the provision. Daily, moment by moment choices must be made to depend upon the enabling power of the Holy Spirit within one's spirit to lead the soul and then for the soul to lead the body, in that order. When a believer reverses the order, allowing the bodily desires or soulish passions to rule, carnality results, and the Spirit of God is grieved. Carnality may be temporary or could potentially continue indefinitely.

The salvation of one's soul is to be distinguished from the salvation of one's spirit. As has already been demonstrated, the salvation of the spirit is a thing of the past and impacts one's eternal destiny, whereas the salvation of the soul is a thing of the present and impacts one's eternal rewards (or loss thereof). Consider the words of Jesus:

*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life (lit. 'soul') shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life (soul) for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels ([Luke 9:24-26](#)).*

This passage is not a warning for unbelievers. If it were, then Jesus would be preaching salvation by works. On the contrary, Jesus is speaking to His disciples. By extension that includes us. He challenges us to live for the eternal rather than for the here and now. If we choose to save (i.e., preserve) our soul now – in other words, live to please ourselves – we will lose our soul at the Judgment Seat. It will not be saved, in the sense of being sanctified. All will be lost, consumed, in God's testing furnace. *"The fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is" ([1 Cor. 3:13](#))*. It will be *"saved, yet so as by fire" ([1 Cor. 3:15](#))*. On the other hand, if we choose to lose our soul now – that is, die to self – then our soul will be saved, preserved at the Bema, and rewarded by Christ. Thus, a battle rages for the soul.

Incidentally, the battle is not between the new nature (a redeemed spirit) and a so-called old nature, as if they were level playing fields. The Bible makes clear that *"old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" ([2 Cor. 5:17](#))*. The battle is between a redeemed spirit and an unredeemed soul that lives in an unredeemed body. The latter two are partners in crime.

This prompted Paul to cry out in [Romans 7:24](#), *"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"* The apostle's unredeemed soul was working in league with his body, holding him back from serving God. He refers to it as *"the law of sin and death" ([Rom. 8:2](#))*. But in the same verse Paul reveals the secret of victory over this law. It is another law, *"the law*



*of the spirit of life in Christ” which frees believers from the law of sin and death. Some call it the law of counteraction.*

Here’s the bottom line: the sinfulness of your unredeemed soul and body can be overcome by the righteous One Who lives within your spirit (that has been made righteous). Thus, your soul is being saved to the extent you are letting the law of the Spirit of life counteract the law of sin and death in your members. The extent of your reward (or loss) at the Judgment Seat will be determined by the extent to which your soul is saved in this life.

In a future article, we shall discuss at greater length the salvation of the soul.

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[1] This article presupposes that man is a tripartite being, comprised of spirit and soul and body. [1 Thess. 5:23](#), “*And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” [Heb. 4:12](#), “*For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*” While man cannot divide between soul and spirit, God can. In fact, [Heb. 4:12](#) seems to emphasize that God – through His Word – wants man to learn the distinction between soul and spirit.

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## [Make Your Calling and Election Sure](#)

*Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things ye shall never fall. [2 Peter 1:10](#)*

What does it mean to *make your calling and election sure*? Some would say, “make sure you don’t lose your salvation!” Others, at the opposite end of the theological spectrum, might say, “make sure you really have salvation!” Yet neither of these interpretations is consistent with the context of 2 Peter, chapter one, or with the overall theme of the epistle.

If Peter is suggesting a believer can lose his salvation, then he is implying the means by which one stays saved is by diligently adding to his faith (v.5ff). Is that not works-salvation and totally contrary to the whole teaching of Scripture?

On the other hand, if Peter is suggesting the way a professing believer knows (in his conscience) he is truly saved is by diligently adding to his faith, then how does the professing believer measure whether he has added enough to

prove to himself that he is saved? What if he has not added all of the things in the list? What if he backslides and reverts back to the beginning of the list? What if he stops adding for awhile? What if the believer thinks he has added sufficiently but others do not think he has? Does not man become the measure? Does not this interpretation fuel the fires of doubt regarding one's salvation? The very thing (adding to faith) that purportedly makes one's calling and election sure, actually makes it very unsure.

In order to properly interpret this passage, several observations must be made:

### **1. Peter assumes his readers are believers, not merely *professing* believers.**

In verse 10 he addresses the audience as *brethren*. In verse 9 he claims that those who have not added to their faith have forgotten they had been purged from their old sins. He doesn't say they were never saved; rather, he describes them as essentially forgetting they had been cleansed (regenerated). Furthermore, in verse one Peter addresses those who *have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ*. There is no doubt, contextually, that Peter is addressing believers, not merely *professing* believers.

### **2. Peter is discussing sanctification, not justification.**

*According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: (v.3)*

*Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. (v.4)*

Peter goes on in verse 3 to describe the positional sanctification that all believers possess in Christ. At salvation everything necessary for living a godly life is bestowed upon the child of God. There is no warning suggesting that positional sanctification can be revoked or that it may have never been received. In verse 4 Peter instructs as to the means by which believers can appropriate their positional sanctification in a practical manner: by claiming the promises. The overall thrust of this sanctification passage is as follows:

- a. The Spirit has bestowed on us the enablement for living an abundant, victorious Christian life (v.3)
- b. By claiming the promises of God we become participants in the nature of Jesus, which is always victorious over sin (v.4)
- c. We access the promises by faith, which leads to further steps of obedience (v. 5-7)

*And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. (v.5-7)*

Peter never suggests these believers are in some sort of experimental mode, the outcome of which will determine whether they are truly saved or not. Nor does he give any indication these believers need to demonstrate their salvation to others or to themselves in order to prove they are genuinely regenerated. He assumes they are already saved and speaks as if they are fully cognizant of and confident in this truth. Accordingly, he urges them to access the promises by faith and thereby take additional steps of obedience by adding to their faith. If they fail to do so, they are not casting doubt on their justification; rather, they are refusing to be sanctified.

*But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. (v.9)*

How foolish and shortsighted to ignore our God-given provision for becoming sanctified! The apostle Paul describes this spiritual condition as “carnal.” It will result in being saved at the Judgment Seat of Christ, yet so as by fire ([1 Cor. 3:15](#)).

### **3. Peter says those who make their calling and election sure will never fall, not prove or guarantee their salvation**

*For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (v.8)*

How does one make his calling and election sure? By doing “these things,” that is, by diligently adding virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love to his faith. It’s a matter of sanctification, not justification.

When this kind of Christ-like obedience characterizes a child of God, he is neither barren (idle) nor unfruitful. In other words, he is a productive, fruit-bearing Christian. Such fruitfulness will be rewarded by Jesus at the Judgment Seat.

Furthermore, those who diligently add to their faith will *never fall* (v.10). The word translated *fall* is never used in the New Testament to refer to eternal condemnation. Rather, it refers to stumbling or failure. Thus, Peter is not saying that a professing believer will – by adding to his faith – be assured that he is not eternally condemned.

His point is that believers who are adding to their faith will not get tripped up or fail spiritually. In other words, to the extent the saint of

God is walking in the Spirit, living the Christ-life ([Rom. 8:4](#); [Gal. 2:20](#); [5:16](#)), he will not stumble. A similar idea is found in [1 John 2:10](#), *He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.* Abiding (remaining) in the light (obedience) keeps one from stumbling into sinful behavior.

Thus, making one's calling and election sure has nothing to do with guaranteeing one's justification. Nor is it about proving to one's self (and perhaps to others) "I am truly saved," but rather it is making sure one accesses the provision that has already been given at the point of regeneration.

#### **4. Peter's theme is perseverance that results in reward, not perseverance unto eternal life.**

*For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (v.10)*

"Faithful living in difficult times" is the theme of 2 Peter. [\[i\]](#) The apostle warns of false teachers who promise "liberty," (2:29) and thereby promote licentiousness. He also reminds his readers that earth will one day be destroyed, *and the works that are therein shall be burned up (3:10)*. Peter uses these adverse circumstances as motivations to live righteously.

*Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness ...? (3:11)*

*Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. (3:14)*

*Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (3:17-18)*

Notice Peter warns again in the very end of the epistle to not *fall from ... steadfastness*. This is the same point made in chapter one. He is urging these believers not to stumble in their faithful Christian walk, to continue adding to their faith.

Perseverance is most definitely taught in chapter one and throughout the entire epistle. However, it is not perseverance that assures the professing believer he is truly saved, as has been demonstrated in the previous point, but perseverance that assures the actual believer of abundant reward.

In the context of 2 Peter 1, it becomes obvious that Peter's reference to *calling and election* is not merely to the fact of God's divine invitation

and selection of us in salvation – the initial event – but rather to His ongoing purpose for saving us. In other words, we are called, but for what purpose? We are elected, but for what intent? In the context of this book we are elected unto obedient, holy living. That is why we are to add to our faith. Then we are called to persevere in that way of living, despite suffering, hardship or adverse circumstances of any type, knowing that one day we will give account to Jesus for how we fared while on earth.

Those who fare well will be given abundant entrance into his everlasting kingdom (which begins with the millennial kingdom). They will be inheritors of the kingdom who will rule and reign with Him for a thousand years. Those believers who live in carnality while on earth are blind and cannot see afar off (i.e., do not have eternal vision) and live as if they have forgotten they were ever saved. The implication of this passage – which is also clearly declared elsewhere in the New Testament – is that this latter group will not *inherit* the millennium or the new heaven/earth to follow. Though they will presumably dwell in the millennial earth, and will certainly live eternally in heaven, they will not receive the greater glory, they will not rule and reign with Jesus, and they will consciously regret it throughout the thousand years. They will *suffer loss*.

A biblical example of abundant entrance is Stephen. The Scriptures characterize him as *full of faith and power* ([Acts 6:8](#)). He was a godly man who obviously added to his faith and walked with Jesus. As he was being martyred, Jesus gave him abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom – even in advance of the Judgment Seat. Stephen was granted *the face of an angel* (the glow of Christ on his face – see [Acts 6:15](#)); a glimpse of Jesus *standing on the right hand of God* (7:56); and a Christlike spirit toward his tormentors (*Lord, lay not this sin to their charge* – 7:60). Abundant entrance indeed.

In light of the coming Judgment Seat of Christ, may we all be diligent to add to our faith and thereby make our calling and election sure.

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[\[i\]](#) Walvoord, John F. and Roy B. Zuck, editors. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* (Victor Books, 1983), 859.

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## [Unsalty Christians \(Part 1\)](#)

Jesus calls Christians “salt” and “light.” There’s nothing negotiable about it. If we are truly children of God, then we are, by our position in Christ, salt and light in the world. That will never change. Jesus is obviously speaking to believers, for unbelievers are never referred to as salt or light. Indeed, unbelievers are “darkness” (Eph. 5:8).

*Ye are the salt of the earth ... Ye are the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-14).*

The problem is that many Christians become “unsalty” and hide their light. Yet they never cease to be saved. I would allege they have become carnal in some degree.

### **Three Spiritual States**

Before exploring the consequences of unsaltiness, it will be helpful to review the three spiritual states in 1 Corinthians 2. Every person on earth can be categorized as either (1) natural, (2) spiritual, or (3) carnal.

#### **Natural**

*But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:14).*

The natural man is a lost person. The Greek word translated “natural” is ψυχικὸς (*psuchikos*), which comes from ψυχή (*psuche*) – or soul. The lost man lives according to the dictates of his soul, not his spirit. The soul is the realm of the mind, will, and emotions.

Because the natural man’s spirit is dead in trespasses and sins, he cannot receive the things of God’s Spirit. Anything of a spiritual nature is foolishness to an unregenerated spirit. So he lives according to what he *rationalizes* is best for him and/or what he *desires* to do and/or what he *feels* like doing. He has no regard for God.

#### **Spiritual**

*But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man (1 Cor. 2:15).*

In contradistinction to the natural man is the spiritual man. The Greek word translated “spiritual” is πνευματικός (*pneumatikos*), which comes from πνεῦμα (*pneuma*)—or spirit.

This person’s spirit has been regenerated, and he is living by taking his marching orders from the Holy Spirit, not merely from his own thoughts or feelings or volition. The evidence that he is spiritual is that he is discerning, and others cannot figure him out. He is an anomaly in culture, for he has the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16), not merely in a positional sense, but practically. He thinks as Jesus thinks.

#### **Carnal**



*And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men ([1 Cor. 3:1-3](#)).*

Were these people saved? Yes, for Paul refers to them as “brethren.” Yet he labels them “carnal.” What characterizes carnality? First, spiritual immaturity. Carnal Christians are like babes in Christ, even if they have been saved for decades. They have not grown as Christians should, but remain feeding on the milk of the Word, not meat.

What a shameful condition! When the preacher goes on to heavier things, they yawn and zone out; the content goes over their head or in one ear and out the other. Worse yet, they get angry and divisive over truth.

The second characteristic of carnal Christians is self-focus. Indeed, the Greek word translated “carnal” is σαρκικός (*sarkikos*), which means fleshly. They live according to the flesh, not according to the Spirit. They are full of envy and strife and division. They “walk as men” (i.e., unsaved men).

Incidentally, flesh is not the equivalent of body. If it were, then we might be tempted to punish the body, as if it were bad. Rather, flesh is the collusion of soul and body to pursue behavior that displeases God. On the contrary, a spiritual man cooperates with the Holy Spirit, bringing soul and body into conformity to the will of Christ. Christians are either Spirit-controlled (spiritual) or flesh-controlled (carnal).

## **The Danger of Denying the Possibility of a Carnal State**

A dear pastor friend of mine said to me, “I believe eighty percent of the people in our independent, fundamental congregations are unsaved.” Surprised, I replied, “I don’t agree. I believe eighty percent of the people in our independent, fundamental congregations are carnal.”

I believe there is a grave danger in declaring those who don’t live as they ought “unsaved.” For then we make works an element of salvation.

By the way, it is critically important to distinguish between soul and spirit in one’s theology, for God does in the Word (e.g., [1 Thess. 5:23](#); [Heb. 4:12](#)). Those who are of a more reformed theological persuasion often tend to lump soul and spirit together and refer to them collectively as the soul or innermost part of man. Some dispensationalists unwittingly do the same. However, integrating soul and spirit results in making theological and hermeneutical errors.

We know that at salvation, technically speaking, the spirit is the aspect of our being that is saved. It was dead in trespasses and sins, but it is made alive in Christ, as the Holy Spirit regenerates and comes to reside in our spirit. The Holy Spirit bears witness with our *spirit* that we are the

children of God ([Rom. 8:16](#)). Our spirit *has been* made completely righteous because of Christ—and there we find our provision for living the Christ life. That is the doctrine of justification and positional sanctification.

But, technically speaking, the soul has not been made righteous, and so we continue to sin. Our soul *is being* saved, and that is the doctrine of progressive sanctification. Thus Jesus calls us to discipleship. He wants us to choose to lose our soul in this life—that is, to die to self, letting go of the things of this world, so that we might find our soul at the Judgment Seat.

Of course, the body is not saved now. It will die, and so the body *will be* saved, and that is the doctrine of the redemption of the body.

The spirit **has been** saved (i.e., justified); the soul **is being** saved (i.e., progressively sanctified); the body **will be** saved (i.e., redeemed). Those who merge spirit and soul together are compelled to arrive at an incorrect theological position in order to make sense of the Scriptures. Whenever they see the word “soul” in the Bible they tend to equate it with “spirit”—and vice versa—essentially viewing the terms as interchangeable.

In so doing, they are essentially synthesizing justification and progressive sanctification. Then they are forced to arrive at either an Arminian interpretation of Scripture—which teaches that one can lose his salvation by not living righteously—or a Calvinistic interpretation—which teaches that if one does not live righteously he was never saved in the first place. I believe both of those theological conclusions are errors, not based on the Scriptures, but rather based on a faulty understanding of spirit and soul, which then leads to incorrect hermeneutical conclusions.

Those who do not distinguish between spirit and soul in their theology tend to misinterpret the books of Hebrews, James, and 1 John, for example.

When they see the term “save” or “salvation” or “salvation of the soul” or some other similar reference, they assume it is a soteriological reference (that is, a reference to the Gospel, to justification).

However, when many of those references are interpreted according to a right understanding of spirit and soul, and within context rather than according to one’s theological grid, it becomes clear they are sanctification references (not justification). Instead of one losing one’s salvation (Arminianism) or having never been saved in the first place (Calvinism), a more biblical conclusion is that carnality leads to millennial disinheritance.

A state of carnality—regardless of duration—is a possibility, according to the Scriptures. In an Old Testament sense, think of King Saul, who was saved but carnal. Think of Lot and Solomon, who were saved but carnal. In the New Testament, think of Ananias and Sapphira. God took their lives! Think of Peter who was carnal for a time. Think of Demas who forsook Paul and left the ministry in pursuit of worldliness. Think of those in [1 Cor. 11](#) who were carnal and partook of the Lord’s table unworthily, and God killed them. They were carnal for the rest of their lives!

Now I realize, some readers may get very uncomfortable admitting the possibility of a carnal state. Here's why: they think that admitting to the possibility of an indefinite carnal state for the Christian will lead to shallow professions and profligate living. The result will be that our churches will fill up with people who call themselves Christians but don't act like it. In fact, some may even go so far as to suggest that by teaching the possibility of a carnal state we will actually go so far as to convince unsaved people they are saved, but carnal!

To those charges I respond: Yes, that could be the case and, I fear, is the case in many fundamental, dispensational churches. Because many pastors are not accurately teaching the distinction between soul and spirit, and they are not correctly teaching the doctrines of faith and repentance. They are not teaching the Christ-life, which is the God-given provision for living righteously ([Rom. 8:4](#)), and they are not teaching about the importance of preparing for the kingdom, which provides biblical motivation and accountability.

But when spirit-soul-body are accurately distinguished; and faith and repentance are preached biblically, not as mere professionalism ("pray this prayer or walk this aisle and you will be saved"); and the Christ-life is taught as our provision; and accountability is preached—that how we live now will determine whether or not we inherit the millennium—then carnal Christians will either get right with the Lord, or they will duck and run from the pressure.

In other words, when the Scriptures are preached accurately in our churches, then we never need to worry about an epidemic of false professions or perpetually carnal saints. Indeed, we can rest in knowing that the truth of the Word will prevail.

The sad truth is that carnality is a possibility for the Christian, and the duration of carnality is never limited. It is not our place to judge whether one is saved or not; we must continue to preach truth and let the Holy Spirit bring conviction, as needed.

Carnal Christians are not salty, nor do they shine brightly for Jesus.

Their saltiness has been diluted and their light has been hid.

In [Part 2](#) we will explore the dire consequences of carnality in the life of the Christian.