

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

SALVATION BEING ETERNAL— ARGUMENTS AGAINST IT

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We have seen on the positive side that all the work that God has done and all the grace that He has given us at the time we were saved cannot be annulled by the passage of time. We can boldly say that once we are saved, we are eternally saved. Once God has shown mercy to us, we are eternally under His mercy. Once we have the eternal life of the Son of God, we will never lose it.

Although I am very bold in saying this, we human beings are still human beings. Even today many Christian workers do not see this matter. Because man's heart is filled with the flesh and the law, he cannot understand how God's grace can be so great. It is too incredible to him. It is natural for man to think this way. Man is of the flesh, and the flesh is of the law. The flesh knows only the law; it does not know grace. Anything that originates from the human flesh is of the law. But anything that originates from God, from the Holy Spirit, and from grace, is of faith.

In the world we know nothing about grace and gift. All we know is to barter. All day long, our minds are filled with how much we should work and how much we should get for our work. We think that in order to gain anything, we have to work for it. This is our life. For years, we have bartered away our lives, our time, and our energy. We think that if one is to pay a certain price, he first has to be paid an equal amount. If he has accepted a certain amount, then he has to offer certain things in return. Our life is a life of bartering. Because this is the way we live, we also think that God's grace and eternal life toward us are in the same principle of bartering. When we hear the clear gospel, we may see the light for a while. At that time, we may realize that grace is free and that it is not a matter of bartering. But this realization seems to happen only at the time we are saved. Many people still have not been delivered from the thought of God's grace as a loan to us. They think that if they do not do well, God will claim back the grace He has given. But if a man knows the Bible and is clear about the ten items of truth mentioned in the previous messages, he has to admit at the very least that there can never be such a thing.

Everyone who knows the Word of God should never doubt what he knows because of what he does not know. Since one has seen clearly the sealing and the pledging of the Holy Spirit, eternal life, the hand of the Lord, the Body of Christ, the temple of God, and the promises of the Lord, he cannot overturn what he knows with problems concerning things that he does not know or understand. We cannot overturn the facts we know. However, there are still things we are ignorant of. What we will do now is to take a look at some of the things that we do not know. We will take a few of the supposedly contradictory arguments—especially the more convincing ones—and consider them one by one.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF ETERNAL SALVATION NOT LEADING ONE TO SIN AT WILL

Before we consider some of the problems in the Scriptures, we have to consider one strong objection and doubt that some men raise. Some think that if a person is "once saved, always

saved," such a person will surely sin more freely. This can be considered as the most common and strongest point of objection. If a man knows that he is eternally saved and will never be condemned, will he not become loose, start to commit all sorts of sins, and be bold to do anything? Since this could be the case, is not this kind of teaching very dangerous?

I remember that a man once wrote a letter to Mr. Mackintosh—the one who wrote a commentary on the Pentateuch. In that letter he told Mr. Mackintosh that he had heard a preacher a week earlier preaching on the matter of being a child of God eternally. A young man in the audience said that since such was the case, he could do anything he wanted to now. Within a few days, the young man committed all sorts of sins. The writer of the letter complained that because of the teaching of "once a child, eternally a child," the young people had been damaged. In response to his letter, Mr. Mackintosh wrote, "It is true that once a person is a child of God, he is eternally a child of God. But I doubt whether the young man you mentioned is a child of God in the first place. I have a son. Suppose I were to say to my son that since he is my son, he will be my son eternally. Upon hearing this, would my son be so overjoyed that he would right away smash the window with a stone, break his dishes on the floor, pull off the tablecloth and roll the bowls on the floor, and do all sorts of impolite things before me? Can there be such a person? It is true that when a person becomes a son, he is a son eternally. But he will not act lawlessly just because he is a son. If he acts lawlessly, I doubt if such a one is really a son."

According to the Bible, there is nothing wrong with the preacher's word. But the young man's action is totally wrong. To determine if a teaching is right, we can only judge it by the truth in the Bible; we cannot determine it by man's conduct. As teachers of the Bible, we can only be responsible for telling others what the Bible says. We cannot be responsible for telling others what the Bible should say. We do not have this authority. We know that the Word of God says that once we are a son, we are a son eternally. We do not know to what result this knowledge will lead us. The problem today is that man would not judge God's Word with God's Word. Man likes to drag out someone from the corner and say that since man is the way he is, how can one say that a man is "once saved, eternally saved"? It is true that some believers have failed and are weak. It is also true that some people are false ones. It is true that there are millions of believers who have different experiences. We can only judge them by the truth of the Bible. We cannot judge the truth of the Bible by what others have done. We can only prove them wrong by the truth of the Bible. We cannot condemn the truth of the Bible as wrong because of what they have done.

The starting point of a Christian is the Word of God, not man's conduct. Today you may ask me whether you are still saved, because you lied yesterday. I cannot ascertain whether or not you are saved based upon whether your lie was a good lie, a bad lie, a bright lie, or a dark lie. I can only tell you what the truth of the Bible says. If this is not the case, there will be no need of the judgment seat and the great white throne. We can only look at what the Word of God says. We can only judge man's act by God's Word. We can never judge God's Word by man's act. It is God's Word that says once a man is saved he is saved eternally. There is nothing wrong with it. Though it is wrong for man to act irresponsibly because of this word, we still must judge everything by God's Word. God's Word is our complete constitution and our highest court.

OPPOSING ETERNAL SALVATION DUE TO IGNORANCE OF IT

I once heard an evangelist from Shanghai say that the teaching of "once saved, eternally saved" makes a person irresponsible, loose, and not very watchful. One can only make such a statement because he does not fully understand the Word of God. Only those who do not understand God's salvation can say that a man will be irresponsible and loose because he knows that he is eternally saved.

Such people are ignorant of at least three things. First, they are ignorant of God's way of salvation. They do not know how God has saved them. In saying this, we are not talking about the way of preservation, but the manner in which God has saved us. God does not threaten us with going to hell in order to gain our belief in Jesus. He does not scare people into heaven. Man always thinks that if he does not repent of his sins, change a little, and perform meritorious works, he cannot be saved. For this reason, he continues to look for ways to be saved. Is this God's way of saving us? Does God put the question of sin continually before man, threatening him to solve it right away? Does God threaten people with the judgment seat and His wrath, coerce them to do various things, and hold in suspense those who do not know what their future holds, to strive with all their strength? If a man has any knowledge of God, he will say a thousand no's to these questions. Those who do not know God will say that it is a good way to cause man's heart to be in fear and trembling and in suspense, not knowing what lies ahead. But those who understand the salvation of God know that this is an evil tiding from hell. It is not the glad tidings. God said the judgment is over. The problem of sin is solved. God's way of salvation is not to hold us in suspense or to scare us into pursuit. He has never coerced us into holiness, righteousness, and sanctification. He said that all things are prepared. The servants said all things are ready (Luke 14:17); God has prepared everything. Now He is coming to give things to you. However, we have changed things around today. We think that a man can be scared into being good. Please remember that a man can only be scared into fainting; he can never be scared into being good.

Second, those people mentioned above are not only ignorant of the way of God's salvation, they are also ignorant of the content of this salvation. What is salvation? It is not just a matter of God solving our problem of sin by His Son. Salvation not only causes our sins to be forgiven, it also gives us eternal life. God's salvation justifies us, and it also gives us the Son of God, putting Him inside of us. Salvation not only causes us not to be condemned by God, but it has put the Holy Spirit within us. Not only does it enable us to live forever in the future, but it has imparted to us God's nature today. This is the content of salvation. Not only do we have forgiveness and justification, and not only are we not condemned and judged, but we have God's nature, Christ, and the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. As a result, man will spontaneously have a new desire, a new inclination, and a new aspiration. God's salvation adds something new to us.

Some have said that salvation is objective. But there are many aspects of salvation which are subjective as well. Salvation has not only solved the problem of sin before God, it has also solved many other problems inside us. Within us, we now have a new life, a new nature, the Lord, and the Holy Spirit. As this is the case, can we be loose? I am not

saying that a Christian will never sin. But I am saying that if a Christian does sin, it is a suffering to him. It is not a joy. If a man thinks that he has received a license and a certificate to sin just because he now knows that he is eternally saved, and if such a one does not feel anything when he sins, has no sense of suffering, I doubt that such a one is a true child of God. I am saying that a person is eternally a child of God only after he has first become a child of God. I am not saying that a person can be a child of God eternally without ever once having been a child of God. The Lord is within us. He forbids us to sin.

Third, a person as mentioned above does not know the issue of God's salvation. For those of us who have been saved by God, there is surely a consequence, a result, and an issue. What is this issue? After a man is saved, can he then break the law just because he is now justified in Christ? Can he now freely transgress the Ten Commandments from beginning to end? Can he now do anything he wants to do? Please read the words of Paul in Philippians 3:6 through 9: "As to zeal, persecuting the church; as to the righteousness which is in the law, become blameless. But what things were gains to me, these I have counted as loss on account of Christ. But moreover I also count all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, on account of whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is out of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is out of God and based on faith." Paul had righteousness through faith in Christ. He received righteousness through faith in God, and not through the work of the law. Was he then free to do anything and to be irresponsible and loose just because of this? He said that the things which were gains to him he had counted as loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. On account of Christ, he suffered the loss of all things and counted them as refuse. Hence, with every regenerated Christian, mature or immature, there is a desire for holiness, a love for God, and a heart to please Christ. I do not know why this is the case. I only know that this is the issue of salvation.

You may reason that because Paul was an apostle, he was therefore able to speak as he did in Philippians 3. Let us now look at the ordinary believers. Second Corinthians 5:14-15 says, "For the love of Christ constrains us because we have judged this, that One died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all that those who live may no longer live to themselves but to Him who died for them and has been raised." Here Paul gave us an answer. A man will not be irresponsible and loose just because God has saved him and Christ has resurrected for him. On the contrary, because of Christ's death and resurrection, a person will live to "Him who died for him and has been raised." While he is living on earth today, he does not live to himself, but to the Lord, who has died and resurrected for him.

Thus, the reason a person can say that he can be loose because he knows that he is eternally saved is due to three things: First, he is ignorant of the way, the process, of salvation; second, he does not know the content of salvation; and third, he does not know the issue of salvation, that is, he does not know what salvation can do for man. If you see these three things, immediately you will see that eternal salvation will not only keep you from lawlessness, but it will also make you godly. Eternal salvation will keep us from looseness and will make us sober.

Peter told us in his letter, "According to His promise we are expecting new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pet. 3:13). Are we free to be loose now that we know where we are going? In the following verse, Peter continues by saying, "Therefore, beloved, since you expect these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace without spot and without blemish." Because we know that we will be with Him, we cannot be loose or lawless. If we do not know where we are going, we will turn around in circles. But anyone who has a goal, who knows where he is going, will surely choose the straightest path.

THREE THINGS TO UNDERSTAND IN GOD'S WORD

Now let us spend some time to consider some portions of the Scriptures that seem to speak of perdition after salvation. Before this, we have to know a few things. First, the Word of God has absolutely no conflict with itself. On the one hand, God can never say that His sheep will never perish or lose their eternal life, and on the other hand, tell man that he will perish. Man can say wrong things, but God's work is a work of glory. He can never say anything by mistake. If it is so clear on the positive side, it can never be contradicting on the negative side. The things on the negative side must be concerned with other matters related to God.

Second, we have taken the time to identify these passages. Among them we see both genuinely saved ones as well as false ones. The Lord Jesus had a false disciple, Judas. When Peter was baptizing people, there was a person named Simon who might not have been saved. Paul also met many false brothers. Peter said that there were many false prophets, and John said that many had departed from them and proved to not be of them. Hence, in the Bible, there are the genuinely saved ones and the nominally saved ones. Some are not saved at all. Of course they cannot pretend or cover up forever. If we can clearly differentiate between these few kinds of people, the problems will be solved. But if you mix these different kinds of people together, it is like mixing the tares with the wheat. The result will be much confusion.

Third, many places in the Bible speak of the discipline of Christians in this age and not of eternal perdition. Do not think that because we are eternally saved, there is no such thing as discipline. Indeed, there is discipline. If you fail and have become weak today, God will discipline you. There is a difference between discipline and eternal perdition. One cannot mix eternal perdition with discipline. Many verses, which seem to speak of Christians being lost again, actually speak of Christians being disciplined. Not only is there the question of discipline and the question of falsity, but also the question of the kingdom and of the reward. These few things are fundamentally different. Many times, we apply words for the kingdom to the eternal age, and words concerning the reward to the subject of eternal life. Naturally, this will produce many problems. We must realize that there is a difference between the kingdom and salvation, and there is a difference between eternal life and reward. The way God will deal with us in the millennium is different from the way He will deal with us in eternity. There is a difference in the way God deals with man in the restored world and in the new world. The millennium is related to righteousness. It is related to our works and our walk after we have become a Christian. The millennial kingdom is for the purpose of judging our walk. But in eternity,

in the new heaven and new earth, everything is free grace. All who are thirsty may come and drink freely (Rev. 22:17). This word is spoken after the new heaven and the new earth have come.

Hence, in the Bible, free gift and the kingdom are two entirely different things. Eternity and the kingdom are also two entirely different things. One cannot put the two things together. In the coming millennial kingdom, God will reward man in a particular way. God will reward man with his rightful crown and glory based upon his works. But as soon as the kingdom is over and the new heaven and new earth begin, everything becomes a matter of grace. Everyone who trusts in the grace of the Lord Jesus will enter in. There will not be the question of work at all. One's personal walk is related to the question of reward, while salvation and justification for the sinner are related to the work of the Lord Jesus. We must differentiate between these two things clearly. Otherwise, when the Bible speaks of the loss in the kingdom, you might be thinking about the loss in eternity, and when God speaks of reward, you might be thinking about salvation. It is true that man's salvation is eternal. But before this eternal salvation is manifested, God will first manifest the matter of reward in the millennial kingdom. One cannot mix these two things together.

In addition to these things, there is another matter that Protestantism has buried in the grave for a long time. Although some may feel that this is something new, actually it was recorded in the Bible long ago. In the Bible there are at least three things which must be distinguished one from another. We have just mentioned two of them, which are the discipline that a Christian receives in this age, and the loss of reward in the kingdom. If we fail, we will not only be disciplined today, but will lose the reward in the kingdom. However, there is still another thing. In the kingdom, there is definite punishment. The Bible is very clear concerning this truth. When a person believes in the Lord and is saved, it is true that the problem of salvation is solved. It is also true that the questions concerning the new heaven and new earth and eternal salvation are settled. But if this one continues to sin and would not repent, he will not only be under God's government and discipline today and lose the reward in the kingdom, he will also suffer some definite punishment in the kingdom.

Some have told us that to lose the reward is punishment enough. But the defeated ones will still be punished. The Bible devotes much space to speak of this. The Bible not only tells us that Christians may not receive the reward in the kingdom, it also tells us that if Christians sin and do not repent, they will receive very heavy punishment in the kingdom. We must distinguish this matter clearly. The question of eternal salvation must not be mixed with the question of nominal Christians. The question of eternal salvation must not be mixed with the discipline of this age. The question of eternal salvation must not be mixed with the question of losing the reward in the kingdom, and it must also not be mixed with the question of punishment in the kingdom. One cannot put these four distinctions together and make "chop suey" out of them. If one does that, God's work will become a mixture of everything that does not resemble anything. If God has made the distinctions, and we ignore the distinctions, we will end up with many unsolvable problems.

Today, we will first take away these four things. We will put aside all the words in the Bible that speak of nominal Christians, the discipline of the believers, the loss of reward, and the punishment in the kingdom for the believers. In the next few messages, we will cover them one by one. What we will talk about in this message are the verses apart from these four kinds of cases. We will talk about the verses that seemingly speaks of perdition after salvation.

THE ARGUMENT BASED ON EZEKIEL 18

We will first begin from the Old Testament. Let us consider Ezekiel 18:24 and 26, which say, "But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die...When a righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die." These two verses can be considered as the main verses in the Old Testament concerning this matter. No other verses in the Old Testament are as important as these. These are the most common and most frequently quoted verses. Hence, we have to devote some thoughtful consideration to these two verses.

Ezekiel 18 never speaks of salvation. It does not say anything about Jesus dying for man, nor does it say anything about believing in the Lord to receive life. It does not say how one takes care of the problem of sin. It does not mention anything about the gospel or about Christ. If one tries by force to apply this passage to the gospel, he is confusing the issue. Ezekiel 18 speaks of God's government. What precedes this passage are things related to God's government. One must remember that things in God's government are totally different from things in salvation. God's government refers to how God works, manages, and arranges things according to His plan and will. If a man does not understand the difference between God's salvation and His government, and if he mixes the two together, he is mixing up God's law court with God's family, the father with the judge. He is confusing the word spoken by the father to the servants with the word spoken to the sons. He is confusing the attitude a man has toward his employees with the attitude he has toward his wife and children. Government is government. Government is not the same as salvation. The difference between government and salvation is as great as the distance between the north pole and the south pole.

Ezekiel 18 does not show us salvation. Its subject is how the Israelites can live on the earth. It does not speak of eternal life. It speaks of the problem with the body. It does not deal with the question of perdition for the soul. Rather, it shows us that if a man does not keep the commandment of God, he will die early physically. It is a question of physical existence rather than spiritual salvation. No one can ever say that a son's teeth should be set on edge just because his father has eaten sour grapes. If someone sitting next to you eats sour grapes, you might feel like you can taste that same sourness in your own mouth. But if a father rebels against God's Word and sins, it has nothing to do with the son. If the father has to die, the son cannot be a substitute for him. If a man sins, he himself should be cut off from God's promised land. This passage is absolutely on the death of the physical body. This is what the end of verse 2 tells us. Then, after these words, from verse 3, chapter eighteen repeats that those who sin shall die. This is not spiritual death. Rather, it is what Adam experienced, the death of the body. If a man sins,

his days on earth shall be shortened by God. From verse 3, this chapter repeatedly tells us who can live on earth through the blessing of Jehovah. This is the context of the words preceding verse 24. If a righteous man who was righteous has now turned evil, he will die. All his former righteousnesses shall not be remembered. This has absolutely nothing to do with salvation. It is a matter of God's government. It tells us why God would not let a man live on the earth. It explains why many people die early. It is a word concerning the judgment of sin for the Jews. It has nothing to do with us.

THE ARGUMENT BASED ON MATTHEW 24

Now let us take a look at the New Testament. Matthew 24:13 says, "But he who has endured to the end, this one shall be saved." When many see this verse, they jump up in surprise. They think that this verse is surely about salvation and not about God's government, as we have just claimed. For example, some would say that since I lost my temper yesterday and did not endure, I am now unsaved. They would say that it is true that a person must believe in the Lord Jesus in order to be saved. But they would also say that a person must endure as well. But if you say this, you are twisting the Word of God. You have cut off the head and the tail in God's Word and have taken a sentence out of context. No wonder we confuse the Word of God! If you would understand the meaning of endurance spoken of in this verse, you have to know what was spoken of before verse 13. You must also know what was spoken after verse 13.

Verse 13 is not speaking about the Christians at all. It is speaking about the Jews. What evidence do we have? First, in the following passage we have the Holy Place, the holy temple, and the Sabbath. All these are Judaic matters. What these verses say is that the Jews should flee to the countryside and should pray that their fleeing would not be in winter or on the Sabbath. When they see the abomination of desolation, that is, the image of the beast in the Holy Place, they have to flee. They should not stay in Jerusalem. If this word is for us, how can we possibly know these things, seeing that we are in Shanghai and the image of the beast is to appear in the temple? Although we do have wireless communication today, what Matthew is speaking about here is a knowledge that comes after actually having seen something. Only one who is as near as those in Jerusalem can see. Hence, this passage refers only to the Jews.

Second, the time in this verse does not refer to the time of the apostles, nor does it refer to the time of the church. The time spoken of here refers to the time of the great tribulation. It refers to the last three and a half years at the end of this age. At the beginning of the tribulation, Antichrist will set up his image in the temple. This passage of Scripture has nothing to do with the church. It refers to the future, not to today. There is no possibility for this to happen today, because Antichrist has not yet come, his image has not yet been set up in the temple, and the great tribulation has not yet started.

Matthew 24 refers to the time of the great tribulation. The salvation mentioned here does not refer to the salvation of the soul. Rather, it refers to the salvation of the body. All the things mentioned here have to do with the salvation of the body. All those who understand the Bible know that this is the period of time when Antichrist will set up his image in the temple, forcing men to worship it and putting his seal upon people's foreheads. When all the Jews who worship and serve God see the beginning of the tribulation, they must not worship in that way and must

not receive the seal. Because of this, they will suffer much. Many persecutions will come upon them. That is why the Lord Jesus told the Jews to flee when they see the image of Antichrist in the temple. If anyone has things at home, they should not bother to get them. They should hide themselves quickly in safe places. Furthermore, the Lord told them to pray that their flight would not be on a Sabbath (v. 20). The reason for this is that they keep the Sabbath. The women should not be pregnant at that time because it would be hard for them to escape. Woe will be to those who are nursing babies at that time. It would also be better if they did not face winter at that time. They should flee to the mountains or to the countryside with the hope that by chance they would not see suffering, persecution, and affliction. At that time, all the forces of Rome will come upon them like a net. They will suffer many difficulties. Many verses in Revelation show us this matter. These people will be saved if they endure during this great tribulation. Because we are too concerned for the matter of salvation, every time the word save appears, we apply it to ourselves. But one cannot apply this word to himself here. If he does, he will be twisting the Word of God. In verse 22 the Lord Jesus said another word: "And unless those days had been cut short, no flesh would be saved." When Antichrist is on earth, no one will be able to escape. Thank the Lord that his day will not be that long. Because of this, there will still be some who can flee. If one endures, he can be saved. Hence, the question of salvation here is not a question of eternal life or death. The nature of the salvation mentioned here has to do with falling into the hands of Antichrist or not.

THE ARGUMENT BASED ON GALATIANS 5

Galatians 5:4 says, "You have been brought to nought, separated from Christ, you who are being justified by law; you have fallen from grace." When many read this verse, they think that, first, one can be separated from Christ, and second, one can fall from grace. Such a one is surely not saved. This understanding is wrong. We have to realize the background in which Paul wrote the book of Galatians. When the clear gospel of God was preached to Galatia, the people there heard it. After this, false prophets came to Galatia to preach the gospel. They did not change the first half of the gospel; they changed the second half. The first half said that man was saved only by trusting in Christ and receiving Christ. However, the second half said that before one believes in the Lord Jesus, he cannot have the righteousness from the law; but after one receives the Lord Jesus, he should have the righteousness of the law. Paul wrote the book of Galatians just to refute them. He argued that as a man cannot have the righteousness of the law while he is yet a sinner, in the same way, he cannot have the righteousness of the law after he is saved. We have seen in the previous few messages that Romans and Galatians are different. Romans says that while we are sinners, we cannot have the righteousness of the law. Galatians says that after a sinner is saved, he still cannot have the righteousness of the law. The subject of both books is not having the righteousness which is of the law. These ones taught that after a man has believed in Christ, is saved, and has eternal life, he has to have the righteousness of the law. The first thing and the minimum requirement of the righteousness of the law is circumcision.

After you are clear about the background of this book, you will know what Galatians is speaking of here. In chapter one Paul said that he marveled that the Galatians were so quickly removing from Him who had called them in the grace of Christ to a different gospel. He marveled that they

were so quickly deceived to follow another gospel (v. 6). He also said that if he, an angel, or any spirit came and preached to them a gospel different from what they had received, they should be anathematized. The word anathematize is the strongest word of curse in the Greek language. It means that all the curse in heaven falls on the cursed one and that all the blessings are withheld. Paul said that his gospel was revealed to him by God alone. He received it in the wilderness of Arabia. This is the reason that his gospel could not contain any mistake. Galatians 2 tells us what this gospel is. In this chapter Peter pretended. When he saw the Jews coming in from James (vv. 11-12), he maintained himself as a Jew. Paul rebuked him to his face. Circumcision means nothing. Christ has already died. It is no longer we who live, but Christ who lives. Chapter three tells us that God's goal is not the law but the promise. The reason that God gave man the law was to cause man first to know his sin and then to accept the Son of God. Chapter four brings out two other things to show us that it is useless for man to keep the law even if he is able to do it. Hagar represents the law, and Sarah represents grace. Hagar must go before Sarah can remain. Even if you can keep the law, you are just Hagar, and you still have to go. The first sentence in chapter five is, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free." Christ has brought us into freedom. We must now stand firm in this freedom. Do not lose this freedom. If a man keeps circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to him. If the system of the law is retained, Christ will have to be denied. One cannot keep the law a little and then ask Christ to make up the rest. Christ never does this kind of piecemeal work. Hence, Paul said, "And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to do the whole law" (5:3). Why would some not choose other things in the law? Why would some only pick up the matter of circumcision? Why would they only pick up what they liked and not keep the whole law? If they wanted to keep one item of the law, they would also have to keep the entire law. If one stays, all have to stay. They cannot choose one and reject all the others. Verse 4 says, "You have been brought to nought, separated from Christ, you who are being justified by law; you have fallen from grace." To be brought to nought from Christ means the same thing as Christ profiting nothing at the end of verse 2. It seems as if Christ is not expressed in you. You do not have forgiveness, joy, and peace. Furthermore, if you follow the law, Christ will be brought to nought in you. Here, it is not a matter of receiving salvation. It is speaking of the condition to be saved. Suppose a brother comes to me and says, "Mr. Nee, I should keep the Sabbath. If I do not keep the Sabbath, my salvation will not be complete." I know that this brother is indeed saved. There is no question about it. Now that he has received such a wrong teaching, I must tell him, "If you keep the Sabbath, the work of Christ will have no effect on you. It is of faith that we are in Christ. Now you have gone back to the law. You have fallen from grace." Thus, it is not a question of salvation or perdition. It is a matter of the condition for being saved. It shows us that a man is saved by Christ and not by himself. If a man keeps the law, there will be no grace.

We know that sin leads to perdition. But we must realize that the book of Galatians is not on the subject of sin. The book of Galatians speaks of good works. It speaks of keeping the law of God. Galatians is on the keeping of the law and circumcision. Paul did not say that they had fallen into sin. He said that they had fallen from grace. There is a big difference between the two. To be fallen from grace and to fall into sin are two entirely different things. To be fallen from grace is to be fallen from the principle of grace and to follow the principle of works once again. Today, there are numerous saved believers who have fallen from grace. But they have not lost their salvation. Even we ourselves are the same. A countless number of times we think that we are through. But our salvation is because of the grace of the Lord Jesus.

Paul said that those in Galatians 5 strove to overcome, but they had fallen from grace to trust in their works instead. They wanted to have good works, but when they did this, they fell. What is to be in grace? Grace means that we are lowly and helpless persons. We can do nothing. We have received grace before God. We are in a lowly position. We are looking to God to give us grace. As such, we are those that live in grace. It is not a matter of sin or evil conduct here. If a man trusts in his own work, he is obstructing the grace of Christ. Paul rebuked the Galatians here for following the law after they were saved. They had fallen from grace. He reprimanded them for not having received enough grace and not having received enough mercy from God. To receive mercy and grace from God is to allow God to work. This proves that the flesh is incapable and cannot do anything. We can work by our flesh. But those in the flesh do not please God.

Suppose Brother Yau is an unprincipled man. Every day he earns a dollar fifty cents but spends two dollars. Tonight I have pity on him. He is short of fifty cents. I give him sixty cents. He is like this every day, and I have pity on him also every day. Suppose one day Brother Yau starts thinking, "Mr. Nee has had pity on me and has sent me money every day. But I have to think of a way to discipline myself a little." When he does this, he is doing what the Galatians were doing with circumcision. They were doing it in the flesh, and as a result, they had fallen from grace. I have met such people. From the world's point of view, I like such people. They do not want others to feed them the rest of their lives. They want to be independent. This is good. But the Bible says that, as far as God is concerned, this is wrong because such people have fallen from His mercy. Paul was not rebuking them for sinning. Paul was rebuking them for doing good. Paul rebuked them for doing good because their doing good meant that they did not need God's mercy anymore for the rest of their lives. They would not live in God's mercy anymore.

My friends, man's thought is totally different from God's thought. We think that we can please God by doing a little. But God is happy when we remain in His grace. He repeatedly says that He desires mercy and not sacrifice (Matt. 9:13). Mercy is for God to give you something, and sacrifice is for you to give something to God. God desires mercy. This means that He likes to give things to you. He does not desire sacrifice. This means that He does not want you to give things to Him. If God can give things away, He will feel happy. This is salvation. Salvation is not to make us happy. Salvation is to make God happy. God likes to keep giving. He wants to work continually on us. He wants to give us grace. You might think that it is enough. But He thinks that it is not enough. You are a poor man and can get by with a few pennies a day. But now you are given a few dollars. No wonder you would think that it is too much. If God is to do something, He wants to do it to the uttermost. If you allow Him to do only a little, He will not feel happy. If you want to be saved, you have to willingly allow God to work. You have to ask God to be merciful to you. God can only be happy if He is allowed to work this way. If you keep trying to give God something, He will not feel happy. When God sees you being shown mercy, He is happy. This is why I say that God desires mercy and not sacrifice.

Galatians 5:4 says that we should not fall outside of grace. It does not say that we should not fall into sin. What is contended here is not the question of salvation, but the question of enjoyment. Before God, we need not move, and we need not keep the law. We do not have to do anything. We should just allow God to work on us and to give us grace. Once we have works, we are fallen from grace. Hence, to say that one has fallen from grace does not refer to the question of

salvation and perdition. To be fallen from grace is a question of whether or not we enjoy Christ's benefits for us. To be fallen from grace is a matter of whether or not one allows the work of Christ to operate in him. We thank the Lord that salvation means to be continually under God's mercy and to be continually under His grace.