

Paradise Lost and Restored: What is the Gospel? (Part 5)

Ricardo Campos, Pastor Grace Chapel, Orange, CA July 27, 2014

I. Introduction

Are there really passages in the Bible that say that you can lose your eternal salvation? If that's not what these passages say, then what on earth does God mean in these passages that seem to question our salvation or threaten us with hell?

II. Some Bible Passages Seem to Say that You Can Lose Your Eternal Salvation...Can You?

In John 1:12 God says that if you believe in His Son, then at that moment you become His child. Eternal salvation is that simple. BUT though it is simple for us, it was VERY costly to God and His Son. Jesus died a brutal death to pay for our sins *that we might become the righteousness of God in Him*, 2 Corinthians 5:21. This is one reason why any Bible passage which mentions sin, cannot question your eternal salvation; your sins have been paid for. Here are other reasons:

1 John 3:4-15, this passage has some strong language that seems to say that if you live in sin or even hate your brother, then you don't know Jesus, are a Devil's child, and you have no eternal life in you. Is this what it says? *Frist*, who is God talking to? John's audience has Jesus Christ as their Advocate, 2:1. Jesus has paid for their sins, 2:2. Additionally, their sins have been forgiven, they have a relationship with God the Father and Jesus, God's Word abides in them, they have overcome Satan, and John flat out states that they are children of God—he and they have the same Father, 2:12-14; 3:1. God does not nor would He threaten His children with hell.

Second, what's the context? Before saying the things in 3:4-15 that may make you doubt your salvation, notice what God says: we are God's children who will look very much like Christ when He returns, 3:1-2. God then tells us that this hope should drive us to become pure as Jesus is pure, 3:3. Thus, this passage is about how God's children should behave in light of the fact that they **are** God's children who will one day look just like His Son. In fact, this is what the whole book is about. Since we are God's children, we need to stay away from sin and instead **abide/live** our lives with God. At every turn, God wants us to **abide/live** our lives with Him and His Son, 1:3-2:29.

Therefore, what God says in 3:4-15 is said in light of those facts. So in 3:6 when God says that whoever abides in Christ does not sin or whoever sins has neither seen nor known Christ, He's talking about the fact that there's no sin in Christ (3:5) and therefore no sin in us when we **abide/live** in Him. But if we sin, then it can be said of us that we have not seen or known Him, i.e., we're not abiding with Him. When He says in 3:8 that anyone who sins is of the devil, He's talking about the same thing: when we sin we're **abiding/living** in Satan's darkness instead of God's light (1:5). This is likewise the case in 3:9, i.e., those born of God do not sin because His seed **abides** in them; they have the ability not to sin precisely because they've been born of God. The same thought is present in 3:10: God's children live righteously and love their brethren but the Devil's children don't. Thus, when a child of God hates his brother, he's **abiding/living** in death, 3:14. Therefore, all these statements that seem to challenge our eternal salvation are actually God urging us to **abide/live** with Him in His light instead of Satan's darkness precisely because we are His children and not Satan's. So instead of God questioning our salvation, He's actually doing the opposite and reminding us that we ARE His children and therefore should live accordingly.

Third, 3:15 appears to be quite damning. It seems to say that anyone who hates their brother is a murderer who lacks eternal life. But does it actually say that? Does this individual lack eternal life altogether OR does he not have it **abiding** in him? It says that anyone who does not love their brother does not have eternal life **abiding** in him, which is the same message God has repeated over and over in the verses prior to 3:15. That is, when you live your life in Jesus Christ—who is Eternal Life (1:1-3) and who has no sin (3:5)—then you will not hate your brother. But if you commit the sin of hating your brother, then Eternal Life is not **abiding** in you nor are you abiding in Him. **Abiding/living**, is a big concept in 1 John (2:6, 10, 14, 17, 19, 24, 27, 28; 3:6, 9, 14, 15, 17, 24; 4:12, 13, 15, 16), and it's the key to understanding these difficult passages.

Hebrews 2:3; 6:4-8; 10:27-29; 12:25-29, these passages seem to threaten Christians with hell: 2:3 warns “how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation,” 6:8 mentions with metaphoric language that the judgment for those in 6:6 who re-crucify the Lord is “to be burned,” in 10:27, those who sin willfully can expect “fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries,” which in 10:28-29 is a punishment worse than death, and 12:25-29 warns that we will not “escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth;...for our God is a consuming fire.” Does God threaten us with hell in these passages?

First, who is God talking to? The author calls them “brethren” several times, 3:1, 12; 10:19; 13:22. Why does he call them “brethren”? Because Jesus Christ calls them brethren, i.e., Jesus made them sons and daughters of God. Thus, Jesus, the author, and the audience have the same Father, i.e., God, 2:10-13. But that's not all, Jesus also sanctified them, released them from Satan's bondage, gives them aid, is their High Priest, died for their sins, and with His blood has perfected them—since it cleansed them of an evil conscience and washed them with pure water—and given them access to the very throne room of God whom they can call upon whenever they need help, 2:11, 14-15, 16, 17-18; 4:14-16; 6:19-20; 10:14, 19-22, 29. Additionally, in 6:9-10 the author is confident they will remain faithful to God who will not forget what they did in His name in helping their brethren. Finally, the author notes how they suffered personally and financially while helping their brethren and him, 10:32-34. These are not people God would threaten with hell.

Second, what's the context? If God is not threatening them with hell in these passages that mention fiery indignation and burning, then why does God use such strong language? It is clear that the author tells his audience that if they do not heed his warning, then they will face a fate worse than death, 10:28-29. Well, what's his warning? The author's main point is encapsulated in 8:1-2: verse one contains the first part and verse two contains the second part of his main point. These two verses also relate to the warning, i.e., verse one contains the first half of the warning and verse two contains the second half. Verse one reveals that Christ has superseded the Levitical sacrificial system, something the author exerts much effort to explain culminating in 10:1-18. He clearly shows that Christ has ended the Levitical system which is why He is now our High Priest “who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,” 8:1. This very important point comes with a very serious warning: “Don't go back to that sacrificial system which Christ ended or else!”

Verse two reveals the second half of all this. Christ did not simply terminate the sacrificial system; **HE REPLACED IT**. This means that another system is in place, one where He is the “Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man,” 8:2. And it is a system where it is not just our High Priest who gets to enter the Holy of Holies. Each one that the true High Priest has sanctified with His blood, 10:19, 29, has access. This is not just a privilege, it is a solemn duty that cannot be abandoned. And this too, the author strains to explain. He informs his audience that Christ became their High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek by His death, 5:7-10. Then He entered the Holy of Holies as our **forerunner**, 6:20, which means that we have a priestly duty to follow Him there.

He repeats this message again in chapter ten and this time it comes with a warning (6:4-6 also contained the warning, but it was not fully developed). Thus, in 10:19-39, the author sounds the alarm for all who have been sanctified by His blood, 10:29, to be bold to enter the heavenly Holy of Holies (12:22-24), an entry that was secured by their High Priest's blood, 10:19. If they refuse this solemn duty and forsake the assembling of themselves together in the Holy of Holies, i.e., if they sin willfully in this way, then they can expect a fate worse than death, 10:25-29. This is what the warning passages are about. Therefore, the warning is not just "Don't go back to that nullified sacrificial system!" It is, "Don't go back to that nullified sacrificial system AND abandon your priestly duty in the heavenly Holy of Holies or else!!"

In other words, the audience faced going back to a sacrificial system that Christ had replaced, 10:1-18, which would be tantamount to re-crucifying the Lord, 6:6. But this is only half of the story. The author also wanted them to realize that Christ's death had acquired for them a priestly position and access that no priest (not even the high priest) ever had. They could now follow Christ into the **heavenly** Holy of Holies! 6:20; 10:19; 12:22-24, where they had 24-hour access to their Lord for petition, 4:16, and worship, 13:15. And this was not just a privilege but a duty they were not to forsake, 10:25. This was the complete danger facing them.

Third, so if this audience is not facing hell, then what's the fate worse than death that the author warns them about? What can be worse than death? Certainly, eternal damnation would be worse, but since these are children of God, who have Jesus as their brother and have been cleansed by His blood, that punishment is out of the question. What else can it be? The book of Hebrews was written before AD 70. Why is this significant and how do we know? We know because the Jerusalem Temple and its sacrificial system was destroyed in AD 70. But the book of Hebrews is all about a sacrificial system that is still functional and to which the audience was thinking of going back to make animal sacrifices through an earthly high priest. The destruction of this system was yet future; this is what the author was warning them about. And in AD 70 God ended this sacrificial system by force. He allowed the Romans to surround Jerusalem; no one came in and no one came out. The people were trapped without supplies and many suffered a fate worse than the quick death offered under the Mosaic Law, 10:28. Instead, they died a slow and agonizing death through starvation. Therefore, the warnings, which mention salvation (2:3), death (3:17), being burned (6:8), fiery judgment that devours God's adversaries (10:27), and God as a consuming fire (12:29), are not talking about eternal damnation but a fate worse than death, the terrifying death (and in many cases a slow death via starvation) that many Jews suffered when the Romans attacked Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple in AD 70. This is the threat behind the warning passages and the "Day" that 10:25 anticipates.

However, the author was confident about his audience's response to his letter. He was "confident of better things concerning" them, 6:9, because he knew that he and they were "not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul," 10:39. Therefore, he warned them so that they would not "fall into the hands of the living God," 10:31. He knew his audience would remain faithful to God, which is likely why he hoped to see them again, 13:23.

Philippians 2:12, this passage seems to say that we must work out our own eternal salvation and that we must do this "with fear and trembling." Is God warning us to produce our own salvation through good works (or that good works are proof that we're eternally saved) or else we will face hell? Obviously, if this is what God is saying, then He would be contradicting Himself in a big way because in Ephesians 2:8-9 God tells us that our eternal salvation is a gift from Him which has nothing to do with our good works, and which is received by faith in His Son. Since God cannot contradict Himself, then what does God mean in Philippians 2:12?

First, who is God talking to? Paul calls them saints who are in Christ (1:1), wishes them grace and peace from God and Christ (1:2), happily thanks God and prays for them always because they have partnered with him (for over 10 years) in not only spreading the Gospel but defending it and supporting him financially even while Paul is in prison (1:5-7 cf. 4:14-18), and Paul is confident that God who began a good work in them will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ (1:6). As with the audience of Hebrews, God would not threaten these individuals with hell. They are His children who have been very faithful to Him for over ten years.

Second, what's the context? In 1:3-11 Paul tells the Philippians that he always thanks God for them because they helped him financially during his imprisonment (cf. 4:14-16), but also because they partnered with him in not only spreading the Gospel but defending it. And he ends with a prayer that the Philippians will continue in this faithful walk, that they "may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ." Why would Paul end his prayer this way, is there a danger that the Philippians would fall away from God? Paul then tells them about what's happened with his trials in prison: it's been awesome! Because of his faithfulness to proclaim the Gospel, his imprisonment has actually advanced the Gospel tremendously so much so that it's reached Caesar's Imperial guard and beyond, 1:12-18. Paul then speaks of his confidence that his imprisonment will actually turn out for his deliverance because he's sure that he will not act shamefully but boldly for Christ whether or not he's killed for it. In fact, he's confident that Christ will release him from prison because it will be more beneficial for the Philippians for Paul to stay alive, 1:19-26. Why would Paul even mention shame as it relates to his conduct concerning Christ or the Gospel?

Paul then challenges them to remain faithful to the Gospel even if they are persecuted for it because God granted them not only to believe in Christ but to suffer for His sake. And Paul identifies himself with them because he and they are undergoing the same struggle: remaining faithful to the Gospel of God while undergoing persecution, 1:27-30—this is why Paul mentioned shame and why he ended his prayer in chapter one the way he did. Paul then gives the supreme example of remaining faithful to God during persecution: Jesus Christ. The first thing you must do to remain faithful is to put yourself last, i.e., think of others not yourself, 2:1-4. The second thing is to follow the ultimate example of self-sacrifice: Jesus, though being God almighty, humbled Himself, became a lowly man, and suffered a brutal death for others in the service of God, 2:5-8. Because of this God exalted Him above everything; Jesus is now Lord of ALL, 2:9-11.

Having said all this, THEN Paul says, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." What is the context? What is Paul pointing back to when he says, "Therefore," i.e., "In light of this, ...work out your own salvation"? What salvation did Paul work out for himself, what was his concern not only for himself, but for the Philippians, and what salvation did Jesus work out for Himself, all of which Paul then uses to say, "Now, you work out your own salvation"?

Third, what salvation is God talking about? Not once has hell been mentioned in this context nor a worry that the Philippians would end up there. But what was Paul's worry? That persecution would cause him or the Philippians to draw back from Christ and His Gospel. This is the salvation that Paul wanted for himself and them so that when they stood before Christ they would not be ashamed, 1:6. The Greek word for salvation is used three times in Philippians, 1:19, 28; 2:12. In 1:19 it's translated "deliverance." It could have been rendered this way in 2:12. Paul was telling the Philippians to *produce* (which is what the Greek word for *work out* means) their own deliverance. What deliverance? From the failure of not remaining faithful to the Gospel in the face of persecution and thus be ashamed before Christ at His Second Coming.

A Caution, it's clear that our eternal salvation in Christ is 100% secure. But the worry some people have—of telling someone that all you have to do is believe in Jesus Christ and you'll go to heaven—is that the person will then go out and live a life of sin and not care at all about serving God. I can understand this concern, but is this what God says to us? Is He OK with us believing in His Son and then going out and living a life of sin as if there were no consequences?

First, it is crucial to understand that your eternal salvation is secure, that it can never be taken away from you because of any sins. Why is it important to understand that our salvation is secure? Because children who live in fear that their parents will disown them end up with terrible identity problems which haunt them for the rest of their lives. God is not a Father who disowns His children. He loves you and wants an incredible life for you, John 10:10, 25-30.

Second, the fact that you can't lose your salvation is not supposed to be an incentive for you to go on a perpetual Spring Break where you get drunk every night and have sex with whoever you want. Yes, you can sin and you'll still go to heaven, but you will suffer in this life and in the life to come: you won't reign with Christ in the future, 2 Timothy 2:12, and in this life you will be miserable. Our choice in this life is death or life and peace, Romans 8:6.

How much sense does it make for your kids to say to you, "Aha! You can't kick me out of the family! Woo!! Hoo!! I'm gonna get drunk every night and have sex with everyone I see! Woo!! Hoo!!" Can your child do that? Yes. How well will their life go if they do? Miserable!! Thus, it makes no sense that you would say to your Heavenly Father, "Woo! Hoo! I'm going to heaven no matter what! I'm gonna live it up. I'll see you when I die. Later!!".....God is not like your earthly father. He sees everything you do and He does spank us, Hebrews 12:6.

III. Conclusion

Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward." Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake." Jesus answered him, "Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times. "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."