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S3. So Complete a Salvation Series

S3.E4. The Soul of Man (1) – Being Transformed

In brief summary of Jesus' instructions to His disciples in Mt. 16.24-27, He makes a connection between the "soul of man" and: that of a cross, of losing or saving his soul life, of the soul's relationship to the second coming of Christ, and finally of rewards according to one's works. All of this is unique to the salvation of the soul, which is just a one-third part of man; the salvation of the whole man involves the redemption of his spirit and body as well. At first glance the passage seems to contradict the idea of being saved by grace which is the foundation of the Christian faith, Eph. 2.8-9 "*gFor by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, gnot of works, lest anyone should boast.*" And so, we must dig a little deeper to understand just what the soul is and the nature of its redemption.

[Episodes in this series, *So Complete a Salvation*, should be followed in sequence as the Episodes are built upon one another.]

Mt. 16.24-27 “24Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 25For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. 26For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 27For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.”

In brief summary, this passage of Scripture makes a connection between the “soul of man” and: that of a cross, of losing or saving his soul life, of the soul’s relationship to the second coming of Christ, and finally of rewards according to one’s works. All of this is unique to the salvation of the soul, which is just a one-third part of man; the salvation of the whole man involves the redemption of his spirit and body as well. At first glance the passage seems to contradict the idea of being saved by grace which is the foundation of the Christian faith, Eph. 2.8-9 “*8For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9not of works, lest anyone should boast.*” And so, we must dig a little deeper to understand just what the soul is and the nature of its redemption.

The subject of *salvation* has been the focus of this series and departing from a simplistic idea of one just believing in Jesus as their Savior and going to heaven when they die. The *salvation* that is spoken of here requires a greater depth of understanding as it is viewed as 1) a transformation of the whole man, spirit, soul, and body; and 2) that it is a progressive work of God touching first the spirit of man as a matter of a past work, then 3) of the present day work involving the “salvation of his soul,” and finally, 4) in the Day of our Lord at His second coming, the salvation of the body in the final resurrection. Thus, to the believer, for salvation to be complete it will, and indeed does, involve a past deliverance from death unto life in the spirit, a present-day work of the Holy Spirit in transforming the soul, and a future of mighty works of God in which the body will be changed into the likeness of Christ’s own resurrected body. **Each component of salvation brings the believer closer into the likeness of Christ.**

The Soul of Man

The soul of man really defines who we are as individuals. It houses traits like our intelligence, memory, will, conscience, emotions, and other intangible and immaterial aspects of our being. As in the natural where one grows from being a baby and matures to the functioning as an adult, the believer must also grow and mature in the nature of who he or she is and to begin functioning as a mature spiritual believer; this maturing process defines the progressive salvation of the soul. Perhaps two foundational scriptures will help our understanding. The first is Phil. 2.12-13,

“¹²Therefore, 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; ¹³for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”

Note first that this salvation requires some kind of a progressive transformation, a change that works in the core of our being— *work out your own salvation*— that which defines who and what we are. To boldly say, “I am a Christian,” meaning I am of Christ to the extent that the Spirit of Christ abides in me, should not the totality of your lifestyle reflect this union between you and Christ? Shouldn’t there be a change in character in Christ likeness? Of course, there should be; not in word only as to what we say but in character and practice as well. Also to note is the most peaceful anticipation of this transforming process, and that is, that this “work” is not ours to bear but remains in the *grace* of God; the call for obedience is not to an outward law to obey commandments and ordinances that regulate our lives, but it is a call firstly to faith, then rest and peace, all “in Christ our Lord.” The scripture clearly states, “¹³for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” It is His life being emitted in us though our union in Christ.

The past salvation of the spirit is a completed process by which we become born again as children of God, in which by the grace of God we become, 2 Cor. 5.17-18 “*a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. ¹⁸Now all things are of God,...*” This thought brings a measure of security to salvation. But now there is a looking forward, in faith, to an on-going relationship and fellowship with God as He continues His work in us, with a focus on the soul. When God created Adam and Eve, He didn’t just equip them with traits like a robot in which they would always automatically do only good things. Instead, He formed them with a will, an intellect, a conscience, etc. to make decisions learned out of a relationship with God Himself. Jesus said, Jn. 15.1 *“¹I am the true vine, and My Father is the keeper of the vineyard.”* God is the Keeper of the vineyard.

The emphasis here is that once the fruit of the vineyard is formed on the vine, the essence of life flows from the vine into the fruit; and it is the keeper of the vineyard to prune and care for the developing fruit. In this analogy we believers are the fruit, who are totally dependent on the essence of life from the vine, who is Christ; we can do nothing on our own; and the Father oversees and keeps the totality of the whole of the vineyard nurturing and pruning it in order to bring forth well developed, mature fruit pleasing to the Father. The Father’s name is on that vineyard, and it is reflective of His care.

The second foundational scripture brings all of our attention of this transforming process to a progressive change leading to maturity, 2 Cor. 3.17-18

“¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. ¹⁸But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

In the Old Testament the term “the LORD” commonly applied to the Father, but here in the New Testament Lord applies to the Son—He *is the spirit* that gives life and liberty which is

contrasted to the bondage of the Law under the Old Testament. This means freedom from fears of condemnation, freedom from guilt and the burden of sin, and freedom from the severe consequences of disobedience in failing to keep all the Law.

Most anytime the term “*glory*” is used in Scripture, as used here “*from glory to glory*,” it refers to heavenly or Divine qualities; thus by the expression, “*glory of the Lord*” we are to have a glimpse of His divine attributes such as His wisdom, power, goodness, His truth, holiness, mercy and grace, and especially His Divine (*agape*) love; these are all facets of His great glory. When we draw close to God in Christ our Lord, we become exposed to this glory that radiates from Him, but not to a consuming sense, but to a degree of personally coming under the influence of these qualities, even them being progressively imparted and worked into our lives. In analogy, we can stand in the full sun all day and only absorb on to the surface of our bodies its powerful rays of energy. However, if we eat the fruit of the vine, the energy in that fruit that was converted from the sun into a less harmful and more beneficial form of energy, food, enters into us sustaining us in life. Perhaps now we can better understand and appreciate the intent of Jesus’s words in Jn. 6.53-58,

“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. 54Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55For My flesh is [k]food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. 56He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. 57As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. 58This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.”

To any believer understanding the spiritual principle set forth in these words, of the glory of God in Christ, and that we may feed upon those divine qualities in Him, the ritual of communion (breaking of bread) will never be the same again. At the core of the practice is faith, believing the bread to be the spiritual substance of Christ Himself and the wine to be the eternal working of His blood to cleanse and make holy—it is our true food from heaven.

Returning to our passage in 2 Cor. 3.18, it reads that we, “*are being **transformed** into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*” Literally, it may read that we, “*are being **transfigured** into the same image.*” The Greek verb, “*metamorphothe*” and the English equivalent “*metamorphosis*” is the same word used of the transformation, or transfiguration of Christ witnessed by Peter, James, and John. (Mt. 17.2) It is as a tadpole transforms into an altogether different life-form of a frog, or an earth-bound caterpillar transfigures into a beautiful flying butterfly, the Christian “is being transformed” into the likeness of Christ. We must hold this truth close to our hearts with the anticipation of faith.

This likeness of Christ is termed the “new man,” which is an altogether new life-form, actually a new species of man living as co-habitants upon this earth. This is a progressive process being carried out every day the Lord gives to us on the earth. The image of the old man, formed after the likeness of Adam becomes less and less distinct as the image of the new man, being formed in the likeness of Christ, takes its place.

A Matter of Wills

The state of the soul of this new man will be evaluated and judged by our Lord, and rewards or loss thereof will be awarded. This is discussed in the following, as we return now to read again the opening passage of Mt. 16.24-27,

“24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. 26 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.”

The first and foremost subject of this passage to note is that it is very “personal;” Jesus here is speaking directly to the individual—He is saying, “*if anyone,*” “*his cross,*” “*his life,*” and of “*his own soul.*” Jesus is not speaking of some generalized vague idea but is speaking directly to you and me personally. How often we look to the Lord in prayer for a personal word of encouragement and seldom hear that still, silent voice speaking into our hearts; but here it is, if you would receive it, the word of the Lord specifically to each of us as if we were standing alongside His disciples when He spoke these words.

Our common thought of “self-denial” is to abstain ourselves of some pleasure or something of profit to us, but this thought falls far short of the Greek meaning of this phrase to “deny himself.” The general rule to be observed here involves “the will,” which is the God-given ability to decide what to say or what to do, and where to go. Involved here are two distinct wills, the will of God and the will of man. They often come in conflict with one another. In a most basic example, God expresses His will as documented in giving the Ten Commandments, yet how often we choose our wills over His and break a commandment. There are no harmless or trivial lies or meaningless impure thoughts; Jam. 2.10 reads, “*For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.*” Therefore, all mankind is found guilty, failing to keep the Law. Guilt abides in Godly judgment and in our personal consciences.

The will of man is His ability to make decisions on his own, independent from the will of God. We have the power of self-determination in the sense that we “can” select our own thoughts, words, or deeds—to choose whatever we prefer or desire. Just to interject an important thought of these two wills, we see that in Jn. 1.12-13 there is the exercise of God’s will in our being born again of the will of God, as opposed to, or in addition to being born of the will of our natural parents. Two wills, two births, one heavenly one earthly.

Thus, we are to deny exercising our wills over the will of God. It is to deny our natural desires, impulses, or motives so far as when they come in conflict with the will of God as those manifested in the claims and commandments of Christ. This is the cost of true discipleship, “*not My will, but Yours, be done.*” (Lk. 22.42) This is the *cross* of which Jesus is addressing, not as in His case a physical cross but nevertheless a bloodless and painless

spiritual death to the self in obedience to the will of God. How often do we think a sacrifice or offering is our highest tribute to God, but it is not. It is written of Jesus Christ in Heb. 10.5-10 that God rejected the legal sacrifices under the Old Covenant for the voluntary offer of Jesus to give up His own will in favor of God's will, and thereby making the sacrifice of self will pleasing to God.

The Soul and Life

The focus of this passage of scripture is very personal, and its requirement is even more so because it involves your *life*, your very *soul*. It is important to note something that is sometimes confusing to the reader, and that is the same Greek word "*psuche*" is translated either as "soul" or "life." And so, the interpreters of this scripture passage felt led to interpret it as "life" in one instance and as "soul" in another. The fact is that the word is used in two senses: the first is the present soul-life in which we live in these bodies; and there is a higher life to enter into, a spiritual everlasting life in Christ.

A Personal Word. For me, personally, that everlasting spiritual life began its work in me when, at regeneration or the new birth, the Spirit of Christ entered into my heart. A spark of life entered in. From thence, every act of spiritual obedience to the will of God, whether it be repentance for shameful acts, of denying my ego and self-centeredness, or undertaking a service to the Lord which most often was quite stressful taking me far out of my comfort zone, or the downright repentance of sin, each act brought a bit of new life into my being; my soul was being transformed, if ever so little. I could begin to sense a higher, more peaceful life and freedom in Christ. This distinction to others may not be as noticeable but to me is as obvious as between climbing a mountain and standing atop the mountain in victory and enjoying the view from there from a completely new perspective. Here I stand many years later knowing ever so much I am not now the same man that began that trek up the mountain.

Whichever term is used, life or soul, "*psuche*" speaks of our inner being, that seat of who we are, being able to think, have emotions, exercise our will and having a conscience. If we choose to preserve this by putting our wills above God's will, we will lose out in both this life and the next. In this life it is truly entering into Jesus's beckoning to us, Mt. 11.28-29,

*"**28**Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. **29**Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find **rest for your souls.**"*

To "*take Jesus' yoke upon us*" is to, by faith, reckon our lives not to be independent and the center of all things, but to actually being in *union* with Christ. It means to labor as one to fulfill the purpose of another. In the Old Covenant the Jews were yoked with the Law in their service to God. It was binding, ritualistic, and heavy to bear. Now, Jesus is saying here is to come into union with Him in all that we do, to share His yoke in fulfilling the purposes of God.

In all spiritual reality, this union means: 1) we have died together with Him at the cross, and 2) have been co-buried together with Him from the elements of the world, and 3) have been co-risen together with Him in newness of life, and 4) have already been ascended together with Him into the heavenly realm and 5) are now co-seated together with Him in heavenly places.

The constant use of the verb phrase “have been” and the clause “together with” is intentionally repeated over and over because that is exactly how it is presented in scripture, of one being fully jointly or mutually identified with Christ. (For example, see Eph. 2.5-6 and Rm. 6.3-11) *Identification* is a spiritual principle; Jesus identified together with us at the cross by taking on Himself the consequences and penalty of our sins by physically shedding His blood and dying on the cross. We may now access the power of God to work in us as we now identify with Him in His death, resurrection and ascension. This is sharing His yoke; our complete identification with Christ, a principle that must be acknowledged by faith. The scripture continues to quote Jesus,

“and you will find rest for your souls.” True rest comes from ceasing in attempting to accomplish something in our own efforts; of attempting to do good things and avoid evil things; of thinking that somehow God will weigh our good and the bad and will find mercy and give us eternal favor. This is religious thinking and has no place in our New Covenant in Christ. Fullness of salvation comes only by faith resting in what Christ has already accomplished on our behalf. If acting in the flesh, we are always looking to the future of what to do or say. But in acting in the Spirit, which is by faith, we are looking to the past as to what has already been accomplished in Christ, and finding our rest in that. The old nature struggles for a sense of new life, and for a heaven to come, yet it is written of something more glorious for those yoked with Christ,

Eph. 2.4-6 “⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

In this instance, faith looks into the past to our union with Christ and makes real in the present our new life and residency in heaven. One may choose to believe this for spiritual gain or not to believe it for the practice of religious rituals. Whatever, it is truth. As is also,

Rm. 6.3-4, “³Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ⁴Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

The encouragement here is to boldly act in faith, believing you have been “*baptized into Christ,*” meaning you have come into that spiritual union with Christ, under the same yoke, and not just have died to the old life which was at one with the world; but you are now risen to a new life in Christ. Truly, “*without faith it is impossible to please God.*” (Heb. 11.6) So, do

you see that living independently, even devoutly and religiously, apart from the yoke of Christ is choosing a life of good or evil according to written commandments and of things morally conceived in the natural mind as being good or evil. This is opposed to living a life free from the bondage of the Law, and the will of the flesh, and coming into oneness of union with Christ, having the liberty to live in freedom, expressing the new life of the indwelling Christ.

S3.E4. Questions for Discussion.

1. What is meant by the “soul” of man? And how is it distinct from the spirit of man?
2. Explain , 2 Cor. 5.17-18 *“a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. ¹⁸Now all things are of God,...”*, and how it personally affects your own life.n us?
3. What is the true spiritual meaning of “communion?” And what did Jesus actually mean when He said that unless we eat His flesh and drink His blood we have no life in us? (Jn. 6.53ff)
4. How would you explain the word ”transformation, also translated “transfiguration?” Why is it such an important spiritual concept? Explain 2 Cor. 3.18.
5. How does the “will” of man enter into the salvation of the soul?
6. Biblically, the two word “soul” and “life” are actually the same word in the Greek (*psuche*.) What is this significance in interpreting Mt. 16.24-27.