

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.

[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.^[1]

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.

^[1] 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.

[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.[1] 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.

[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.