

General Topics :: If most people will end up in Hell, how does God win vs Satan?

If most people will end up in Hell, how does God win vs Satan?, on: 2010/7/6 1:29

I don't understand this. Please explain.

Can we change this at all? Does God want us to change this?

Matthew 7:14 (King James Version)

Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

Re: If most people will end up in Hell, how does God win vs Satan? - posted by HeartSong, on: 2010/7/6 3:32

God will be left with only those that truly love Him.

Re: If most people will end up in Hell, how does God win vs Satan? - posted by utilizer001 (), on: 2010/7/6 4:18

We can and should endeavor to make it a "few more" rather than a "few less".

We need to get our hands clean, our hearts pure. We need to get right with God. And we need to continue confessing and repenting of our sin to stay right.

Then, we start praying for the salvation of people. Whom ever God leads us to pray for. Sometimes this means people groups, some times it means some one you barely know (Like the cashier at the mini-mart), sometimes it is your closest friends or relatives. Pray for them, wrestle with God for them, stand in the gap and intercede until God saves them.

You may not make the way any broader, But God will have saints to worship Him.

Jason

Re: , on: 2010/7/6 7:03

Honestly if God knew how little people would be saved. Couldn't he have made a better way for us to be saved?

Right now, I don't know any saved christians in my life. Everyone is using Christ for their own benefit.

It feels like there is gonna be 100 people up there.

Was God too harsh with His standards

Re: - posted by sojourner7 (), on: 2010/7/6 10:13

GOD gave what was most dear and precious;
HE offered up HIS Only Son as an expression
of HIS eternal love. The gift of saving
grace that forgives and pardons us is free.
But GOD is holy and HE is just, so HE
cannot allow what is not holy and justified
in HIS heaven.

Re: - posted by TaylorOtwell (), on: 2010/7/6 10:49

Actually, Spurgeon believed that the majority of mankind would be saved (and many other godly men have believed this). I don't mean the majority of people alive today necessarily, but over the course of all history, the number of saved would be more than those who weren't.

"It is a sweet belief to my own mind that there will be more saved than lost, for in all things Christ is to have the pre-eminence, and why not in this?" - Spurgeon

This excerpt is from his sermon "Infant Salvation".

With care in Christ...

Re: - posted by whyme, on: 2010/7/6 11:00

God "won" on the cross, and His victory is not measured by how many people get saved by God in His grace. The number of rebels who are transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son is a consequence of victory, not a determiner of it.

Re: - posted by hmmhmm (), on: 2010/7/6 11:30

God made a perfect way for us to be saved, and scripture says any man can come to Him, His perfect way can make us perfect in His Son. And it is free and open to all who believe.

the problem is many will not, they cannot and even if they could by themselves they would still refuse, they are many enemies of God, haters of God etc.

God slaughtered His only Son and shed His blood as a ransom for those who would humble themselves and place their faith in His Christ. What God will do to those that despise that payment we can only imagine...

Whenever we blame God for something, we are reading the word wrong or we are missing something in the big picture.

Re: - posted by learn (), on: 2010/7/6 12:46

Actually the bible says few will be saved if we take verses like Matthew 7:13-14 to mean saved.

Here's an article by J C Ryle with bible verses and showing how the bible history (eg: during Noah's days, Lot's days, King David etc) has played out which seems to support the notion that more will be lost than saved. A good read <http://www.the-highway.com/articleSept07.html>

I know Spurgeon and some others believe that more people will be saved but so far I have not seen them give any convincing bible text from it (except for infants that are saved as the bible states it). Spurgeon mentioned that he believes more will be saved because to him if more go to hell than heaven that means the devil will win over God (sorry can't remember the exact word here as I can't find the article which I read it from). Spurgeon mentioned that the bible says and I paraphrase 'many people from all over will be saved as mentioned in the bible'. The problem I see in this remark is that although yes there's a lot of people who will be saved but nowhere does it compare with the number of people that will go to hell. So it could very well be possible that although many are saved but if we compare it to the whole population, this is but just a fraction of those that are going to hell.

The verses that have even an inkling of comparison between the number of people going to heaven/hell is in Luke 13:23-24 and Matthew 7:13-14 and some others as stated in the J C Ryle article.

PS: If we include all those infants, then maybe there will be more going to heaven than hell??--this I do not know as I would think infants will not apply to verses like Matthew 7 and Luke 13

PPS: While I can understand Spurgeon's reasoning of if more people go to Hell than Heaven, then wouldn't the devil be victorious over God...I will then ask this question. If we see the world today and its history, we will see very few bearing t

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he fruits of the Spirit and following God's commands and we are told this is how we know that they are Christians. God had said that He rescue us for His glory and His namesake. So if so few are showing fruits yet they are still saved (excluding infants)--it seems to go against the very word of the bible (evidence of being saved is the fruits of the Spirit) and also lessen God's glory.

One cannot say that many more are saved than lost when those people that show fruits of the spirit are a minority. Are we then to say that the majority that are saved are baby Christians. Nowhere in the bible does it mention that majority of Christians saved are spiritual babies (immature) in Christ or that majority saved are not showing fruits of the spirit.

Thus, from the bible verses and history in the bible plus present day world and history (outside the bible)--it seems to me that more people will be lost than saved.

But I also remember that 2/3 of the angels were on God's side (ie majority was with God)

PPPS : The only other option is if towards the end (ie in the future), so many more will be saved than lost. This I do not know.

Edit to add more things

Re: If most people will end up in Hell, how does God win vs Satan? - posted by Lysa (), on: 2010/7/6 12:58

Codek,

Does it say that everyone on the broad road goes to the lake that burns with fire?

I personally think v14 should be taken as a whole with Matt 7.13-16, it could just be me b/c right after v14, Jesus tells us to beware of false teachers. I think these are those teachers who also tried to enter in at the strait gate and failed; so they've began to leading people to the broad gate where they are because it's just plain easier.

Human beings are basically lazy, Jesus was saying that not many will make the effort to overcome the sin in their lives. I know this to be true in my life; it is a constant effort & fight to not lay down and say, "Ok, I'm good right where I'm at." No, we've got to get up and start again.

Luke 17.24, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.

According to Abbott's Illustrated New Testament:

"'Strait;' narrow, difficult to be entered. It requires watchfulness and a constant struggle to resist temptation, and to live in obedience to the precepts of Christ. And there are comparatively very few who do thus live, and they are consequently here represented as travelling in an unfrequented path. The great multitude give themselves up to sin. They are therefore represented as travelling the broad highway."

This is from Adam Clarke's commentary:

"Nothing renders this way either narrow or difficult to any person, but sin. Let all the world leave their sins, and all the world may walk abreast in this good way."

But anyway... God is always the winner!

God bless,
Lysa

Re: , on: 2010/7/6 13:23

whew! well at least we know that the regular posters here on SI who love God, discuss God, argue God, argue with each other about God, will be saved.

aint church a nice lil club for the saints?

exclusive, special, this religion business is fun.

Re: Natan4Jesus - posted by Lysa (), on: 2010/7/6 17:39

Quote:

-----aint church a nice lil club for the saints?

You do know that you are included in that club, right?

hehehe

Love you brother in Christ!!

Lysa

Re: If most people will end up in Hell, how does God win vs Satan? - posted by Areadymind (), on: 2010/7/6 19:18

Revelation 7:9-10 "After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes and palms in their hands; and cries with a loud voice saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

"Few" is a relative term...

Re: , on: 2010/7/6 19:59

I am going to share something that most people don't know and I am going to get radical.

Everyone has been cleansed by the blood. Not some, ALL.

Through one man's disobedience, all were made sinners, likewise, by one man's obedience all shall be made alive.

Is the "All" in Jesus any less than the "ALL" in Adam? 1Corinthians 15:22

Even though "ALL" of Israel was under the blood on the door post in Egypt, not all came out. Not all believed, not all entered in, even though they were under the blood. We've seen the end of the rebellious, the earth swallowed them up. We've seen the end of those that didn't believe, they all died not receiving the promise. Though the promise is there that "All shall be made alive", not all will be. You see, there is a catch to all of this, John 3:16.

Just as there is a promise that "All Israel" shall be saved, not all of Israel would be saved. We have to read further when it says, "Though Israel shall be like the sand of the sea for multitude, only a remnant shall be saved". The provision has been made, but in reality only a handful will actually get in. Romans 11:26 Romans 9:27

The whole world has been cleansed by the blood of the lamb, but not all will believe, not all will enter in. Hebrews 10:10

Truly old things have passed away, behold all things are become new. Christ has restored all that Adam destroyed through disobedience, it's now up to man who have been cleansed by the blood of the lamb to believe. 2Corinthians 5:17

God went further than just sprinkling His blood on the door post, He cleansed all mankind by taking man to the cross.

When He died, we all died. When He was buried, we all were buried with Him. When He arose, we all arose with Him. W

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When He ascended, we all ascended with Him. Is Jesus dying each time a sinner repents? NO!! He did this act "ONCE FOR ALL".

Was God too harsh with His standards you ask?, Actually He was more generous than human words could ascribe.

Re: , on: 2010/7/8 1:22

@Natan4Jesus

haha nice. i gotta say still better than never talking bout God like most of the non-xians.

Re: If most people will end up in Hell, how does God win vs Satan? - posted by StevenL (), on: 2010/7/17 12:16

Depends upon which "hell" you're talking about. The sheol "hell", or the hades "hell" (same as sheol "hell") which is finally delivered up, with death, to the great Fire to be destroyed? The gehenna "hell" that burns up the refuse and carcasses? The tartarus "hell" which is the jail cell for the fallen gods or angels where they wait for judgement?

The word "hell" has lots of different meanings to lots of different people, most of them completely in error.

If you'll do a thorough word study on sheol, hades, gehenna, tartarus, hell.... it'll clear up quite a bit for you. And you'll wonder how all this was translated into a word which means, to most people, a literal place where lost souls, angels and human, are tortured by Satan and Demons forever and ever.

Re: - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2010/7/17 13:12

Quote:

-----Can we change this at all? Does God want us to change this?

Matthew 7:14 (King James Version)

Dear brother, we ought to with all fervency and love from God share Christ with all mankind. Imploring them to come to Him. Yes the way is narrow but we can pray for and encourage many towards that way. To me only 8 being saved amidst 3-8 billion is very narrow. But hundreds of millions or 1 billion out of 3-8 billion gives me much more hope of salvation from God working in this earth. May we not make the the narrow way more narrow than it is.

But we cannot escape the reality and truth of hell that souls that go there are FOREVER in torment and eternal punishment. This truth should move us from our complacency to share christ!

Re: If most people will end up in Hell, how does God win vs Satan? - posted by dbiser, on: 2010/8/6 21:53

I have given time to this for the last month. I only focused on the question that was posed, I did not read the responses. So I may repeat some that have already been said. WE view victory as numerical; for example, a ball game, the one with the most score wins. Our mindset is fixed on this. But this is not God's way; 'As high as the heavens are above the earth so are His ways higher than our ways.' WE are already told in Scripture, the Lord knows those that are His or will be His. He allows for that time of redemption to come to all men. 'The Gospel hath appeared to all men.' Jesus declared, 'the way that leadeth to life is straight and narrow and few there be that find it.' Numerically, the Lord is not set. The saving of one soul, produces the angelic hosts to rejoice over the lost be saved. Yet, God is victorious because His glory is retained and manifested. He Who is mighty is mighty to save; yet, man chooses to reject Him and harden themselves away from His gift of salvation. Yet, in the midst of their rejection, God's glory is unchanged, His victory is already won by Christ death and resurrection over death and hell. We focus on numbers for victory; Christ focused on 'It is finished' for victory. And when eternity begins, the saved enter in, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant' He is glorified; and when the lost are condemned His righteousness and justice is served and His glory is maintained for that is Who He is. His victory is absolute as He is absolute and cannot be undone, no matter what the numerical count. It is a finished work in Him.

And since His desire is that all would be saved, so it should be our desire. We should spend and be spent for the winning of souls and the labor of His kingdom. This also is victory in Him that He will complete His good work in us.

Re: - posted by LindaC, on: 2010/8/10 18:33

Codek

I also thought myself couldn't there have been another way. My heart breaks, and I often break down in tears because I can see everything falling apart before my eyes and know that so many souls are going to have to answer for their destructive, evil, lustful behavior. And even though I intellectually understand that they can not see that they are serving every god imaginable besides the one that gave them their very souls, I just cry out, what is wrong with everyone!

But, your point about couldn't God have chosen another way to save souls. I don't think - or at least, I cannot think of an other one - that there could have been another way. Considering that the very nature of God is love, pure love, no. True love, by it's very nature, requires the gift of free will. Anything else isn't love, it's done out of selfishness, and selfish acts are not really acts of love. Love can not manipulate it's love interest, because if it does, then it's love for one's self and one's own desires and happiness. Love only wants the object loved to be free and come to love it back on it's own.

We have to want to know God. We have to want to experience life as Jesus, the King. We have to want to please him. We have to want to know how to love with such a pure heart.

If God manipulated our lives and we came to him because he made us, it wouldn't be sincere, and if it's not sincere, it's not really love.

Who knows, maybe that's all kooky talk, but at least for me, it's what I believe to be the most likely reason that God chose the path he did. But, at the end of the day, I know that my views are limited because I see all from my Earthly, human vantage point.

Re: The Judgement Seat of Christ, on: 2010/8/11 8:00

The Judgement Seat of Christ

Johan Malan, University of the North, South Africa

Abstract: All Christians have an appointment to appear before the Judgement Seat of Christ to give account of their lives and stewardship as believers. This judgement is distinct from the final judgement before the great white throne.

Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Holy Bible except where otherwise indicated. Only very archaic terms have been substituted, between brackets, with correlating terms from the New King James Version (NKJV). All pronouns referring to the Godhead are capitalised. Edited by Bernard and Kathleen Reeves of London.

THE JUDGEMENT SEAT

The church of the Lord Jesus has nearly reached the end of her earthly pilgrimage. She can look forward to an imminent reunion with her Lord at the rapture, followed by the marriage supper of the Lamb. But prior to the latter, every true Christian must keep an important appointment at Christ's judgement seat where He will review and assess their lives.

At the judgement seat of Christ, the works of believers will be tested by fire to determine whether they were spiritual or of the old sinful nature. Rewards will be granted to those who led fruitful and victorious lives under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, while unspiritual Christians will see all their works consumed by fire, though they will be saved. They will be ashamed and empty-handed in the presence of the Lord who purchased them at such great cost and to whom they were not fully committed in this life.

The apostle Paul describes the scene at the judgement seat where some Christians will be rewarded while others will stand there empty-handed: "Å...every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon... For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be

saved; yet so as by fire” (1 Cor. 3:8-15).

A close study of the judgement seat of Christ reveals the following important facts with regard to the nature and purpose of this judgement:

A fixed appointment

Christians are reminded that the judgements of God will begin at His house, which is the church (1 Tim. 3:15): “For the time has come that judgement must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?” (1 Pet. 4:17).

In the first phase of the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ, members of His church will face their Lord at the judgement seat. For this reason Christians are repeatedly challenged to be prepared for this important appointment: “For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10).

Good works, typified by gold, silver and precious stones, the fruit of the Spirit, will be rewarded. Bad can be translated fruitless or futile, i.e. works of the old nature, not Christ-like or not done with a pure motive. When tried they will be rejected and, like wood, hay or stubble in a fire, be consumed.

Paul confirms the sobering fact that we must all give an account of the way we have lived our lives, which the Lord Jesus will examine at the judgement seat: “But why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgement seat of Christ... So then everyone of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:10,12).

Believers only

Only born-again believers will appear before the judgement seat of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 3:15 it is clearly stated that those believers whose works are consumed will still be accepted as redeemed. Works obviously have no bearing on redemption, because there is absolutely nothing that we can add to the perfect work of redemption by Christ on the cross. No room is left for self-righteousness since we are saved only by the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

At the judgement seat, all believers will have one thing in common – the foundation of the new birth. This is the only basis for acceptance by God. That is why Paul emphatically states in 1 Corinthians 3:11 that no one can lay a foundation other than the one which has been laid, that is, Jesus Christ. There is, therefore, no other means of reconciliation to God than faith in the Person and work of His Son Jesus: “...for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

The basis for judgement

We have already shown that the foundation of the new life is the common characteristic of all those who appear before the judgement seat. Because Christ has already borne the punishment for the sins of all believers, they will not be required to give account of their faith or of whether they are saved or unsaved. On this occasion a whole new criterion for judgement is applied – that of works. The Lord Jesus on this occasion will examine what kind of life Christians led after their conversion; to what extent they carried out their Lord’s commission to act as witnesses and faithfully served Him while shining as lights in a dark world.

1 Corinthians 3:11-12 (quoted above) reveals that the standard which the Lord sets will result in widely different outcomes – the works of some believers will be consumed, while the works of others will be commended. This indicates that there are two categories of works, of which only one is acceptable to the Lord. From these verses also emerges the important fact that it is indeed possible to lead an unfruitful life after being born again, by doing things that are devoid of eternal value. It is therefore of the greatest importance that Christians should be fully aware of the standard required for their works and way of life.

Fleshly or spiritual?

If it is true that professing Christians can be divided into two groups, one would surely expect to find clear statements to this effect in the Scriptures. Paul does indeed make this distinction just before he describes the judgement seat. He first refers to the natural man who does not accept the things of the Spirit of God because he cannot understand them and they are foolishness to him (1 Cor. 2:14). This applies to people who still remain in their unsaved condition and therefore

will not appear before the judgement seat of Christ, where believers will give account of their stewardship. The unsaved will be judged according to their evil works at the great white throne after the second resurrection when they will be condemned to the lake of fire (Rev. 20:12-14).

By way of contrast, Paul then refers to the spiritual man who has been born again and lives under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:15; Rom. 8:14), while bearing fruit to the glory of God and for the extension of His kingdom: "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

Christians of this kind bear fruit worthy of repentance, consequently their works will endure and not be consumed in the fire. Spiritual Christians are definitely not without problems and setbacks, but they resist the evil tendencies of the old nature and persevere in a life of sanctification.

Paul then refers to another type of Christian who is clearly immature in faith, has not yet learned to "walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16), but is still dominated by the old nature: "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but 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).

Christians referred to in these verses (whether or not they are new converts) though having a foundation of salvation yet, so far, have built futile lives, typified by using non-durable materials like wood, hay and stubble. Having failed to make any spiritual progress, they are in danger of being content to stay indefinitely in a state of spiritual immaturity. This is not what we are saved for, so we are sternly warned against such stagnation and urged to grow up spiritually: "...let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God" (Heb. 6:1; see also Heb. 5:12-14).

We should build our lives on the foundation of repentance and the study of the Bible. However, we are called to be not only hearers, but also doers of the word of God (Jas. 1:22-25). God has called us to be conformed to Christ's image (Rom. 8:29) and only by surrendering to God's will, obeying His word, praying and following Jesus can we grow spiritually and become mature, Christ-like Christians: "And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ" (Eph. 4:11-15).

Works

In the light of the above it has now become possible for us to distinguish three broad categories of works. They emerge from different motivations and sources, and therefore have quite distinctive characteristics. These are the fruits in people's lives that reveal their inner spiritual state. "Ye shall know them by their fruits" (Mt. 7:16).

1. The evil and sinful works of those who are lost

"For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death" (Rom. 7:5). "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph. 5:11).

This group of people includes not only the heathen who have never heard the gospel, but often highly civilised, decent people who are church members. They think they are acceptable to God by observing rituals such as baptism, confirmation, holy communion, and doing good works without repenting of their inherent sinfulness and seeking cleansing by the blood of Christ. They are building their lives on false foundations and, unless they repent, will be condemned at the great white throne judgement – so will not stand before Christ's judgement seat. Then there are the evil impostors described in 2 Timothy 3:1-9, who use religion as a cloak for wicked deeds, much like the Pharisees whom Jesus called hypocrites "like white-washed tombs" (Mt. 23: 27,33 NKJV), and will be severely judged except they repent.

2. The works of fleshly believers

Many Christians who have not surrendered the full control of their lives to the Holy Spirit, try to establish their own righteousness and serve the Lord in their own strength. However, the works of the uncrucified flesh are unacceptable to God as they are opposed to the works of the Spirit: "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal. 5:17).

Unspiritual Christians lead a life marked by ups and downs, in which free reign is given to human failure and weakness. There is sound, biblical advice to those who are perpetually motivated by the uncrucified old nature: "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Gal 5:16). "Reckon yourselves to be dead unto sin" (Rom. 6:11).

To be able to do this, a full surrender is required of us. Every sin and human effort of self-righteousness that still separates us from the Lord, has to be confessed and forsaken. We have to surrender ourselves to the Lord with an undivided heart in earnest prayer, in order to be filled with and used by His Spirit (Lk. 11:13; Eph. 5:18).

3. The good works that flow from a Spirit-filled life and are acceptable to the Lord

We have to emphasise here that there must be no question of pursuing a humanly inspired works-holiness in the sense that we would attempt to present our achievements to God in an effort to earn our salvation. The works we are referring to here must be those which have been worked out in our lives by the Holy Spirit after salvation: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10; see also Jas. 2:14-26).

Only those works which the Lord has done through us, and not those which we have done in our own strength for God, will be able to come up to His standard. Our role is that of willing channels for His use and service. "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Rom. 6:13).

We are repeatedly encouraged to persist in good works of this kind, that we may glorify God through our lives and contribute towards the extension of His kingdom: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58). "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10).

Watch and pray

A life of spirituality based on prayer and watchful service to the Lord is required to be in a perpetual state of readiness for the return of Christ and for His judgement seat. We should always keep in mind that the present world is passing away, and that we are heading for our eternal home: "But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer" (1 Pet. 4:7). "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy and godliness?" (2 Pet. 3:11).

In this regard, the apostle Peter's exhortations are in close harmony with the statements of the Lord Jesus, whose advice for spiritual readiness always remains the same, namely: Watch and pray! (Lk. 21:36).

We are called upon to pray and be alert always, but especially in times of crisis. In the garden of Gethsemane, when the forces of darkness descended upon the Saviour and His small group of disciples, the latter fell asleep as they failed to appreciate the seriousness of the situation. What did the Master say to them? "And He cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mt. 26:40-41).

The same exhortation to vigilance applies with regard to the Second Coming of Christ: "Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch" (Mk. 13:33-37).

There are people who argue that it is not really essential to watch and pray, seeing that it is not possible for a Christian to be lost once he has been saved. However, it is possible that born-again children of God could backslide and lapse into an unspiritual, worldly state in which they will forfeit their reward (2 Tim. 4:10; 2 Jn. v. 8). Others may even suffer shipwreck

weak in their spiritual lives (1 Tim. 1:19).

Satan, the deceiver, is ever on the look-out to lay cunning traps for the active Christian. He often succeeds in his goal of distracting and diverting them from the great commission of world evangelism. For this reason Christ exhorts Christians to be watchful lest anyone should steal their crown and even their white garments (Rev. 3:11; 16:15).

We have to keep on watching, praying and fighting the good fight of faith to remain steadfast as Christians amid the utter depravity of the end times. We must accept that to follow our Lord we must tread a narrow and difficult path, and no one lukewarm, or unwilling to "endure hardness" can be "a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2:3,4).

Many Christians do not stand firm in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, but lapse back into some of their old weaknesses, sins and worldly life-styles. The Galatians, for instance, returned to a legalistic way of life. Paul is clearly concerned about this turning back: "Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh? Have ye suffered so many things in vain? If it be yet in vain" (Gal. 3:3-4).

It is the tragedy of our day that so many believers fail to grow and mature spiritually and seem quite content to lead a life of defeat. As a result they not only fail to fulfil their life's calling as ambassadors for Christ, but also show a bad example to unbelievers who might otherwise have been open to receiving Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour.

There is but one solution to this problem. Only a complete surrender to Christ can transform lukewarm, sluggish and inefficient Christians into people consumed with zeal and a burning desire to serve the Lord. It also has to be fully understood that total surrender is not a one-off decision like the step of receiving Christ, which signifies the start of the Christian pilgrimage, but a commitment which must be renewed and re-affirmed every step of the way. Holiness and self-denial must become a way of living: "And He said to them all, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Lk. 9:23).

Let us joyfully proceed with the journey and, "...seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:1-2).

As we approach the finishing line and draw closer to the goal with every passing day, we must reach new heights of perseverance and commitment: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:11-12).

CROWNING OF THE FAITHFUL

The New Testament often refers to the promise of the Lord Jesus that He will reward His faithful servants after His Second Coming. It is His heartfelt desire that all Christians should exert themselves in this regard, because striving for a crown contributes to the motivation and spiritual idealism which are required to resolutely persevere to the end. It also emphasises the necessity of being always equipped with the whole armour of God for the struggle against Satan and his kingdom (Eph. 6:13-17). This will ensure that we do not risk stunting our spiritual growth, nor stand impoverished and empty-handed before Christ's judgement seat. For this reason the following advice is given to every Christian: "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Rev. 3:11).

The Scriptures abound in promises of reward for the faithful servants of the Lord. It serves as a special encouragement to those who find themselves in difficult circumstances and are suffering severe affliction. It is also a rich source of inspiration which fills the weary traveller with strength and zeal to persevere in the struggle. It creates in the Christian a living expectation of a glorious and incorruptible heavenly kingdom that awaits those who are willing to make significant sacrifices for the sake of Christ and His kingdom (1 Cor. 9:27; Rom. 8:17).

Hebrews 11 confirms the fact that the spiritual vista of the life to come was a strong motivating force in the lives of many Old Testament worthies – the world's greatest heroes of faith. They derived strength from faith in God when obeying His commandments, standing firm against fearful odds, and loved not their own lives even when facing death. Because of this same conviction, Moses chose to be ill-treated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, and considered the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, because he looked forward to the reward (Heb. 11:25-26).

The following promises were made to all the warriors of Christ who have in this way taken up their positions in the front li

ne of the battle against the forces of darkness: “But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not t his doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But t hat which ye have already hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth My works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations” (Rev. 2:24-26). “He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and... I will confess his name before My Father” (Rev. 3:5).

Categories of service

The Bible identifies five broad categories of service against which the granting of rewards are measured. These works ar e collectively called “the righteous acts of the saints” (Rev. 19:8 NKJV) and are compared to gold, silver and precious stones because they will withstand the test of the fire of Christ’s judgement (1 Cor. 3:12-14). As the fruit of the Holy Spi rit they have the stamp of incorruptibility.

It is evident that these works essentially originate from God. Christians are important co-workers with God in this regard, because they are the channels through which the works of their Father take on a visible form on this earth. Christians sh ould be storing up treasures in heaven which will be awarded to them at the Second Coming of Christ, in direct proportio n to the extent to which they were committed to the pursuance of their divine calling.

The crown of life for martyrs

The crown of life is reserved as a reward for those who have laid down their lives for their faith. This also applies to all w ho were severely persecuted and who bore the reproach of Christ through suffering, beatings and ridicule.

According to 1 Peter 4:12-16,19 the martyrs are seen as partakers in the sufferings and afflictions of Christ because the y are in the heat of the battle against the forces of Satan. This kind of sacrifice is precious to God and the oppressed are encouraged to accept their suffering joyfully: “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

This promise is addressed to the church in Smyrna. Smyrna means bitterness and as such it is representative of the bitt er suffering of the persecuted church of Jesus Christ throughout the ages. The ten days of tribulation evidently refers to t he age of fanatical religious persecution which characterised the reign of ten consecutive Roman emperors, from Nero i n 64 AD to Diocletian in 312 AD. The property of Christians was confiscated and robbed, many sought refuge in secret c atacombs, they were thrown into prison under inhuman conditions, many were thrown to lions in the arenas in Rome, wh ile others were burned at the stake.

The emperor Constantine’s acceptance of the Christian faith early in the 4th century did not bring a permanent end to t he persecution. Medieval Europe gradually became the scene of intensified action against Christians who refused to acc ept the authority of the Roman Church. So-called ‘holy wars’ were waged against true Christians who fled to remote p arts of the Alps and sought refuge in caves.

There have always been faithful servants of Jesus who risked their safety and even their own lives to keep the flame of t he faith burning in a hostile world. They realised and accepted the full implications of Christ’s words when He said that He would send His disciples out as lambs in the midst of wolves (Lk. 10:3). In the world they would be hated and persec uted (Jn. 16:33; 17:14), but like the three friends of Daniel in the furnace, they would never be forsaken.

The Protestant reformation in Europe also claimed a frightfully high price in the blood and tears of Christian martyrs – Hebrews 11:32-40 was almost literally rewritten in the histories of these heroes of the faith. They had such an important and far-reaching influence on the survival and advance of the Christian gospel that some historians claim that our prese nt (perhaps soon past?) religious freedoms can to a large extent be attributed to the unwavering testimonies of French H uguenots who gave their lives to defend the faith.

The persecution was to increase in scope and severity and, under the onslaught of communism, claim the lives of more martyrs in the twentieth century than in the previous nineteen centuries put together. When communism started to crum ble, evangelical Christians began to encounter rising hostility from human rights and radical Islamist movements, increas ingly powerful interfaith alliances, and humanistic, multi-racial, multi-faith or Islamic governments. The popular religious t rend in the world today is the New Age philosophy that all religions worship the same God, so must accept each other a s brothers and sisters in a one-world faith. Evangelical Christians are increasingly branded as judgmental, uncompromisi ng isolationists who resist efforts to create a new one-world religion by refusing to link hands in unity with other religions.

It is under gloomy circumstances such as these that the true worth of the Christian faith is powerfully manifested. It is imperishable in the midst of the strongest persecution and to many people remains the highest aspiration in life. Its inherent strength is evidenced by the fact that some of the most cruel oppressors were conquered by the power of divine love while their helpless victims prayed for them.

The gospel of Christ did not reach us by easy means or without cost. It was confirmed by the testimonies of millions of martyrs who laid down their lives for it. They sealed it with their blood and in this way made a major contribution to its survival. Through their heroic actions they confirmed the validity and truth of our faith beyond any doubt. In critical situations they were willing to pay the highest price to defend the Christian faith against the vicious, satanically inspired attacks aimed at its total destruction.

It is clear that costly sacrifices for the sake of the gospel are required even in countries where no religious persecution occurs. Also, the Lord often allows severe afflictions in the lives of His people to test their faith, mostly in the form of sickness, bereavement, financial setbacks or other disappointments, in order to help them feel their need to depend upon Him fully, and to give them the opportunity to encourage others and take a clear Christian stand in life (2 Cor. 1:3-10). Those who do not become bitter or despondent as a result of their trials and afflictions but allow themselves to be purified and edified by these experiences, will also receive a crown from the Lord on that day: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him" (Jas. 1:12).

The imperishable crown for a holy life

The heroic conduct of martyrs who suffered the deepest and most terrible anguish has often been a challenge to lukewarm and backslidden Christians to recommit their lives to serve the Lord with greater devotion and holiness: "Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:1-2).

The image of the Christian as a competitor in a race, with a set goal, striving to win and be crowned as victor at the end of the race, must have occurred to Paul while he was attending the Olympic or Isthmian games in Greece. Hence his remark to the Corinthians: "And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Cor. 9:25-27 NKJV).

It must have struck Paul that athletes not only commit themselves wholeheartedly to arduous fitness programmes, but also abstain from anything which might negatively influence their performance. This is also essentially what sanctification means – to lead a pure, disciplined life in which Christians abstain from all habits and activities that could damage their spiritual lives. Paul once again challenges the Corinthians in this regard in his second letter, indicating that both body and spirit must be cleansed while we strive to please the Lord in every aspect of our lives: "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1).

Sanctification implies more than Christians purifying their lives from outright sin and unrighteousness. It also means abandoning any activity or commitment which may not be sinful of itself, but which hinders us from serving the Lord wholeheartedly. The devotion of time, money and effort to earthly things which are not essential to our or our family's temporal needs and do not directly further the Lord's work, will stunt our spiritual growth or even completely ruin our witness for Him (see Phil. 3:17-19). We need to urgently identify and remove these hindrances.

It is only when Christians deny and crucify their old natures, which are focussed on earthly goals and pursuits, that they make a full surrender and pursue "holiness without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14): "As obedient children, not yourselves to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:14-16).

The Lord wants to purify our whole life, to fill it with His Holy Spirit and set it apart for His service (Rom. 6:13). His desire is that even the most hidden thoughts of our hearts should be acceptable in His sight (Ps. 19:15), so that He can have full control of every facet of our lives and thought processes. Only then can we be transformed into examples of His holiness, and our lives be a positive witness so that we shine like stars in this dark world, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (Lev. 10:3; Phil. 2:14-15).

The wish of the apostle Paul for all true Christians is that they should conform to God's high standard in personal sanctification. He assures them that, even though God's command to holiness is far beyond the reach of the unregenerate to attain to, He will make it a reality in the lives of all Christians who are unconditionally committed to Him: "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. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it" (1 Thes. 5:23-24).

Only along the path of sanctification can Jesus Christ in all His excellence be manifested in the lives of His disciples. This experience of being clothed with the Lord Jesus also renders them suitably adorned to be introduced to Christ at the marriage supper of the Lamb in bright and clean linen, without spot or blemish (Rev. 19:7-8).

The crown of rejoicing for soul winners

World evangelisation is the most important task the Lord Jesus committed to His disciples and to us by extension: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk. 16:15).

This commission applies to all Christians in all ages. Because the survival of the church on earth is so dependent on evangelisation and missionary work, it is expected of each member to be involved in this task in some capacity. It has never been easy to spread the message of Christ in a hostile world, therefore, the messengers need to be equipped with the necessary divine power: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Although other disciples had already moved into Samaria with the gospel message, Paul laid the foundation for the church among the Gentiles. He greatly rejoiced over the first people who repented and were saved on account of his preaching. To the congregations in Philippi and Thessalonica, respectively, he said: "Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved" (Phil. 4:1). "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?" (1 Thes. 2:19).

To everyone who leads lost souls to Jesus, the crown of rejoicing will be given at the judgement seat of Christ. This is a highly esteemed calling in the kingdom of heaven, which is why soul-winners are compared to shining stars – they have brought the light of the world, Jesus Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, to a lost, dark world, so that others can find their way to Calvary and to a new life in Him: "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever" (Dan. 12:3).

The crown of glory for faithful shepherds

The spiritual nurture and edification of the flock is a very important aspect of Christian service which was ordained by Christ Himself and will eventually be rewarded by Him: "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy gain, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Pet. 5:2-4).

The pastoral aspect is sometimes undervalued by evangelists and others who tend to measure the results of preaching only in terms of the number of decisions that were made for Christ. It is true that this first step of salvation is very important, but the Bible also teaches that second-phase work demands even more time and commitment. While people are born again immediately upon receiving the Lord Jesus as Saviour, years of spiritual edification and development are needed before they would be reliable members of the local assembly or teachers with a wider ministry. Spiritual edification is clearly and essentially follow-on from first phase evangelism: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Mt. 28:19-20).

Paul stayed in Corinth for eighteen months to provide new converts there with more advanced training in the Word of God (Acts 18:11). Peter, who received the emphatic order to tend the flock of the Lord (Jn. 21:15-17), devoted much time and care to the spiritual maintenance of converts by regular house visits and temple service (Acts 2:37-47).

Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods (Mt. 24:45-47).

The crown of righteousness for those who love the appearing of Christ

“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only but unto all them also that love His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8).

It might appear strange that the Lord should reserve a distinctive crown as reward for a good work that seems no more than an attitude of mind and heart. Closer scrutiny, however, reveals that not only does the Lord deeply value our love for Him, but especially the fact that we are eagerly looking out for His Second Coming! It is this which gives a special quality to all our work and witness for Him.

The eye should be kept steadfastly on Jesus who has promised to return soon and to reveal His heavenly kingdom in glory. Christians should be keenly aware of this fact to the extent that it continuously gives purpose and direction to their daily life and work. The concept of the Second Coming contains a special motivation to serve the Lord. It adds a dimension of urgency to evangelical and pastoral service. It is also a strong incentive towards sanctification because every Christian in whom is the hope of Christ’s appearing “purifieth himself, even as He is pure” (1 Jn. 3:2-3).

The example of the martyrs clearly illustrates that the Christian’s expectation for the future provides a steady anchor for the soul as well as a conscious connection to the next life. In moments of deepest distress and suffering, comfort and inspiration are derived from the knowledge that the way of the cross does not end at the grave, but leads to certain resurrection, a new heavenly body and eternal life: “For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory... For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our which is from heaven” (2 Cor. 4:16-17; 5:2).

When born-again Christians backslide, their interest in spiritual things begins to fade and both earthly- and worldly- mindedness tends to take over. Their spiritual calling to world evangelisation and the edification of the church is abandoned and there is little to distinguish them from nominal, non-born-again Christians; indeed both tend to follow a socio-political philosophy. In this way many 21st century churches degenerate into secular do-goodism which shows little concern for the eternal salvation of the lost (Rev. 3:17).

The healthy interaction that should exist between our relationship with God and our relationship with other people becomes disrupted and distorted because of our loss of vision, and degenerates into a humanistic involvement in the secular misfortunes of the peoples and nations around us. This results in a search for political, economic and even military solutions, without recognising the spiritual dimension and the underlying moral causes of these problems.

The only solution to the serious and widespread problem of secularisation is found in a restored spiritual perspective. Prof. H. du Plessis says: “Only when the faith of the church is focused far above the horizon of the world, on the coming of the kingdom, on the Second Coming of Christ, only when the believer understands his purpose within the kingdom and is willing to be used in this regard, does the conviction exist that all our labour in this regard is not in vain, and are we safeguarded against a secularised life” (Science of Mission Today, p. 89).

Christ to be praised

Paul could confidently write to the church in Philippi: “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:3-6).

So should it also be with us, because good works are what Christ, as head of the new creation, has prepared for us. He explained this principle to His disciples as follows: “He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5).

In true Christian service, there is no room for boasting or rejoicing in our own achievements. The crowns which will be awarded at the judgement seat of Christ, will eventually be laid down before the throne of the Lamb in acknowledgement and deep gratitude to Him (Rev. 4:9-11).

Still, the promises of reward for our labour serve a positive purpose in motivating us towards dedicated action. The Lord has a glorious plan for world evangelisation which He has entrusted to His church, and He is counting on us to accomplish it. It would have been very easy for God to bring His works to pass in a direct and spectacular way, but He chooses to do it by means of His church, thus perfecting His power in our weakness (2 Cor. 12:9).

It is the desire of the Father that every Christian be involved in the furtherance of His kingdom on earth, hence the many and urgent challenges towards a life of dedication.

THE WAY TO SPIRITUAL FULLNESS

Since sanctification is such a crucial concept in preparing ourselves to appear before the judgement seat of Christ, a closer examination of this doctrine is necessary.

Already in the first five books of the Bible we find the basic guidelines for the process of sanctification, where the people of God are led step by step from the slavery of Egypt into the freedom of the Promised Land. In 1 Corinthians 10: 1-13, Paul clearly explains that the people of Israel's journey to the Promised Land does not only have historical value, because "all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Cor. 10:11 NKJV). We can, therefore, expect to find in the early history of Israel a clear type of the Christian's pilgrimage to the heavenly land.

Egypt – enslaved to sin

The sojourn in Egypt is a typical portrayal of ungodly people who are spiritually dead and in bondage to sin. They are captives of the world and driven to certain ruin and destruction by merciless slave-drivers. They cannot free themselves from the power and domination of the enemy and are therefore driven to cry out to God in their desperate plight: "And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage" (Ex. 2:23).

Salvation – a miracle of God

Because of their groanings, God took pity on the people and sent Moses as a deliverer to free them from the bondage of slavery. All who were liberated to begin the journey to the Promised Land, experienced the miracle of the wonderful salvation of God. They were amazed to behold the mighty deeds of His salvation which allowed them to pass through the Red Sea without even wetting their feet!

"I am the LORD your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that ye should not be their ; and I have broken the bands of your yoke, and made you go upright" (Lev. 26:13).

In New Testament terms, this dramatic exodus from Egypt can be compared to the salvation or new birth of a sinner. The lamb without blemish which was to be sacrificed by the children of Israel on the night before the exodus is a type of Jesus, the Lamb of God who was sacrificed for us and "bare our sins in His own body" at Calvary (1 Pet. 2:24). His sacrifice provides the only ransom for sins: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

This once-for-ever sacrifice by Christ (Heb. 10:12) during Passover, made possible the offer of a new, eternal life to myriads from every nation, tongue and tribe – and the beginning of a spiritual pilgrimage to our eternal home.

The wilderness journey – conflict between the Spirit and the old nature

In the wilderness, the redeemed Israelites experienced a mighty inner conflict between the sentiments of the old life in Egypt and those of a new life as the people of God in a barren wilderness. On the one hand they were committed to a life of faith and sanctification by trusting God and living to His honour and glory all the days of their lives: "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine: And ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel" (Ex. 19:4-6).

On the other hand there was the harking back to Egypt (Ex. 16:3; 17:3), as well as the doubt as to whether God would really supply all their needs in that barren, inhospitable wilderness. Dissatisfaction and rebellion were often evident in the conduct of the Israelites, even idolatry in one instance. They soon started rebelling and murmuring against God, and in this way backslid into sensual craving: "They soon forgot His works; they waited not for His counsel: but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert. And He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul" (Ps. 106:13-15).

In the same way half-hearted Christians who still battle with inner conflicts after their salvation, often cling to a life of sensual pleasure. This can be compared to the process in which a new shoot is grafted into a tree without the old branches

being pruned away. The new and the old life are now competing with each other to extract the maximum amount of sap from the plant. Eventually the old, established shoots deprive the younger branch, causing it to be unfruitful and wither away. In the same way the lust of the flesh and of the eyes, also the pride of life, can cause conflict and decline in the Christian life (1 Jn. 2:15-17; Gal. 5:16-17).

The same was true of Israel in the wilderness. A life of divided loyalties snuffed out the spiritual motivation of the people and stimulated sensual and sinful tendencies to such an extent that they eventually got the upper hand. The result was an unsatisfactory spiritual experience, with little or no progress on the path of sanctification. This is evidenced by the forty years of aimless wanderings before the people were ready to enter into the Promised Land.

In the wilderness there were also opportunities for the strengthening of their faith, but these were short-lived and did not make a marked impression on the commitment of the people. Like the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 3:1), the people suffered from prolonged spiritual immaturity, thus it was to be expected that they would act irresponsibly.

On the whole, the wilderness journey did indeed serve a very important purpose in revealing to the people the latent unbelief in their hearts, and in this way precipitate a crisis intended to lead them to make a full surrender: "All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore unto your fathers. And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments, or no. And He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live. Thy feet, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years. Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee" (Deut. 8:1-5).

The same principle applies in the New Testament where the Lord subjects His children to a process of purification in order that they might enter into His holiness (Heb. 12:3-14). Peter also confirms this truth: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 Pet. 4:12-13).

The River Jordan – a full surrender

This is the point at which the life of self-seeking and sinfulness is finally discarded and the believer commits himself totally to the Lord to be filled with and guided by His Spirit. With brokenness of heart he humbles himself before the Lord and confesses his failed and unfruitful spiritual life. Only then can the Lord take full control and equip this person with power from on high to play a constructive part in extending His kingdom.

Israel's struggles during their wilderness journey came to an end at the Jordan River. The people were commanded to move through and take possession of their inheritance: "Behold, the Lord thy God hath set the land before thee: go up and possess it, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath said unto thee; fear not, neither be discouraged" (Deut. 1:21).

In addition to the promised land of milk and honey, this change would also bring them into intensified conflict with the enemies of God. Israel is assured, however, that the Lord is fighting for them and He will certainly lead them to victory in their battles against the heathen nations: "Hear, O Israel: Thou art to pass over Jordan this day, to go in to possess nations greater and mightier than thyself, cities great and fenced up to heaven... Understand therefore this day that the Lord thy God is He which goeth over before thee; as a consuming fire He shall destroy them, and He shall bring them down before thy face: so shalt thou drive them out, and destroy them quickly, as the Lord hath said unto thee" (Deut. 9:1,3).

The Promised Land – on the way to victory

A spiritual transformation took place. On the other side of the River Jordan the nostalgic yearning for Egypt and the inner conflicts engendered by this longing, were soon overcome and forgotten. The struggle against an enemy from within (the old sinful nature) was replaced by a fierce struggle against an external, evil power. Because the people were no longer their own worst enemies, they could become partakers in the battle to which the Lord calls all believers, namely to be a real Israelite, or Warrior for God.

Although the people were going to enter into a land of milk and honey, they would first have to drive out a mighty foe and take possession of the fortified cities. The apostle Paul challenges Christians to engage in a similar warfare against formidable and wicked spiritual enemies: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on

in the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Therefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Eph. 6:10-13).

This struggle must continue and the enemy driven back so that we can take possession of the spiritual inheritance the Lord has given us. As soldiers of Christ we cannot afford to be passive in the face of the increasing global threat of evil, a morality, atheism and false religious militancy.

A fierce onslaught is being directed against Christians on various fronts. Any who do not make a definite stand against Satan's attacks, will be robbed of their spiritual inheritance. Those who move forward in full assurance of faith and in obedience to the Holy Spirit, however, receive the assurance that they are on the winning side and will be more than conquerors through Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:35-39).

Holy to the Lord

The key word with regard to the victorious life to which we all aspire is sanctification. "For the Lord thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee; therefore shall thy camp be holy: that He see no unclean thing in thee, and turn away from thee" (Deut. 23:14).

This principle is just as valid in the dispensation of grace, hence the fact that the commandment to be holy which was given in Leviticus 11:44 is repeated word for word in 1 Peter 1:15-16. This clearly implies that a believer must be sanctified and purified at every level of his existence. This renewal starts in the heart and mind from where the causes of sin must be removed. Inner conflicts and tensions are caused by sinful desires, wrong motives, worldly friendships, a guilt complex, etc., and call for self-examination, confession, a full surrender to the Lord, and asking Him to show us our secret sins and to cleanse us from them: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23-24).

The process of sanctification must be clearly evident in a person's conversation: "Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile" (Ps. 34:13). This is in accordance with the stern warning issued in James 3:1-12. We need to ask the Lord daily to set a watch before our mouths and keep the door of our lips (Ps. 141:3). Apart from abstaining from malice, guile and idle gossip in our conversation, there is a clear stimulus towards good: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Eph. 4:29).

The process of sanctification can be broken down into two clear phases. The first phase consists of a thorough-going crucifixion of the old nature (Gal. 5:24) which is utterly depraved due to the Fall. An incomplete crucifixion results in a struggle between the flesh and the Spirit. Such people pretend that everything is well, when it is not. Condoning secret sin in oneself will keep the flesh alive. Solomon's warning in this regard is very relevant: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13).

Christians who keep certain sins in their lives hidden and attempt to build a life of holiness on the half-crucified remains of the old life, will find that they are leading a hypocritical and unfruitful spiritual life. A prerequisite for a life of spiritual prosperity is a total purification and abandonment of sin and worldly-mindedness. Often there remains a single obstacle that stands in the way of a Spirit-filled life. Will you confess it to the Lord? Jesus said to a rich but God-fearing man: "Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast... and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow Me" (Lk. 18:22). This man was not prepared to sacrifice his materialism, so went away sorrowful.

The second phase of sanctification is the systematic building up of the new life, after the foundation has been laid in Jesus Christ. For this, growing faith, whole-hearted commitment to Christ and firm self-discipline are required. Faithfulness in Bible-study and prayer are essential, as is an active witness to the outside world and commitment to a Christ-centred fellowship. In the busy and rushed life of our day and age it has become increasingly important to redeem the time because the days are evil. Only in this way is the inner man nourished and enabled to unfold in continuous growth. Without all these building-blocks, spiritual stagnation and backsliding would be inevitable.

The solution to spiritual problems of this nature are not unknown to us. Every Christian knows about the stream of living waters which flows from the Rock that was cleft for us (Christ). Everyone who is willing to kneel down and drink from this stream daily, will not thirst in all eternity. Christians who have discovered the secret of the revival of their souls will never want to leave this Source of cleansing, nourishing, and strength again. Every Christian should be like a tree which is pl

nted by the streams of water which gives its fruit in season; and prosper in everything he does (Ps. 1:3).

Are you ready for this final moment of truth?

After referring to that fixed appointment we must all keep – i.e. to appear before Christ at His judgement seat – it is significant that Paul also refers to “the terror of the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:10-11). It will be a truly awesome experience, indeed the final ‘moment of truth’, for which we would be wise to prepare now! Paul urges us all, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves... this also we wish, even your perfection” (2 Cor. 13:5-9). “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine” (1 Tim. 4:16).

Are we quite sure the doctrines we hold on the Trinity, the deity of Christ, and other fundamental doctrines have not been inherited unreformed and uncritically from Rome but are true to Scripture? Do we spiritualise Scripture, so robbing it of its literal meaning and distorting doctrine, e.g. by misinterpreting end-time prophecies, or throwing doubt on the inspired creation account in Genesis by capitulating to the false claims of the unproven evolution theory?

Do we compromise on biblical truths in our desire to achieve outward unity among believers? Do leaders in the church put personal popularity and career prospects before faithfulness to Christ and Scripture? Do we go beyond the teaching of Scripture in too readily accepting dubious new teachings and bizarre practices? Are we conformed to “this present evil world” (Gal. 1:4) by being too easily influenced by the media, entertainment, trends in music, dress and conduct, or becoming “enemies of the cross of Christ” by earthly-mindedness? (Phil. 3:18,19)? We can be sure such things will come up for review at Christ’s judgement seat.

As we have seen, the latter is not punitive, but for Christ to assess our lives, test our deeds by fire, and reward faithful servants. Surely, we would not wish to be ashamed or stand empty-handed there, but rather to deserve our Lord’s “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Mt. 25:23). Referring to this awesome occasion, Paul adds that he was “manifest unto God” (2 Cor. 5:11) – i.e. he was unaware of anything in his life which God would not approve of, so could truly say, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day” (2 Tim. 4:7,8), and urges us to “imitate” him (1 Cor. 4:16; NKJV). Christ’s coming is clearly imminent, and “judgement must begin at the house of God” (1 Pet. 4:17), when “many... first shall be last” (Mt. 19:30). May we search our hearts in the light of God’s Word to ensure we know of nothing of which we should be ashamed when we stand before the judgement seat of the Lord we love!