

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN
SALVATION BEING ETERNAL—
ARGUMENTS AGAINST IT

(2)

NO TEACHING CONCERNING ETERNAL DEATH
IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the last message we read Ezekiel 18. Here let me add a few additional words. All those who study the Old Testament carefully and who understand the Old Testament know that it does not have the teaching of eternal death, nor does it have anything like eternal punishment. All the deaths mentioned in the Old Testament refer to the death of the body, and the only place that people go after they die is Hades, and not hell. Two or three places seem to speak of hell. But they are either wrong translations or should be interpreted otherwise. All the deaths mentioned in the Old Testament are the death in the body. They are not eternal death. The Old Testament was written to the Jews. Because they were earthly men, their failures were also earthly failures, and their punishments, earthly punishments.

I am not saying that there is no such thing as eternal death in the Old Testament; there is such a thing in the Old Testament. But the Old Testament never teaches us about eternal death. In the Old Testament, those that were blessed by God had much cattle, sheep, gold, and silver bestowed upon them. These were the signs of God's blessing. But in the New Testament, those who are blessed by God can say, "Silver and gold I do not possess, but what I have, this I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene...walk!" (Acts 3:6). In the Old Testament, there were the gold and the silver. In the New Testament, there is no silver or gold. The Old Testament, though not exclusively dealing with things in the flesh, mainly speaks of the physical and material aspect of things. In the Old Testament, when a man was blessed by God, he would enjoy long life, have many offspring, and have much wealth. These are the blessings of the Old Testament. But in the New Testament, we do not see these things. On the contrary, we see that James died. Stephen died. Many were martyred for the sake of loving the Lord. They were not at all cursed. Moreover, the New Testament never made offspring an item of blessing. On the contrary, those who live for the Lord should remain virgins. Hence, what the Old Testament shows us and what the New Testament shows us are two entirely different things.

This does not mean that in the Old Testament there is no such thing as eternal death. But this is not taught as a teaching. Because man does not understand this truth, the New Testament tells us about eternal death. In the Old Testament are a few places that seem to speak of eternal death, but are wrong translations. One of them is translated as the wicked being turned into hell (Psa. 9:17). But actually it should be translated as the wicked going to Sheol. It is temporary, and it is not for eternity. In Isaiah 66:24 it mentions worms which shall not die and the fire which will not be quenched. It seems that this is speaking of the same thing that the Gospel of Mark speaks of (Mark 9:48). But please remember that Isaiah was not saying that unless the Israelites repented they

would go down to hell, where the worm will not die and the fire will not be quenched. Isaiah was prophesying concerning a group of people who will go to hell at the end of the millennium, where the worm will not die and the fire will not be quenched. Isaiah was not speaking of eternal death at all. If we drag him into the subject of eternal death, we are trying to import something foreign. This would become an imported item.

CHRIST OF NONE EFFECT BEING DIFFERENT FROM SEPARATION FROM CHRIST

One thing more we have to know. 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." In the original language the word "brought to nought" is *katargeo*. This is a passive verb. There is a little of the sense of separation. *Kata* has somewhat the sense of detachment, but the sense is not very strong. The word *katargeo* means to be led away from the effect and the function. Stephan's lexicon of Greek words can be considered as one of the best. It tells us that the word here means to be led away from the function. One must see the difference between separation from Christ and being led away from the effect of Christ. These are two different things. If a man has left Christ and is separated from Him, then everything is through. But this is not what Paul was saying here. Paul said that if they keep the law, they have fallen from grace. If they want to hold on to the law, they have to let go of grace. If they follow the law, they will lose the effect of Christ.

What is the effect of Christ? If the effect of Christ is manifested in me, I can rejoice. Though I may be weak and worthless, I know that His grace is sufficient for me, and my heart is able to be at peace. This joy and peace that I have in my heart is the effect of Christ on me. This is Christ working out His effect on me. I do not try to be saved by my works. I know that I am saved already. I do not have to strive to be saved. I do not have to plead desperately. Nor do I have to struggle. I can rest in His work. This is the effect of Christ. Today many Christians have turned away from Christ. Christ does not have much effect on them.

Suppose I owe someone a great deal of money. I cannot repay it even if I were to sell all that I have. Now I have a best friend. He says that since I am so heavily in debt, he will write a check for me so that I can clear my debts. But I am a lazy man. I am too lazy to cash the check. Now do I have money at home? I do, but I also have a debt at home. I have the check, but the check has no effect on me. The debt is still there; it has not been repaid. I am still bearing the burden of the debt. Today God has given us the check already. But we have not cashed in on the effect of this check.

Hence, to be separated from Christ and to have Christ made of none effect on us are two different things. To be separated from Christ is to be not saved. But we can never be separated from Christ. Romans 8 tells us that there is no way for us to be separated from Christ. It says that no one can separate us from the love of Christ. The grace we receive from Christ and the blessing we have from God are ordained by God. No one can overturn them. They cannot be overturned, because they are based on righteousness. Through the many things that Christ has accomplished for us, the problem of eternal life and death is solved. There is no way to overturn this, for this is based on righteousness.

But on the subjective side, the absence of peace in the heart and the continual presence of unhappiness is a Christian problem. A man may worry about how he can receive grace and how he can preserve his salvation. Every day his heart is held in suspense, not knowing what he should do. When a man has turned away from the effect of Christ, he will not receive the effect he should receive from Christ. Hence, Galatians 5:4 shows us that for a man to pursue after law is for him to fall from grace. When he falls from grace, he is away from the effect of Christ. Therefore, this does not refer to man's losing his salvation after he is saved. Rather, it refers to one's not having the joy and peace of salvation.

THE ARGUMENT BASED ON 1 CORINTHIANS 8:11

In this message, we will consider a few more verses. First Corinthians 8:11 says in the King James Version, "And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?" This verse presents a problem. This person mentioned here is definitely saved, for he is called a brother. It is true that he is a weak brother. But nevertheless he is a brother, a person who belongs to the Lord. But here it says that he could perish. The word perish, *apollumi*, carries two meanings in the original language. One can be translated as perish. The other can be translated as destroy. But this word is the same as the word perish used in John 3:16. John 3:16 says that everyone who believes in Him shall not *apollumi*, but have eternal life. If we can use the word destroy in 1 Corinthians 8:11, then we can translate John 3:16 as destroy also. Here then is a problem.

When we read the Bible, we cannot read it in a superficial way. We have to study the context in detail. Only after reading the context carefully can we know what the verse says. One cannot hear clearly what others are saying by leaning the ear against someone's window. One of the most foolish things on earth is to listen to others through the keyhole behind closed doors, for one may not catch what is spoken before or after. If you pull a sentence out of context from the Bible, you will surely not be able to understand it clearly. To understand it clearly, one must read the context.

The subject of 1 Corinthians 8 is on the forbidding of Christians from eating food offered to idols in the idol temple. The Corinthian believers proposed that it was all right for Christians to eat food offered to idols in the idol temple. Their reason was that there is only one God in heaven and on earth. The idols are nothing. If one offers food to the idols, and the idols are real, then the offerings are real offerings. If the idols are not real, then the offerings are not offerings at all, but are food only. If they are not offerings, what harm is there to eat them? If the idols are not real, then the temples are but non-temples, and it would not mean anything for one to eat the offerings in the temples of the idols. They therefore thought that the offerings could be eaten. This is what the Corinthians said.

But Paul said that the offerings should not be eaten. His reason was not that the idols were real or the temples real. At the beginning of chapter eight, Paul said, "Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge." The word "we" refers to the Corinthian believers. Because all have knowledge, therefore they can eat. However, "knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." The purpose of love is to build others up, whereas knowledge puffs up. It is true that the Father is God, that Jesus is the Lord, and that the idols are nothing. But there were many

weak brothers in the church in Corinth. They did not have the knowledge; their minds were not as keen as yours are. Although you can turn the words around and consider there to be nothing, these ones do not understand the things you are saying. They still think that it is against the commandment of the Lord to do something like this. One has to remember who these people were and what their backgrounds were. Today you may think that idols are nothing. But these ones had offered to idols before, thinking that they were offering to God; they thought that the idols were gods. When you eat, you do not feel anything. But if they eat, they would be reviewing their past sins. They were not like you. You have the knowledge, and therefore you can eat and go away. But they would feel that they were doing the same thing that they had done before and were sinning the same way they had sinned before. In their mind, they still consider this as sin. Hence, for the sake of the other Christians, and for the sake of loving them, though you may have the knowledge, you would rather not do it. You have the knowledge, but they do not have the knowledge. They feel condemned in their conscience before God. They feel that they have committed some great sin and are falling away again. Therefore, for their sake, we would not eat. This is the general meaning of this passage.

First Corinthians 8:4 to 7 say, "Concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, either in heaven or on earth, even as there are many gods and many lords, yet to us there is one God, the Father, out from whom are all things, and we are unto Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we are through Him. But this knowledge is not in all men; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat the food as an idol sacrifice, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled." Please notice the word accustomed here. This was their past habit. Verse 12 says, "And sinning in this way against the brothers and wounding their weak conscience, you sin against Christ." This passage teaches people to refrain from food offered to idols on account of the love for the brothers. You cannot act freely and put your brother into trouble simply because you have the knowledge.

From verse 7 until the end, the problem was that of the conscience. It was not a problem of the spirit. Paul was not talking here about eternal salvation or eternal perdition. Paul was telling us what to do in relation to a brother with a weak conscience. If a man does something that he knows he can do, his conscience will not condemn him. But if he does something that he knows he should not do, his conscience will condemn and rebuke him continually. For example, we know that we do not need to keep the Lord's Day, and we do not need to keep the Sabbath. It is all right to shop and to work on the Lord's Day. Our conscience never condemns us. This is a grace of the New Testament. The Lord has not laid upon us the burden of the Sabbath. But some do not have this knowledge. When they shop on the Lord's Day, they think that they have sinned a great sin. After such a one does this, his conscience will not be at peace. Sometimes the question of sin is simply a question of the conscience. Man's conscience determines for him what his sins are.

Paul was saying that here is a weak brother. Formerly he worshipped idols. Now he sees others eating, and he wants to join them. For you to eat is all right, because you have the discernment and you know that the idols mean nothing. You could therefore freely eat. He eats, not because

he has the discernment, but because he sees you eating. All the time he is eating, he has no peace. You eat with joy. He eats with fear. After this meal, he can no longer pray. His conscience tells him that he has just sinned and that he has forsaken God to worship idols just as he used to do. His conscience begins to perish before God. He feels guilty before God. He thinks that he is through and that he has gone back to his former sins again.

In addition to John 3:16, the original word for perish also appears in Luke 13, 15, and 21. But in those three places, this word was used very differently. In chapter thirteen, Pilate had killed quite a number of people and had mixed their blood with their sacrifices. The Lord Jesus told the people that they should not consider these Galileans to be more sinful than they were. Unless they repented, they would all likewise perish. The perishing here refers to the body being killed; it has nothing to do with man's soul. The Lord said that there were eighteen killed when the tower in Siloam fell. Unless these repented, they would similarly perish. This refers to the killing of the outward body.

In the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15, the prodigal said, "How many of my father's hired servants abound in bread, but I am perishing here in famine!" Perishing here does not refer to the perishing of the soul. Hence, this word does not refer only to eternal death, but to the killing of the body and to starvation. One can be considered as perishing when he is killed. He can also be considered as perishing when he is starving to death.

In Luke 21 the Lord says that the hair of our head shall by no means perish. Even our hair can perish. Now this cannot possibly mean eternal death anymore. From these three places, one can immediately get an idea of what Paul referred to here. He was referring to something that would cause the conscience of a weak brother to perish. In the meeting he would not be able to pray anymore. He would think that he was through, that he had worshipped idols again and had eaten of the food offered to idols in the idol temple again. He would think that he had left the living God again, and his conscience would be destroyed because of you.

If we read this portion of the Scripture in 1 Corinthians 8 carefully from verse 7 on, we will see why Paul said what he did. "But this knowledge is not in all men; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat the food as an idol sacrifice, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled." Please note that this refers to those whose conscience, being weak, is defiled. "But food will not commend us to God; neither if we do not eat are we lacking, nor if we eat do we abound." This is absolutely our standard: If we eat there is no merit, and if we do not eat, there is no loss. But those without the knowledge have a problem here. "But beware lest somehow this right of yours become a stumbling block to the weak ones." The weakness here does not refer to a moral weakness or a doctrinal weakness. Rather, it refers to weakness in the conscience. If it meant weakness in one's moral condition or doctrine, the verse would lose its meaning. It refers rather to the weakness in the conscience. "For if anyone sees you who have knowledge reclining at table in an idol temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be emboldened to eat the things sacrificed to the idols?" Those with a weak conscience think that since others can eat it, so can they. But if such a one eats it, his conscience will be defiled. "And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?" (KJV). Hence, the perishing here does not refer to eternal perdition of a saved brother. The perishing here refers to the spiritual stumbling of a brother due to weakness.

If what 1 Corinthians 8 says is that a brother's knowledge can cause another to eternally perish, then I can say that a person's being saved or perishing depends on another's knowledge. If that were the case, I could send every one of you to hell by my knowledge. If that were the case, man's perishing would not be determined by himself, but by some others. We know that there can be no such thing. The Bible says that all who believe in the Lord Jesus will have eternal life. Whether or not a man will perish before God depends on whether he believes in the Lord Jesus. How could others bring me to hell? This is absolutely unscriptural. Concerning the use of the word perishing, we can say that perishing here does not refer to the matter of eternal life and death. Rather, it refers to the damaging of the conscience and the bringing of a person under.

Let us go on. Verse 12 says, "And sinning in this way against the brothers and wounding their weak conscience, you sin against Christ." The sinning against the brothers here refers to the causing of the weak brother to perish through knowledge in verse 11. The sinning in verse 12 refers to the causing to perish in verse 11. Verse 12 says that when you cause your brother to perish because of your knowledge, you are wounding his weak conscience. Hence, the perishing mentioned in the previous verse refers to the wounding of the conscience. This does not refer to eternal life or eternal death and perdition.

Verse 13 goes on to tell us what it is to wound their conscience. "Therefore if food stumbles my brother, I shall by no means eat meat forever, that I may not stumble my brother." If you put the three verses together, you will see what perishing here means. To perish is to have the brother's weak conscience wounded, and to wound the weak conscience of the brother is to cause the brother to stumble. Therefore, verses 11, 12, and 13 are three rings that are linked together. They show us what perishing is. What is covered here is absolutely not the perishing in relation to salvation. If you insist on explaining it this way, saying that a saved person will perish, you will find this argument hard to support. You will have a hard time explaining it that way.

THE ARGUMENT BASED ON JAMES 5:20

James 5:19-20 says, "My brothers, if any one among you is led astray from the truth and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner back from the error of his way will save that one's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." Some people also infer from these two verses that a saved person can perish. To them, in verse 19 we have the brother. Then in verse 20, we have the sinner. To them, verse 19 says to turn a brother back, and verse 20 says that in turning back the brother, the soul is saved from death. This would mean that some brothers need to turn back, and some need to have their souls saved from death. Would this not say plainly that a brother can lose his salvation?

In order to understand these two verses, there are a few things here that we have to pay attention to. First, James 5:19 and 20 are like a lone mountain. They are not connected to the preceding verses, and they have nothing to follow. All the other Epistles in the Bible have greetings and benedictions. James is the only book that ends this way. Verses 17 and 18 speak of prayer. All of a sudden these few words seem to break in from nowhere. This is a very peculiar thing.

Second, from chapter one until the end, the book of James is on practical love among the brothers and sisters. Because of love, there is the mercy, the care, and the concern for the

brothers. This is what the book of James shows us. From 1:1 to 5:18, there is a continuous line, a definite goal, and a subject. Verses 19 and 20, however, seem to drop down from nowhere. One can say that 1:1 to 5:18 are very organized. But we do not know where these two final verses come from.

Third, in principle, since James 1 through 5 speaks of love expressed in one's conduct, verses 19 and 20 should not deviate from this point. They should also tell us what we should or should not do when we love the brothers. If a sinner continues in the error of his way, and you save him in love, you are saving a soul from death. In addition, you will also cover a multitude of sins. All readers of the Bible know that what covers a multitude of sins is love (1 Pet. 4:8). The many sins spoken of here do not refer to sins before God. They refer to the sins before man. If you turn a sinner from the error of his way, God will no longer remember his sins and will cast them into the deep sea. All his sins will be under the blood. Now what about us? Suppose Brother Yuan was a very evil man before he became a Christian. His past history is very black and unseemly. I know his past history and stories of his past. I could lay them out and expose them. But if I expose his sins of the past, I am acting contrary to God's will. God has cast his sins into the sea. After we are saved, God does not mention our past sins any longer. When I see a brother, I have to cover his past because among us God has covered our past sins.

Verse 20 is on the matter of principle, and verse 19 is on the matter of example. In other words, verse 20 is the formula, the law, and the principle of action, whereas verse 19 is the case study and the individual incident. Verse 20 says that if anyone turns a person, he will not die and his sins will be covered before God and before men. Verse 19 shows us what happens when one brother among us is led astray from the truth or has erred in his way. We have to turn him back. The exhortation in verse 19 is based upon the principle in verse 20. If you see a brother in the church led astray from the truth, you have to recover him. When a sinner is turned, his soul will not die and his many sins will be covered. This being the case, how much more should we do the same on behalf of a brother? What James was saying here was that we should do unto the brothers as one would do unto the sinners. James is telling us here that a Christian should treat his brothers and sisters with love and should recover them. This portion is not speaking of a brother perishing.

THE ARGUMENT BASED ON HEBREWS 6:6

Now we have to consider Hebrews 6:1-8. This passage presents the greatest problem in the Bible. Almost all the ones who doubt that salvation is eternal take Hebrews 6 as their city of refuge. All of them dig their support material from here. They argue that if a man was saved and now has fallen away, it will be impossible for him to be renewed again to repentance. Would that not mean that such a person is through and is doomed to perish? Because many are not clear, they take this passage as reason for man's perishing.

But we have to realize that the subject of Hebrews 6 is not salvation. It has nothing to do with salvation at all. If one wants to understand this passage, he must begin from the end of chapter five. There it says that many who should be eating solid food are still taking milk. According to their age, this group of believers should have been the teachers already. But they were still like

babes and were not progressing, but were staying at the same place. Hence, chapter six begins by saying, "Therefore leaving the word of the beginning of Christ, let us be brought on to maturity." The subject of Hebrews 6:1 is therefore progress, and not salvation. If you put the subject of salvation in, surely you will encounter difficulty. The purpose of this chapter is to tell others how to progress, and not to tell us how to be saved. The first thing we must take note of is that the topic here is on progress to maturity, not regressing to perdition.

The apostle was here talking about being brought on to maturity. Verses 1 through 8 can be divided into three sections. We can use three words to represent these three sections. The first section is on having no need, the second section is on having no possibility, and the third section is on having no right. This portion tells the Hebrew believers from these three standpoints that they have to progress. First, they have to leave the word of the beginning of Christ and should not lay again a foundation. The word of the beginning of Christ is like the cornerstone in a building. In building a wall, a person does not need two foundations. The apostle said that these ones had been talking about foundational things. But the foundation was laid already; there was no need to lay the foundation again. The word of the beginning of Christ are teachings such as repentance from dead works, faith in God, baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. All these are the words of the beginning of Christ. The apostle said that these need to be done only once. There was no need to do them again. He was exhorting them to go on to perfection.

The second section requires an introduction. Before we read verse 4, let me first tell you about this introduction. Before the apostle wrote verse 4, he anticipated that these ones would ask, "If you say that we should not lay again the foundation, what then should we do if we sin again? If a person has failed, backslidden, and sinned, does he not have to lay again the foundation?" Here the apostle said something in anticipation of their question. "For it is impossible for those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift..." If you have a Greek New Testament in your hand, you will see that the word once according to the grammar of the original language does not refer only to the first item of the list, but to every item in the list. It should read, "...those who have once been enlightened, and who have once tasted of the heavenly gift, and have once become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have once tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come..." This is very clear in the original text. Here is a man who has been enlightened, has tasted of the heavenly gift, and has become a partaker of the Holy Spirit, and has tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come. The age to come is the millennium. This one has tasted the powers of the millennium. In other words, he has seen and tasted miracles, wonders, healings, and the casting out of demons. If such a one falls away, it is impossible for him to be renewed again to repentance. "And yet have fallen away..." One British brother who studied Greek and who specialized in the book of Hebrews for his whole lifetime said that the falling away here means to have a slip of the foot. When it says that it is impossible to again renew themselves unto repentance, many think that it means perdition. But this explanation is not valid.

If there is a man who has once been enlightened, who has once tasted of the heavenly gift, who has once become a partaker of the Holy Spirit, who has once tasted the good word of God and

once tasted the powers of the age to come, is it possible that such a one cannot any longer repent once he makes a slip? Are there cases of fallen Christians who have risen up again? The Word of God tells us that indeed there have been many, and church history also tells us that indeed there were many. Many Christians who had once slipped eventually became the best runners of the heavenly kingdom course. Beginning from Peter, there have been countless Christians who have fallen and have risen up again. If there were no possibility for these to rise up again, then Peter would have been the first one that could not have risen up. He slipped terribly. We can say that he had fallen flat on his face. Peter was not the only one. Throughout the two thousand years of church history, countless Christians have failed. But eventually they became the best testimonies. I can enumerate countless proofs of this. If what was said before was right, then there should not have been a single one; if there is one, the Bible would be wrong.

In this passage, there is a word in the original text, *palin*, which means again. There is also another word, *anakainizo*, right after this word, which means to renew. Hence, according to the original text, this part should be translated as "once having slipped, it is impossible to again renew to repentance." The apostle was telling the Hebrew believers here that the repentance from dead works, the faith in God, the teaching of baptisms and of the laying on of hands, of the resurrection of the dead and of eternal judgment, are all words of the beginning of Christ. If they have once been enlightened, once tasted of the heavenly gift, once partaken of the Holy Spirit, once tasted the good word of God, and once tasted the powers of the age to come, and have then slipped, they cannot lay again the foundation and cannot again be renewed to repentance.

Please remember that the repentance here is the foundation spoken of in the first section. The repentance here does not mean repentance in general, for in the previous verses there are six items of the words of the beginning of the Christ. The first is repentance from dead works. Hence, we cannot take the repentance we have in our concept and equate it to the repentance here. We must consider the context of the Scripture, and we must expound it according to the thought of the apostle. The repentance spoken of by the apostle is the same as the repentance from dead works in verse 1. The meaning here is that after a man has believed in God and has been baptized, and after he has understood the coming judgment and the truth of resurrection, and has repented of dead works, he cannot repent again for what he has repented of. Once he is baptized, he cannot be baptized again. Once he has believed in the teaching of judgment, he cannot try to believe again. Once he has believed in the teaching of resurrection, he cannot try to believe again. The word repentance here includes all six items mentioned above. The apostle did not repeat the words "to renew again" as many times as I did: to renew again the repentance from dead works, to renew again faith toward God, and to renew again this and that. He only needed to use the words to renew again once. If there had never been anything yet, we would use the words to begin. But if there was something already, we would use the words to renew again. The apostle was afraid that we would not understand the meaning of renew, *anakainizo*. Hence, he added a further word again, *palin*. Hence, the repentance spoken of in verse 6 must refer to the repentance in verse 1. If the repentance in verse 1 were mentioned as the second item, we might not be very clear. But thank the Lord, it is placed as the first item. As long as it is the first item, we know that all the other items are like this one.

The apostle was saying that the word of the beginning of Christ can be compared to the foundation. For one to be a Christian, first there is the need for the repentance from dead works, to judge his sins. Then he has to have faith in God, to be baptized, to have the laying on of hands, and to believe in the resurrection of the dead and the eternal judgment. All these are foundational matters. Once the foundation has been laid, there is no need to lay it again. While one is building on this foundation, even if his foot slips, there is no need to lay again the foundation. Even if one wants to lay a foundation again, it is impossible to do so. For example, Brother Wu has just come into the meeting hall from the main entrance on Wen-teh Lane. After he came into the alley from the entrance, and as he was turning the corner to come into the building, he slipped. What then should he do? His goal is to come to the meeting. Now he has slipped. He does not need to start all the way from Wen-teh Lane again. He can rise up from where he has slipped. The apostle was saying that once a person has been enlightened and has tasted of the heavenly gift, if he slips, he cannot repent from dead works again, believe in God again, be baptized again, have the laying on of hands again, and believe in resurrection and eternal judgment again. In other words, the apostle has no intention to say that a man can perish again after he is saved. What he means is that after a Christian is regenerated, he cannot be re-regenerated. At most we can be regenerated once. The apostle was not saying that one is not allowed to repent again. He was saying that it is impossible to repent by starting all over again.

The next part of verse 6 says, "Crucifying again for themselves the Son of God and putting Him to open shame." Some have said that to fall is to crucify the Son of God again. Who can crucify the Lord again? The work of the Lord Jesus was accomplished once for all. He was not like the bull and the goat, which must be slaughtered when they are needed. On your side, you cannot renew your repentance. On the Lord's side, He cannot renew the crucifixion. If you have to renew your repentance, that means that the Lord Jesus will have to renew His crucifixion. If that were the case, then you would be putting the Lord to open shame. You would be saying that the Lord Jesus' onetime crucifixion was not enough, that there have to be more crucifixions. Hence, this is not a question of salvation and perdition here.

In the previous messages, we have seen that eternal salvation is a fact that cannot be overturned. If there is a fallen and backslidden Christian among us, who was once clearly saved and was clear about God's salvation, for him to rise up again does not require a fresh start. As long as he would rise up today, that is all that is needed. There is no possibility of crucifying the Lord Jesus again and putting Him to open shame.

In the last section in verses 7 and 8, not only was the apostle saying that there is no need and that there is no possibility, but he went on to say, in a more serious way, that there is no right. Why do we not have the right? It is because a laying again of the foundation would crucify again the Lord Jesus. If one does that, there would be serious danger ahead of him; he would suffer great punishment. "For the earth, which drinks the rain which often comes upon it and brings forth vegetation suitable to those for whose sake also it is cultivated, partakes of blessing from God. But if it brings forth thorns and thistles, it is disapproved and near a curse, whose end is to be burned." We will leave the detailed discussion of this passage until later. After one reads

Hebrews 6, he can see that this chapter speaks of the matter of progress. It is not on the question of salvation or perdition. Hebrews 6 never tells us that a saved person can perish.

FOUR THINGS TO BE DIFFERENTIATED

Here we have to consider again the four things mentioned in the Bible. They are the four things that must be distinguished one from the other, which we mentioned earlier. If a man wants to understand salvation, first, he has to differentiate between the genuine Christian and the false Christian. Second, he must differentiate between the discipline of the believers and eternal salvation. Eternal salvation is one thing, and God's discipline of His children is another. It is one thing for a Christian to be chastised in this age. It is another thing for an unbeliever to perish in eternity. A Christian will not perish eternally, but he can be chastised. There are many verses that speak of chastisement for a Christian. One cannot apply these verses to salvation.

Third, there is a great difference between the kingdom and eternal life. In other words, there is a great difference between reward and gift. It is one thing for you to be saved. It is another thing for you to reign, to rule, and to share the glory with the Lord Jesus in the millennium. There are many places in the Bible that speak about a person being removed from the kingdom. Because many are not clear about the difference between the kingdom and eternal life, the reward and salvation, they apply the verses on the kingdom to the matter of salvation. Many think that to be removed from the kingdom means to perish. These, however, are two entirely different things. A Christian can lose his position in the kingdom, but a Christian cannot lose his position in salvation. Although a Christian can lose his position of reigning together with Christ, he cannot lose his position of being a child of God.

Fourth, not only does the Bible say that a Christian will suffer discipline today, and not only does it say that some Christians can lose the kingdom, but there are definite punishments for a Christian in the kingdom as well. The Bible says that many Christians will suffer discipline in this age. They will lose the reward in the coming age and will also suffer punishment. A Christian can lose his reward in the future. He can also be punished with definite, positive punishments. But one cannot mix the punishment in the millennium with eternal perdition. Eternal perdition is one thing. Chastisement in the kingdom is another. When a Christian is chastised, it does not mean that he will perish eternally. Salvation is eternal. Chastisement is only a discipline in the family. If some children cannot be disciplined well in this age, they will be disciplined in the coming age. Hence, there are four things here that must be distinguished one from the other. The four things, the false Christians, the chastisement in this age, the losing of the kingdom, and the punishment in the millennium, are different from eternal life and death.

Let us now consider the first group, the false Christians. Second Peter 2:1 says, "But there arose also false prophets among the people, as also among you there will be false teachers, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction." Some would ask if this verse indicates that a Christian can perish. The ones mentioned here are those that have been bought by the Lord. Some will say that this verse obviously says that a Christian can perish, because it says here that they have followed the heresies and have denied the Master who bought them, and their end is swift destruction.

But please remember a few things. Here it mentions the Master who bought them. The word bought is used in a particular way. Does the word convey the sense that the bought ones are the saved ones? If these bought ones are the saved ones, then we have to admit that a saved person can perish. But if this word has a different meaning, then one cannot say this any longer. It is true that the Bible tells us that we are bought by the Lord with a price. But we have to see the scope of what the Lord Jesus bought on the cross. Did He buy the believers only, or did He buy the whole world? From the Bible we can see that the Lord did not buy the believers only, but He bought the whole world as well. Matthew 13:44 says, "The kingdom of the heavens is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid, and in his joy goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field." This shows us that the Lord Jesus sold whatever He had to buy the treasure. But not only did He buy the treasure, He bought the field as well. The treasure is a small part, but the field is a big part. The treasure is in the field. In order to obtain the treasure, the Lord bought the whole field. The purpose of buying the field was not for the field, but for the treasure. Please remember that the purpose of the Lord's buying was for the small part, but He bought the big part. His purpose is to get the treasure, but the scope of His buying was the field. Those in the kingdom of the heavens are the treasure. But what the Lord bought was the field.

Hence, we cannot say that everyone that is bought by the Lord is saved. The scope of buying is greater than the scope of salvation. The work of buying and redemption on His cross is different from His work of substitution. The Lord's substitution is only for all the believers, but He died for the whole world. He made the scope wide enough. But this does not mean that the whole world is saved. If Peter were to change a word here, if he were to say "denying the Master who saved them," then it would be very serious. But Peter has used a big enough word. He said "denying the Master who bought them." Hence, we can see that this group of people has not been saved at all. This word bought is a very broad word. By this word alone, one cannot say that they are saved.

Second, the word Master, despotes, here is not a common word either. It should not be translated as lord, but should be translated as master. It is not the Lord as in the Lord Jesus, but the Master as one who has temporal control of a person. It refers to an earthly master. There is no life relationship here. According to a strict interpretation of the Bible, this is not a relationship between them and the Lord, but a relationship between them and their master. Hence, this group of people has not been saved at all. No one can say, Jesus is Lord, except in the Holy Spirit, for whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. These ones are like Judas. They have never confessed Jesus as Lord.

Third, Peter tells us that this group of people are the false teachers and the false believers. Peter also told us that there were false prophets among the people. He also said that there will be false teachers. These false prophets refer to the false prophets in the Old Testament. All the readers of the Bible know that no false prophet in the Old Testament was saved. We can say boldly that this group of people have not been saved at all. They followed their cleverness and their ideas, secretly bringing in destructive heresies, and even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. Hence, 2 Peter 2:1 does not refer to the perdition of the saved ones.

There are more words in the Bible like these. All of them refer to the nominal believers. They do not refer to the perdition of the saved ones. Some have argued about a few words at the end of chapter two. Verse 20 says, "For if, having escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ but having again been entangled in these, they are defeated, the last state has become worse for them than the first." Verse 22 says, "It has happened to them according to the true proverb: 'The dog has turned to its own vomit, and the washed sow to wallowing in the mud.'" Based on the words of verse 20, some have thought that these ones refer to the saved ones, because it says plainly that these ones have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; surely such ones were saved.

But please note that Peter was very careful in the way he spoke. Verse 20 says that these ones have the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and that they have escaped the defilements of the world. But verse 22 tells us who these people really are. If there were only verse 20, we might think that these are the saved ones. But if we read verse 22, we will know who they are. "It has happened to them according to the true proverb: 'The dog has turned to its own vomit, and the washed sow to wallowing in the mud.'" It says that although these ones have escaped the defilements of the world, and outwardly they have the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they were later entangled again, and their last state has become worse. These people are simply dogs and sows.

The Lord Jesus has never said that He gives to His dogs eternal life. Nor has He ever said that His dogs will never perish. The Lord said that He gives eternal life to the sheep. He never mixes the sheep with the dogs. He cannot say that He gives eternal life to the sows and the dogs, nor can He say that the sheep have been entangled by the defilements of the world. These two kinds of people can never be mixed together. Many who have heard the gospel would say that Jesus is Lord and Savior. They can quickly tell you about doctrines related to the Lord. Outwardly they do not have any defilements. But actually they have never been regenerated. They have never received the Lord and have never experienced the Lord living in them. They only confess the Lord temporarily. They have removed a little of the outward defilements. But when sentiments change, they go back to their old ways. The last state of this kind of people is worse than their first state. These are not the sheep at all. They are the dogs and the sows. Because they are the dogs, they turn to their own vomit. Because they are the sows, they wallow in the mud after they have been cleansed without. This does not mean that Christians will not sin, and it does not mean that they will not touch the mud or wallow in the mud. A Christian may touch the mud; he may wallow in the mud. But for a Christian to wallow in the mud is an uncomfortable thing. If he is comfortable in wallowing in it, then he has to be a sow. A Christian could perhaps also swallow his own vomit. But he will feel that it is repulsive, and he will be uncomfortable if he does that. This is the difference between the sow, the dog, and the sheep. One has to identify clearly the nature of the dog and the sow. In the Bible, sows and dogs refer to the unsaved ones. They do not refer to the saved ones. If a person is a sheep, he will never perish.