

The Investigative Judgement

Am I Saved?

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Introduction

The question that perplexes many Christians is how can I be sure I am saved? The topic of the investigative judgement, a heavenly tribunal that investigates the cases of professed believers sheds some light on this question. There can be no greater event in history, yet very few are interested in the results of this tribunal which affects the destiny of everyone who has ever lived on earth. A battle rages over the souls of men, a battle which also includes the vindication of God's character and law. The investigative judgement is one of the most exciting doctrines in the Bible, because it reveals Christ as the all powerful Mediator. Satan is doing all he can to keep people busy with the things of this life so they won't have time to discover this important truth and focus on their Mediator in heaven in order to make the necessary

preparation to enter God's kingdom. Is your name in the book of life? Are you an overcomer or a loser? These are vital questions, and perhaps the most important question is, what steps do I need to take in order to become an overcomer. This book will deal with the implications of the investigative judgement on a practical level in terms of what one needs to do to be saved. I don't know if this book will answer all your questions but hopefully by God's grace it will help.

1. Will the Saints be Investigated

For many believers the concept of a heavenly tribunal to investigate the lives of professed Christians seems to contradict their understanding of the gospel. The investigative judgement is seen by some as an anathema to assurance of salvation in Christ. Why investigate Christians when they already believe in Christ? This question of whether the investigative judgement is Biblical needs to be addressed first. It is not the purpose of this book to go through all the arguments to prove the reality of the Investigative Judgement because I have covered that in my first book, “Exploring the Heavenly Sanctuary”. The purpose of this book is to consider the practical implications of this doctrine; however, some basic explanation and Biblical proof is expedient and useful.

A good place to start is the book of Daniel chapter 7, where in verses 9-10 we find a description of the heavenly tribunal that sits before the destruction of the wicked. The judgement is set, the books are opened, there are tens of thousands of angels, and the Ancient of Days presides. The Son of Man comes to the Ancient of Days prior to receiving his kingdom.

At this point you might conclude that this is a judgement of the wicked as they are destroyed following the judgement. However, in verse 22, judgement is passed in favour of the saints and the time comes for them to possess the kingdom. So clearly the lives of the saints were considered before they inherited paradise. This makes sense because Jesus cannot return to earth and take the saints to heaven before they have been judged worthy to enter God's

kingdom. It would be very odd if someone was taken to paradise and then at a later date told there had been a mistake and they had to leave! Further, the wicked cannot be destroyed before the righteous have been judged. There has to be a pre-advent judgement to decide who will and will not be saved which is then executed at the return of Christ.

The visions of Daniel chapters 2, 7 and 8 parallel each other and we find that the judgement scene in chapter 7 parallels the cleansing of the sanctuary in chapter 8 [please see my book, "Exploring the Heavenly Sanctuary"]. The cleansing of the sanctuary was a time in ancient Israel when the sins of the believers were finally blotted out. If someone on that day did not humble himself, he would be cut off from the people (See Leviticus 23:29). This shows that the Day of Atonement is a type of the judgement of believers.

The sins dealt with on that day were the sins of believers; this day symbolised the final blotting out of those sins. Following the cleansing of the sanctuary the scapegoat was destroyed, symbolising the destruction of Satan and the cleansing of the universe from sin. We see the principle at work that before the wicked can be destroyed the saints have to be judged first. The Apostle Peter agrees with this when he said that judgement must begin at the house of God (1 Peter 4:17). So far from being exempt from investigation, those who profess to be Christians are to be investigated. Paul also taught that believers must come before the judgement seat of Christ (Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

The fact that one professes to be a Christian does not give him a sort of spiritual get out of jail free card. Throughout history there have been false Christians who

have not lived up to their profession. Some church leaders massacred and tortured other believers; and other supposedly respectable church goers secretly lived lives of sin. There were the Nazis who claimed to be Christian but tried to exterminate a whole race of people. In order for justice to be done, these so called Christians need to be investigated and judged. One preacher described how he had what he thought was a perfect garden until he put some weed and feed mixture on it. Then most of it died; what he thought was good pasture was in fact mostly weeds!

It would not be just for every one who professes to be a Christian to go to heaven, when their lives testify that they never really knew Jesus. If every person who claimed to be a Christian went to heaven then we might have to admit murderers, thieves and other evildoers. The Apostle Paul

clearly states that evildoers such as idolaters and thieves won't inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Of course, if a person is genuinely repentant, such as the thief on the cross, their sins however big can be forgiven and they can be saved (Luke 23:39-43). The important point is that when a sinner repents of his sins and turns to Jesus for salvation, then their sins are forgiven and their transformed life testifies to a genuine change from death to life and from evil to good.

The 2300 day prophecy of Daniel 8:13-14 points to the time when the cleansing of the sanctuary began. This refers to the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary where Jesus ministers as our High Priest (Hebrews 8:1-4; 7:25), and the cleansing refers to the final blotting out of the record of sins of professed believers who are found to be genuine. This process is known as the Investigative Judgement.

From Daniel 9 we discover that the start date of the 2300 day prophecy is 457 BC when a decree was made to rebuild Jerusalem, then using the year/day principle (Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6) this leads to 1844 AD. At that time the heavenly tribunal started and when its work is finished, Jesus will return to this earth with his rewards.

What is clear is that a superficial Christianity is not enough for a person to be saved. That should not come as a surprise because Jesus taught that unless a person is born again they will not enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5). He also said that the way to life is narrow and few find it (Matthew 7:13-14). Before people reject the concept of an Investigative Judgement they need to consider the basic biblical principles of the gospel. Did Jesus teach that anyone who says, Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom? Clearly that

was not his teaching (Matthew 7:22-23). In the Sermon on the Mount he likened those who do not put his teaching into practice as someone building a house on the sand (Matthew 7:24-27). He spoke of those who break the least of these commandments as being the least in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:19). In even stronger language he spoke of those who do not bear good fruit being cast into the fire (Matthew 7:19). These are clear warnings that something radical is required, a new birth, in order to be saved. It is not a convenient modification of the old life, but a complete new life in Christ, with the heart regenerated by divine grace, a life lived in obedience to God's commandments (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:24; 1 John 2:3-4) and filled with the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-24).

This Investigative Judgement is referred to in the book of Revelation; just prior to the second coming of Jesus a solemn message goes forth that, “the hour of his judgment is come” (Revelation 14:6-7). A warning is being given to the people of planet earth that they need to get ready for the return of Jesus. The books have been opened in heaven, names are being considered, and when this process is finished Christ will return to earth with his rewards. The message also warns us to fear God and to worship our Creator. This is especially relevant in an age when many have embraced the concept of evolution which is contrary to the Scriptural record in Genesis. The call to remember our Creator also points to the Sabbath commandment which has been neglected. The man made Sunday Sabbath has been substituted in its place without Scriptural authority. We need to worship God correctly in the way He commanded us to

worship Him. Therefore a work of Sabbath reform needs to take place before Jesus returns.

It is interesting that the message, calling us to remember our Creator (Revelation 14:7) comes at a time in earth's history when many people no longer believe in the Creation account. Darwin's theory of evolution has confused and turned many people away from a belief in the reliability of the Bible, but the warning message of Revelation 14 calls us back to realise that God is our Creator. One of the things that convinced me about the biblical Creation account is the reliability of Biblical prophecy. Only God knows the future 100% and can accurately tell us about future events before they happen.

The other question that people often ask relative to the Investigative Judgement is why does there need to be a tribunal; God knows the human heart, He does not need books or a tribunal. That is a valid observation, but we need to remember that Satan is the accuser of the brethren and a liar (Revelation 12:10; John 8:44); he accused God of unfairness before the universe (see Patriarch and Prophets, Ellen White, chapter 1). So another purpose of this tribunal is open justice; all the angels and later the saved will be able to look at the books and see for themselves that God was both merciful and just in His decisions. God's character and His law will be vindicated before the universe from Satan's accusations.

If you get to heaven and discover that a friend or loved one is not there, you will be able to look at the books

and find out the reason. God will not hide any of the facts from us. In no other way could the universe be totally convinced of the justice of God and serve Him in love rather than fear. God does not require a forced obedience; He wants us to serve Him because we want to do so out of an appreciation of His loving and just character. This is why open justice is so important to God; once and for all the controversy between Christ and Satan will be settled. In the ages of eternity no one will need to question God's dealings with the lost.

If you're not yet convinced about the Investigative Judgement, consider the parable of the wedding garment (Matthew 22:2-14). Many people were invited to the wedding feast, but one person was found to be without a wedding

garment and was rejected. He professed to be a true servant of the King, but on investigation was found to be unworthy.

There are many other books which have been written that go into greater detail into the Scriptural proofs of the Investigative Judgement; I would encourage you to search the Scriptures and find the Biblical proof for this doctrine (John 5:39; Acts 17:11). Once you are convinced about the truth of this judgement, it is important to consider the practical implications, so in the next chapter I will consider the question, does it matter? Unless we understand how this doctrine affects our daily life it will not really benefit us.

2. Does it Matter

It's surprising how little interest people have in the decisions of the heavenly tribunal. People are absorbed in the cares of this life, in business, work, food, amusements, in the decision of earthly courts and goings on. They get up, go to work, come home, read the newspaper, watch the television, and life goes on with its usual round of activities. But little interest is given to the greatest event in human history. Everyday names are coming up for consideration for eternal life or damnation and no one on earth seems to really care, at least very few.

In heaven things are different; guardian angels anxiously wait to hear the outcome of this name or that. And when a verdict of pardon is reached, there is a

celebration in heaven over another soul that has been saved for eternity.

Satan is very clever in keeping us absorbed in the things of this life; in anything except our eternal destiny, knowing that if he can hold us in this unconcerned state long enough, our probation will pass and we will be eternally lost. Even some professed Christians will find that although they thought they were saved, their lives testify that they never truly loved Jesus, they never overcame their besetting sins, they never made any real sacrifice for Jesus, they did not deny self, take up their cross and follow Jesus (Matthew 16:24).

I feel fortunate that I've never had to be summoned to court or been found guilty of a crime. I know someone

who did have to go to court and could have faced a prison sentence if found guilty. It was one of the most stressful times of their life, but in the end the judge ruled that they were not guilty. Whether we like it or not we all have a case to answer in the heavenly tribunal, a decision will be made from which there will be no appeal, and then a sentence will be executed either for eternal life or the second death. The book of Malachi speaks of the day that will burn like an oven when the wicked will be burned up root and branch (Malachi 4:1).

Therefore the Investigative Judgement is very important; it is the most important thing going on in the universe that we should know about. The good news is that if we are still alive there is still hope, in the heavenly tribunal there is a High Priest who can represent us and help us

become overcomers and win the race of life. The danger is in being so complacent that we feel no need of his help. All the resources of heaven are waiting to be put into action to save us. When God gave His Son (John 3:16), He gave the most precious thing He possessed; all of heaven was in that one gift. The question is do we value it and are we going to avail ourselves of the help provided? No one will be lost except by their own choice, all the resources are there for our salvation, the worst sinner can be saved if he chooses to follow Jesus, who can save to the uttermost (Hebrews 7:25).

3. The Books of Heaven

Today there are many archives and libraries which store important historical information such as census returns. People who study family history often have a look at these returns to find out about their ancestors. In some countries families keep a book with a record of their ancestors going back many generations. Increasingly many of these types of records are now stored electronically in databases that are available online. The modern computer can store thousands of books on its hard drive, and as technology increases we are able to store more and more information on less and less space. What is not so well known is that there are books in heaven containing records of people's lives; this clearly exceeds any technology on earth

considering the amount of information it would need to contain.

In heaven there is also the book of life which records the names of those who will be saved. A person's name can be added to the book if they repent and turn to Christ, or taken away if they fall away from Christ. Moses referred to this fact when he asked God to blot his name out of the book rather than the rebellious children of Israel (Exodus 32:33). If a righteous person turns to evil, none of his good deeds will be remembered (Ezekiel 18:24). No matter how many good deeds he did, it will not count. Conversely if an evil man repents, he will be saved and none of his evil deeds will be remembered (Ezekiel 18:21-22). Therefore what is important is to repent and stay committed to God (Matthew 24:13).

The disciples had just returned from a missionary trip and were rejoicing that they had authority to cast out demons; to them this was the most amazing miracle and perhaps a source of pride. But Jesus pointed them away from this type of thinking, he told them to rejoice that their names were written in heaven (Luke 10:20). It was more important to be grateful for their salvation than to boast about miracles they had performed by the power of God. Perhaps it is still true today that we are not as aware of how grateful we should be for our salvation. When Jesus healed ten lepers, only one returned to give thanks and he was a Samaritan (Luke 17:11-19).

Have we really stopped to consider that there is a book in heaven with all the names of the saved recorded, and whether our name is written in that book or not. It is a great

privilege to have your name written in that book, more important than having a birth or marriage certificate, or a certificate to show you own some land, money or shares in a company. It is the book of life that should be our concern, how is it with my soul?

The Apostle Paul referred to his fellow workers having their names in the book of life (Philippians 4:3). Anciently every city had a roll which listed the names of all its citizens. The book of life can be considered a roll for citizenship in heaven. People are often concerned with gaining citizenship when they move to a new country. Citizenship confers a right of abode in a county and other rights not afforded to aliens. Sometimes people make long journeys to a country only to be turn away and sent back home because they do not have a right to enter the country.

In a similar way many hope to enter the kingdom of God, but unless their name is written in the book of life their journey will have been in vain, they will not gain entrance into the city of God (Revelation 21:27). The prophet Daniel referred to a time of trouble at the end of the world, and only those whose names are in the book will be delivered (Daniel 12:1). We need to be concerned not only with our earthly passport but with our heavenly one too; this needs to be our priority.

The books in heaven are far superior to those on earth in that they not only contain the names of the saved, but also a record of good and bad deeds. No earthly archive could hold this much information. Malachi refers to a book of remembrance of those who feared the Lord and thought upon His name (Malachi 3:16). These faithful ones were in

contrast to the ones who did not faithfully return their tithes and offerings. It seems that the faithful ones were more concerned with spiritual rather than material things. They put God before their money. Jesus said a person cannot serve both God and mammon, a word meaning wealth (Matthew 6:24). Nehemiah also spoke of a book that records good deeds for the work he had done for the house of God when it was neglected (Nehemiah 13:14). Our lives are recorded in the great record books of heaven by the angels; the psalmist said that his wanderings and tears were in the book (Psalm 56:8). No matter what we have suffered or done in our life, it is not forgotten. When the martyrs died alone in some dismal dungeon with no one to hear their cries, they were not forgotten, a careful record was made of all that they suffered to be brought to light on judgement day. Every righteous deed, temptation resisted, evil overcome, word of tender pity expressed, act of sacrifice or sorrow endured for

Christ's sake, all is recorded in the books (The Great Controversy p. 481, Ellen White).

The most important record book of all is the Bible, written by various prophets who wrote under the inspiration of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:21). The Bible is also the standard by which our lives will be judged. If there was only a book of good deeds then we would have no fear of the judgement, we could stand and hear all the good things we have done and feel satisfied with our own righteousness. But there is also a record of evil works that will be brought to light in the judgement (Ecclesiastes 12:14), this includes a record of every idle word (Matthew 12:36-37). Whatever crime has ever been committed is faithfully recorded; there will be no escape for the transgressor of God's holy law. In fact, even the secret purposes and motives are recorded (1

Corinthians 4:5), a sobering thought. The time is coming when the iniquities of the lost will be punished (Isaiah 65:6-7).

In the final judgement all is brought to light as recorded in the books in review for faithfulness or unfaithfulness, including wrong words, selfish acts, unfulfilled duties, secret sin, artful dissembling, heaven sent warnings and reproofs neglected, wasted moments, unimproved opportunities, influences exerted for good or evil (The Great Controversy, p.482, Ellen White).

It is a sobering thought that the heavenly books record all our failings and errors. In consequence, we need to be certain, am I saved? This is the question that we need to concern ourselves with, will my sins be blotted out from

the book. A mere profession of Christianity would soon be detected by the heavenly intelligences. Only the overcomers will at last be saved, a special group that will be identified in a later chapter.

4. The Law of God and the Sabbath

In every tribunal there needs to be a law. When William Tyndale translated the Bible into English there was no law in England at that time prohibiting this, so he could not be prosecuted. But later, laws were enacted to stop the translation of the Bible into English for the common people. Before a person can be prosecuted there first needs to be a law that has been broken. In a similar way the standard used in the heavenly judgement are the commandments of God (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). The Apostle James refers to the 10 Commandments as the law of liberty and says we will be judged by it (James 2:12). These laws are easy to understand and brief, everyone can understand them, so there is no excuse for violating them. They are comprehensive and universal. These laws are fully expounded and explained in

the Bible. This book which so many people have, but do not read, will one day be their downfall because their lives did not pass the test of the good book. Jesus said he is the stone which people will either fall upon and be broken, or it will fall upon them and grind them to powder (Matthew 21:44).

Have you ever considered that the Bible is the standard by which your eternal fate will be decided? The Bible that may have been sitting on the shelf gathering dust will one day decide your destiny. Perhaps it is time to get it off the shelf, remove the dust and read it. Then you can become acquainted with its contents before your name comes up in the heavenly tribunal.

Even professed Christians are often guilty of neglecting the good book and not taking the time to study it.

Too often this is left to a minister or a doctor of theology; their eternal fate is left to another person. But unfortunately another person cannot secure our salvation, it is an individual work. We cannot in the judgement complain that we did not read the Bible and left this duty to someone else when we had the Bible within our reach but never bothered to read it. We are often told that ignorance of the law is no excuse. This is especially true regarding the Bible when it is willing ignorance or laziness on our part. There is no excuse for being willingly ignorant of the Bible.

When the Bible was translated into English, some of the Bishops tried to burn the Bible to stop it getting into the hands of the common man. But the modern situation is not much better because although we have the Bible, many do not read it or believe that it is inspired by God (2 Timothy

3:16-17), so it produces the same result as not having it in the first place; it is almost as though we do not have the Bible when it is hardly read by the masses. If there was a book which had directions to finding masses of gold and diamonds, many people would be eager to get hold of a copy and read it, but directions to the heavenly city where the streets are paved with gold are not wanted. The devil keeps people busy with the things of this earth, long enough so they don't read the Bible, realise their need of salvation and find the way to true riches and eternal life.

At the end of time God will bring a test upon the world, to see whether we truly love Him and are willing to keep His commandments (Revelation 14:12; John 14:15). There will be a restoration of the Sabbath truth, the seventh day of the week, which God rested on, blessed and sanctified

at Creation (Genesis 2:2-3). The only commandment which God said remember is forgotten (Exodus 20:11). Yet there have always been a faithful few who have kept this sacred day; little groups who stayed loyal to God's word in a time of great apostasy. When the Sabbath truth is brought before the Christian world it will be a test of loyalty. God's law is going to decide who are saved or lost. Those who knowingly and deliberately break one of the 10 Commandments will have their names blotted out of the book of life (Revelation 14:12; 21:27; 22:14-19). In the book of Malachi we are told of the coming of Elijah before the day of the Lord. This represents a special message before the return of Christ. It is given in the same spirit as John the Baptist who fearlessly denounced sin and called for repentance and baptism. He warned of a coming judgement and the arrival of the Messiah. The prophecy of Malachi was partially fulfilled by John the Baptist at the first coming of Jesus, but will be

completed just before the second coming of Jesus by a people proclaiming the importance of the 10 Commandments (Revelation 14:12). This is referred to in the prophecy of Malachi with a call to remember the laws of Moses (Malachi 4:4-6). There is a warning that if this message is not heeded a curse will strike the earth. A similar warning is also found in the book of Isaiah where a curse strikes the earth because the inhabitants have transgressed the laws of God (Isaiah 24:5-6). While the death of Christ brought an end to the ceremonial and civil laws, the 10 Commandments remain the universal moral code by which we will be judged (James 2:10-12).

It should be noted that at present most people are not aware of the Sabbath truth, but this will change just before the return of Christ. At that time people will make an intelligent choice as to whether to be loyal to God and His

commandments, including the Sabbath or whether to obey the laws of man. The choice will be between the commandments of God and the laws of man, between worshipping the Creator and worshipping a man. For more information on this topic please see my book, “The mark of the beast and the seal of God”.

The heavenly tribunal will look at those who have believed in Jesus in all ages, for even Adam looked forward to the coming of the Messiah (Genesis 3:15), and the gospel was preached in all ages (Hebrews 4:2). The sacrifices offered by the Patriarchs and later the Israelites pointed to the coming of the deliverer as their sin bearer. The judgement begins with those who first lived on earth and continues down until it reaches the living. If there are sins left of the record, un-confessed, un-repented of, then their names will

be blotted out of the book. At the resurrection of the just, those whose names are in the book of life will be brought to life and taken to heaven (Luke 14:14; Revelation 3:5).

The Bible is like a sword that pierces to the marrow revealing the true thoughts of our hearts (Hebrews 4:12). If prayerfully read, especially as we study the life and death of Christ, it will reveal the deformity of character and our need of salvation and transformation. Something in the shade may appear wholesome until a bright light shines upon it. The Bible is a light which reveals Jesus Christ, and that light reveals our deformities that need to be corrected by the grace of God and the transforming power of His Spirit. The Bible reveals to us how we have transgressed God's law. When the rich young ruler came to Jesus asking the way to eternal life (Matthew 19:16-22), Jesus saw his lack of concern for others.

His selfishness and avarice were obstacles to his salvation, so he bid him sell all that he had, give to the poor and follow him. But the rich young ruler was unwilling to part with his riches and sadly turned away from Jesus.

If you are troubled and wonder, am I saved? There is good news, in Jesus you can have your sins blotted out, you can be transformed in character, grow in Christ and become an overcomer. But let no one deceive you that you can be saved while deliberately breaking the law of God (1 John 2:3-4), or without being born again (John 3:3). The gospel calls us to die daily (1 Corinthians 15:31), to be transformed (Romans 12:2), to overcome the world through faith in Christ (1 John 5:4), and to appropriate the victory of Christ into our own lives (1 Corinthians 15:57). There are only two groups, those who overcome and those who lose all in the

game of life. Which you will be will depend on how you respond to the Bible. In a later chapter the seven steps of becoming an overcomer will be discussed in more detail.

5. The Use of Talents

For those who believe that merely saying, “I believe in Jesus”, is a passport to heaven, the parable of the talents should be a wake up call (Matthew 25:14-30). In this parable, all were given a different number of talents but even the person who only had one talent was expected to put it to use in the Master’s service. On the day of judgement there simply won’t be a valid excuse for not doing anything for the salvation of lost souls or helping the poor.

Within our reach are those who are suffering and perishing. As names come up in the heavenly tribunal, souls are being lost or saved. Christ died for these souls and he expects us to share in the work of salvation. It is a great privilege to be able to lead others to the kingdom. The

greatest reward we can receive is to one day be in heaven and meet people who will say, I was a lost sinner and you came to me and showed me the way to life and now I am saved in this paradise for all eternity (see Testimonies for the Church, vol. 8, pp.196-197,310-312, Ellen White). There is no other legacy which can compare with saving souls. The fate of people we know are hanging in the balance, we need to take time to pray for them and seek to lead them to God's kingdom.

In the parable of the talents, when the master came to call his servants to give an account, the one who had hidden his talent was found to be without excuse. We often try to make excuses, we are busy with work, getting married, we cannot do anything for God, and we have no abilities. But is

this really so? In the parable everyone had at least one talent which could be put to good use.

Perhaps the greatest challenge is the talent of time. How have we used our spare moments? Has our life been wasted in foolish amusements and the cares of life or have we done something for the Master. How was my time spent? In accumulating money, in pleasure seeking or in studying the Bible, confessing my sins and working for Christ and the poor.

One of the worse delusions that Satan is bringing upon the earth is the belief that we only need to say, I believe, and we will go to heaven no matter how unregenerate we are and regardless of whether we are breaking the law of God. The Bible does not support

universal salvation, clearly only those who keep the commandments will enter life (Matthew 19:17). Time and time again the principle that only the good will go to heaven was illustrated in the parables of Jesus such as the good and bad fish (Matthew 13:47-50), the wise and foolish virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24-30). In the gospel of John, Jesus makes it clear that it is the good that will rise in the resurrection of life (John 5:29).

If you are wondering what hope there is for me, keep reading because the fact that we feel a need for change is an opportunity for God to work in our lives. He is all powerful and has provided a wonderful Mediator who can both forgive sin and provide the power so we can be transformed and born again.

6. The Need for Transformation

We are used to the concept of growth in nature, a baby grows to maturity, a sunflower grows until it makes yellow flowers that brighten up our day and may even provide some tasty seeds to eat if the birds don't get them first. But what if the baby did not grow up, or the sunflower remained a small shoot. Clearly something would be very wrong and we would be concerned. The same is true in our Christian life, we should be growing in our walk with the Lord, being transformed (Romans 12:2), changed from glory into glory into His likeness (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Jesus taught that unless we are born again we cannot see or even enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3, 5); this clearly illustrates the need for transformation. We may not at

first recognise our need, but it is the work of the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin (John 16:8) and then lead us to Christ for salvation (John 15:26; 14:26). Christ taught that we need to be connected to the Vine, which is a symbol of Christ himself (John 15:1). By being connected with Christ we bear fruit while those branches which do not bear good fruit are cast into the fire (John 15:4-7; Matthew 7:19)! The bearing of fruit is a symbol of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, such as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness and faith (Galatians 5:22). Clearly a vital change is needed, a transformation in our lives, otherwise we simply won't be ready to face the judgement. The works of the flesh are such things as idolatry, envying and murder (Galatians 5:19-21). And although we may not have done these things, Jesus showed that the law is concerned with our hearts because even if we are angry with our brother we can commit murder in our hearts (Matthew 5:21-22). Although the power

for transformation comes from God as illustrated by our connection with the Vine, it will also require a great struggle on our part. The importance of this connection with Christ is discussed in more detail in a later chapter, seven steps to becoming an overcomer.

Jesus taught that those who are found worthy will have a part in the resurrection of the just (Luke 14:14; 20:35), and those who have done good will be raised to eternal life (John 5:29). Therefore a mere profession of faith without a change in our characters will not suffice. James says that the demons believe but tremble, and that faith without works is dead (James 2:19-20). Faith in Christ is more than a mere intellectual assent. If we claim to believe in Jesus, it means nothing if our lives have not been changed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

A superficial change is not sufficient; Jesus said that unless our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees we will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20). The Pharisees were known for their scrupulous observance of various laws, many of which were man made rules and traditions. Yet Jesus said the Pharisees were like whitewashed tombs, beautiful on the outside but with dead men's bones on the inside (Matthew 23:27); under their religious pretensions they were full of corruption and loved the praise of men for their "good deeds" (Matthew 23:5; 6:1-8; 12:33-34). Jesus showed that a superficial obedience is not enough, if we are angry with our brother we may be committing murder in our heart (Matthew 5:21-22). The law has a spiritual dimension reaching into our inner thoughts and motives. Even to covet something that does not belong to us is a transgression of the law (Romans 7:7; Exodus

20:17), therefore this commandment encompasses all selfishness.

When deeds are done to earn the praise of men or to try to earn salvation it is of no use. Paul spoke of Christ setting us free from dead works (Hebrews 9:14; 6:1). What we need is more than an outer conformity to certain rules and regulation which leaves the heart unchanged. Christ calls for an inner transformation of the heart by His Spirit, a new birth, a new creation (John 3:3; 2 Corinthians 5:17). He calls for the death of the old man, crucified with Christ (Romans 6:6). None of us want to be crucified, to suffer pain, yet in order to be saved, the old self has to die, to make room for the new man. Only then can we truly be overcomers.

In the days of Noah people were busy eating and drinking, they had their amusements and the daily things of life to keep them busy, they saw no need of transformation and as a result their time of probation passed and they were lost. Once the door to the ark was shut no one could get in or out. Christ said conditions will be similar at the end of time; as in the days of Noah people will be absorbed in pleasure seeking rather than in getting ready for God's kingdom (Matthew 24:37-39). Then, unexpectedly, probation will close; those who are ready will be saved, those who are lost will remain in their lost condition (Revelation 22:11). There will be no second probation because if in this life we do not give our hearts to Jesus, even if we were given a thousand more years nothing would change. This will be demonstrated when the wicked dead are raised after the millennium and they march against the city of God (Revelation 20:7-9), their hearts remain unchanged.

We are living in a serious time when our lives will at some point come under review; we need to recognise our need to be forgiven and transformed by the grace of God.

7. Power through Christ our High Priest

In many cities electrically powered trams run through the streets. But imagine if one day there was a power cut, they would all come to a stop. It would be futile for the passengers to try to get out and push the tram under their own strength. In a similar way we would not try to use an electric drill if it was not plugged in, or drive a car with an empty fuel tank. In terms of our spiritual life, we need to recognise that without Christ we are lost. Once we recognise our lost condition, we need to go to where the power is, in the heavenly sanctuary where Christ mediates for our salvation (Hebrews 8:1-5; 7:25). In life if we are hungry we go to the fridge or the kitchen, if we are tired we go to bed, if we need money we go to work, we need to know where our

spiritual power comes from, where the source is and go there.

Although we are called to overcome we must never forget that our victory is only possible because of Christ's victory and that human effort without divine aid will be futile. The mediation of Christ as our High Priest is as vital to our salvation as was his death on the cross, for he ever lives to intercede for us and can save to the uttermost (Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 2:1). As our High Priest he helps us as we read our Bibles and pray, this was symbolised by the bread of the presence and the incense which ascended on the altar in the holy place of the earthly sanctuary. The bread symbolised the word of God and the incense the righteousness of Christ which makes our prayers acceptable to God and shielded the priest from the glory of God. Jesus

enlightens us through the Holy Spirit to understand the words of Scripture. By contemplating our all merciful and all powerful Mediator we are lifted up to overcome the difficulties and trials that are before us. Our minds need to focus on where Christ is now ministering, in the Most Holy Place in the heavenly sanctuary. It is there that Christ is completing the final phase of his work as High Priest, mediating the forgiveness of sins and completing the judgement.

It was through a lack of faith in God's power to deliver that Israel faltered on the borders of the Promised Land. The unfaithful spies gave an evil report and magnified the difficulties of what lay ahead by claiming that the land swallowed people up (Numbers 13:31-33). Because of a lack

of faith in God, the people were not allowed to enter the Promised Land and died in the wilderness (Numbers 14).

When Christ ministered on earth he made statements like, your faith has saved you or has made you whole (Mark 5:34; 10:52; Luke 7:50; 18:42). When two blind men came to Jesus, he healed them saying, according to your faith be it unto you (Matthew 9:29). When he returned to Nazareth, because of unbelief he did not do many miracles there (Mark 6:5-6). In a similar way if we have little faith in the power of our High Priest to help us we will not be able to overcome our sins. Faith is the key that unlocks the promises of God. But if we believe God cannot deliver us, it will become a self fulfilling prophecy. This is one of Satan's delusions that we cannot overcome our sins, and it denies our all powerful Mediator.

However, we need to recognise that we are all sinners in need of grace; the work of sanctification is the work of a lifetime. Even the Apostle Paul said, I am the chief of sinners and also exclaimed, O wretched man that I am, because he did not always do what he knew to be right (1 Timothy 1:15; Romans 7:14-24). Paul recognised that we are in a battle; we are running a race and fighting a fight (1 Corinthians 9:24-26; Hebrews 12:1; Philippians 2:16). He did not claim to be absolutely perfect, but was pressing on toward the prize of eternal life (Philippians 3:12-14). Therefore if we think we are without sin we deceive ourselves (1 John 1:8-10). Only the Word of God can reveal our true condition (Hebrews 4:12). Yet when we sin we have an advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1-2). The important thing is to keep our eyes on Jesus, to keep running the race, to keep overcoming as the Holy Spirit points out to us obstacles to our path such as sins

which prevent us from entering the kingdom. As long as we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus we will complete the race.

Christ said he has power on earth to forgive sins (Matthew 9:6); as our High Priest he has the power to blot out our transgressions and to keep our names in the book of life, so we should have confidence in him knowing he has this power. We are promised that our iniquities will be forgiven and our sins remembered no more (Jeremiah 31:34). Peter spoke of the time when the sins of believers would be blotted out (Acts 3:19). Yet sometimes we doubt that Christ can forgive our sins, we allow Satan to plant doubts in our mind and question whether our sins are too big to be forgiven, and then we doubt God's promises. We need to take God at His Word and trust in the power of our High Priest. We must not lose sight of the power of Christ to save

and forgive our sins, nor let Satan lead us to believe we cannot be forgiven. Often when someone has committed a great sin, Satan leads them to believe their case is hopeless, that they are unforgivable, that they have committed the unpardonable sin. But it is a delusion; Satan is seeking to turn their eyes away from Jesus who is the only one who can save them (Acts 4:12).

Our salvation depends not on our feelings - whether we feel we are saved but upon Christ's unshakeable oath and promise (Hebrews 6:17). Around the throne of God there is a rainbow, a symbol of God's covenant of mercy (Revelation 4:3; Isaiah 54:9-10). We need to have more confidence in God, He does not lie (Hebrews 6:18; Titus 1:2), He has promised to save the penitent (2 Chronicles 7:14). We need to turn to Him in faith and receive forgiveness for our sins (1

John 1:8-9) and cleansing from all unrighteousness. Those who confess their sins will find mercy, but those who conceal them will not prosper (Proverbs 28:13). The victory which overcomes the world is faith, faith in Christ (1 John 5:4-5). Satan wants to keep the truth of an all powerful Mediator out of our minds, but by faith in Christ we can be victorious.

Chapters omitted from the preview:

8 Christ the Conqueror

9 Are you an Overcomer or a Loser

10 Seven Steps to becoming an Overcomer

11 The Battle over your Soul

12 The Rewards of the Overcomer

13 The Vindication of God and Eden Restored

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