

Dear Friends,

I do not question the sincerity of folks who react in shock to the Biblical teaching of eternal salvation all and only by the kind grace of God. However, the frequent quip, "Why, if I believed that, I'd live my fill of sin," sadly says far more about them and their motive for their Christian service than it says about the doctrine. Do they live a Christian life only because they believe it is the means of their "Buying" their eternity with God? If they have a sense of morality, of right and wrong, shouldn't they--we--respect it and live it because it is right, reward or not?

New Testament writers wrote by direction from the Holy Spirit. Contained in that writing we discover repeated and clear teaching regarding God's eternal saving "Covenant" purpose, mutually purposed by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And those same inspired writings just as frequently teach us our ethical/moral obligation to God because of His eternal saving grace. You see, according to Scripture, the Christian life is not about how many rewards I can earn or how many stars I can gain for my crown. The Biblical basis for every act of Christian service, which includes Christian living according to the will of God, is wholly a matter of praising and honoring the Lord for His loving merciful grace that saved us. Based on Romans 3:5-8, this idea of "If I believed that, I'd..." is not new to contemporary critics of Biblical truth. Apparently someone raised it to Paul, and he categorically rejected it in this passage. Further, in our study passage for this week, Peter added his affirming words, "**For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles.**" The amazing change the Lord makes in a person when He saves that person immediately alters their moral compass and appetite. From that moment, they've already had far more than their fill of sin. They long to avoid it, not continue in it. Peter teaches us to conduct our present life "**...to the will of God,**" not to sin.

In our study lesson, Peter teaches us that our Lord is ready to judge, His judgment will include all the wicked (The judgment of the elect occurred in Jesus. It is already completed, and God's "Verdict" was "Not guilty," "**Justified**" by the blood of Jesus. If our God has so strongly and consistently revealed His abiding wrath against sin of any kind and to any degree, it behooves believers in Jesus to strive to live their lives according to His will as taught and revealed in Scripture.

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? (Romans 6:1 KJV)

What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. (Romans 6:15 KJV)

The context of these verses includes Romans 5 in which Paul reasoned on "Federal headship." As "Federal head" or representative of all humanity, Adam's sin imposed the sentence of death upon all humanity. And as "Federal head" of all whom the Lord chose from eternity, Jesus' victory over sin graces every chosen vessel of God's eternal mercy with life, eternal life in glory with the Lord. Paul answered the human centric "If I believed that..." idea clearly in these verses, in fact throughout his reasoning in Romans 6.

How then should we live? Full of ambition to gain eternal rewards and crowns for self? Or devoted to manifesting our Biblical design as a "**Vessel of mercy,**" (Romans 9:23 KJV. Pay special attention to Paul's term "Vessels of mercy.") wholly devoted to praise God for His loving mercy in saving us from our sins, from ourselves? Lord give us conviction and clear vision to live for Him and in fellowship with Him.

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

Ethical Implications of Jesus' Suffering for Us

Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead. (1 Peter 4:1-5 KJV 1900)

Often, when people not familiar with salvation all and only of divine grace first hear this idea, their first reaction is, "If I believed that, I'd have my fill of sin." Despite whatever Bible learning they may have gained, they are ignorant of a major Biblical truth, the moral or ethical implications of Jesus' suffering for us. Typically, their thought of eternal life is structured on their own works. If they believe enough or work hard enough, they shall earn their eternity with God, along with some kind of special reward in heaven, stars in their crown or whatever. They have no sense of loving and serving God wholly out of love and for His praise and honor. Their present passion is to conscientiously live a servant's life of devotion to others and to the lifestyle that Jesus and His first followers teach us in Scripture. The selfless mindset of doing and giving all for love of Jesus and not for greater benefit to self is an unknown idea to folks who strive to earn heaven by anything, mental or physical, which they do.

For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles. Peter affirms my point. Rather than thinking salvation all and only of God's loving grace gives us a free ticket to sin, Biblical thinking—and a Biblical conscience—looks back on our former sins and shouts, "I've had more than enough of that!" We are now ready and eager for a better way to think and to order our life.

That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us.... When we embrace the Jesus way of life in faith, the last thing we want to do is continue in our former sinful ways, "no longer," please, Lord. Our present passion is to live our life in harmony with "**the will of God.**" In the context of Peter's writing, the "Will of God" means we choose to suffer, if necessary, in well doing and not—never—in evil doing. (1 Peter 3:17 KJV) Paul enlarges what it means to live according to the will of God. (1 Thessalonians 4:3 and context, as well as 5:18 and context. KJV) When we adopt all these verses as our goal for life, we learn that Scripture shows us the will of God in every aspect of life, from moral conduct to avoiding complaining, and even enduring suffering with grace.

I love an unusual verse in Acts which summarizes all of Jesus' ethical teaching in one simple thought.

I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. (Acts 20:35 KJV)

Search the four gospels as you might, you'll never find those words of Jesus in them, "**It is more blessed to give than to receive.**" However, the spirit of those words appears on every page of the four gospels' account of Jesus' life on earth. While our sincere friends strive for one more star in their crown or some other personal reward in heaven, believers in the gospel of Jesus strive to give and serve with no thought of personal gain. They understand these words. Our present blessings come in proportion to our giving, not to our working to gain for self or to rule over others.

Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind. Did you notice? Adopting the mind of Christ relative to suffering for others, as He suffered for us, Peter compares to military armor. There is a war going on that started in Genesis 3, and it has never ceased for a minute. That this war is invisible in no way diminishes its reality. While the war itself is invisible, we see the results of it all around us—and within. Whether we even engage our enemy or give him an open-door welcome to our lives depends on whether we “arm” ourselves with the same do-even-to-the-point-of-suffering-for-others mindset that Jesus manifested throughout His time on earth. In this point, Peter echoes Paul's teaching from Ephesians 6 regarding our putting on and daily wearing the whole armor of God. We personally engage our spiritual enemy primarily within our own mind. Paul will further teach this truth in 2 Corinthians 10:3-6. Underscore this verse especially from that passage.

Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5 KJV)

Where does our imagination reside? Within our mind. And that is precisely where Paul teaches that we need to apply the truth of the gospel. **We can't do a righteous, Biblical thing of value until we have won the war against our own imagination.**

...for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. This thought only makes logical and moral sense when taken in its context. We do not automatically cease from sin when we get a headache or a sprained muscle. We cease from sin, the heartthrob of our focus in this study, when we wholly embrace the mind of Jesus, especially His selfless giving of Himself, even in suffering to the point of death, for “Us,” not for Himself. Ah, when we put on the armor of this mindset, we overcome the influence of sin in our life. We cease doing everything for self, **“to the lust of men,”** (You and I belong to humanity, “men” here used in the classical sense, referring to both men and women. As in “Mankind.”) And we begin striving to

live, how we conduct our life, **“to the will of God.”** You don’t need to hibernate and ponder “What the will of God for my life is.” Arming ourselves with the mind of Christ will urge us to the “Will of God” lifestyle which Paul and Peter described in the above verses.

Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you. Your former companions in sin will have no sense of who you now are and how you now choose to live. A deacon in our church was born and raised in a German Baptist pastor’s home. His parents reminded him often of this truth. Those same people who saw you in that dark sinful season of your life may now think strangely of you. However, our goal is to so strive to live the faith of Jesus in our conduct that, should the Lord ever touch their hearts with His loving grace, they will remember your steadfast and gracious faith, and seek you out for answers. Let them speak as they wish of you now. Just keep living the Jesus-way. The Lord can do in their life what you can’t. Then they may seek you out rather than thinking strangely of you. Our constant task as believers in Jesus is to live today before whomever we meet so that, should the Lord touch their heart and life, they will remember and seek us out.

Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead. Regardless of how long or how deep the ocean of sin into which fallen broken humans may choose to live, Scripture reminds us. God is the final Judge of humanity. Wicked people may live to be one hundred years old, and they may think there is no accountability for their sins, but they fail to understand the reality of life. There is a God! He is a moral God! And He is ready, waiting only for His time, to judge **“the quick and the dead.”** In this clause, “quick” refers to living. A time certain in God’s eternal purpose is coming when He shall interrupt the universe’s “Clock.” Then only one reality shall exist. He is God. He is the only righteous Judge of all. It matters nothing at all whether people are alive when that day comes, or dead. He shall judge all.

I spent my secular career in the business world. On occasion, I was blessed richly to work with decent, honest, and godly people. On other occasions, I worked with people who showed no real sense of moral integrity. For them, what was right and wrong was measured by what you could do and get away with it. If you did something immoral, and no one ever discovered it, they regarded it as perfectly acceptable. But, if you did the same thing and were discovered, oh, you were wrong. When the Lord returns and appears on His Judgment throne, this phony amoral mindset will melt away.

Who shall give account to him. There shall be no evasion, no avoidance. Literally, “account” means they must “Give a word,” or answer to Him. Every evil thought, word, and deed of wicked people, including their persecution and evil speaking against Christians. No longer will they be able to dismiss or belittle the moral teachings of God. Then those values shall be their basis for judgment. It shall not matter if they escaped the scrutiny of other humans by their secret sins. God knows all about them. And they shall answer to Him for what they did.

There is a fascinating revelation about this final judgment in the closing lesson of Matthew 25, the separation of sheep from goats. Both the saved and unsaved will respond with surprise, **“When saw we**

thee....” The saved will be surprised at the Lord’s merciful awareness of their labors, and the wicked will be shocked at His full knowledge of their sins. Another man’s opinion shall mean nothing. No man shall sit on that Judgment Throne. Only God. The wicked shall be called in question specifically for what they did or refused to do for “...**one of the least of these.**” (Matthew 25:45 KJV)

Scripture dealing with the Lord’s final judgment of humanity always emphasizes the thoroughness of His judgment. Nothing can be hidden or forgotten. In our finite humanity, we imagine that the Lord’s thoroughness of all humans who ever lived shall require an extended time. I am far more inclined to believe it shall be incredibly brief. I’ve read about a person’s experience during brain surgery. By merely touching a specific brain area, the patient literally relives past experiences as if they were happening now. When the wicked protest against God, “**When saw we thee...**” He might immediately touch their whole memory bank, bringing every sin to their fresh remembrance, leaving them speechless before God, their final Judge.

For the children of God, that day holds nothing for you to fear. Jesus endured all the penalty for your sins. You shall be raised immediately in His likeness. (Psalm 17:15 KJV) Rather than fear, Paul reminded the Thessalonians that a faith-outlook enables us to “**Rest with us when...**” that day appears. (2 Thessalonians 2:7 and context. KJV)

All of Scripture serves to remind and encourage us to live our life now all to our glorious Savior and in service to His people. The blessing grows to the extent we practice His words by giving, not striving or manipulating others to gain or receive for self. How may I serve you today?

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church

16434 Woodruff

Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday, 10:30 A. M.

Joseph Holder, Pastor

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