

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### **SALVATION BEING ETERNAL— ARGUMENTS AGAINST IT**

#### **(3)**

In this message we will continue to look at the verses which seem to argue against salvation being eternal.

#### **THE ARGUMENT BASED ON 2 CORINTHIANS 2:7**

Second Corinthians 2:6-7 says, "Sufficient for such a one is this punishment by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with excessive sorrow." In some translations, the words "swallowed up" are translated as "perish." A brother in Corinth had received punishment by the majority because of his sin. Paul was concerned that the brothers and sisters had dealt with him too severely. He asked them to forgive and encourage such a one, lest he should "perish" with excessive sorrow. Some may argue that if excessive sorrow can cause such a one to perish, is this not an indication that a believer can still perish?

We must realize that this brother is the same one that is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5. This one committed a gross sin, the sin of fornication of an abnormal sort. Paul said that such a one needs to be removed (vv. 2, 13). The saints in Corinth took Paul's word and removed him. After being removed, he realized that he was sinful, and was in much sorrow and agony over his sin. Paul told the saints in his second Epistle that they had to comfort and encourage him, lest he be swallowed up with excessive sorrow. If we are careless, we may think that "perish" here means to go to hell. Yet Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:5 says "to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord." Based on this word, we can say boldly that such a one was saved. What is mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:7 is definitely not a matter of the perishing of the spirit.

Second, the word for "be swallowed up" is not a commonly used word. It is a special word in Greek. The word *katapino* denotes something being swallowed up, as a ship sinking in the sea and being swallowed up by it. After such a brother sinned and was excommunicated, he repented. He thought that he was excommunicated and fully rejected. He thought that he had lost all hope. Therefore, he continued in his sorrow and agony. Paul's thought is that if the church would not forgive and comfort him right away, he would be swallowed up by sorrow. This is not a matter of the saving or the perishing of the soul.

#### **THE ARGUMENT BASED ON 2 PETER 3:16**

Let us look at another passage. Second Peter 3:16 says, "As also in all his letters, speaking in them concerning these things, in which some things are hard to understand, which the unlearned and unstable twist, as also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction." Some would argue

after reading this word that Peter is telling us that Paul's letters were hard to understand, and that some who are unlearned and unstable, that is, untaught and unestablished, bring in their own destruction by twisting Paul's letters. If they can be destroyed, does this not indicate that they will perish? Will a saved person perish? In this case Peter is not talking about eternal perdition at all.

According to the Bible, whether one perishes or not does not depend on the way that he interprets the Scripture. Today in China, I have seen a number of good Christians who love the Lord and who labor everywhere in the gospel work. Yet they do not really understand Paul's letters. When they preach, they do more than twist the word of the Scriptures. Are these Christians going to perish? Can a wrong exposition of the Scriptures be a factor of perdition? The Bible never makes a sound exposition of the Bible a condition for salvation. Hence, Peter's word here must mean something else.

Second, the word *apoleia* in Greek does not refer to an ordinary kind of destruction. It is different from the one used in 2 Corinthians 2:7. It is different from the usual word for "perdition." In Greek, this word, *apollyon*, means to destroy or to be corrupted. If something is taken from you smoothly, it is a "taking"; if something is wrung out of your hands by force, it is an *apollyon*. What Peter meant in his Epistle is that some misunderstood Paul's letters and did not have light from God. They twisted his word in the same way that something is wrung out of a person's hand. In so doing, they were destroying themselves and not building up themselves. Destruction is the opposite of building. If you are not being built up, you are being destroyed. By so doing, you will not be built up but will have your work destroyed. Hence, these two verses do not tell us that a man can perish after being saved. They tell us of those whose work and living after salvation are not perfected, and who are unable to be built up day by day. If you twist Paul's Epistles, you are destroying what you already have.

## **THE ARGUMENT BASED ON HEBREWS 10:26**

There is another portion of Scripture that we must mention. It is also a passage that many do not understand. Hebrews 10:26-29 says, "For when we sin willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice of bulls and goats for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fervor of fire, which is to consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without compassion on the testimony of two or three witnesses. By how much do you think he will be thought worthy of worse punishment who has trampled underfoot the Son of God and has considered the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing and has insulted the Spirit of grace?" The person mentioned in this portion of the Word must be saved, because he has already had the sacrifice for sins. The apostle said that if one who already had the sacrifice for sins sinned willfully, there would be no more sacrifice for sins. We have no problem after verse 27. However, the verse that many readers of the Bible find difficult to understand is verse 26, which says, "There no longer remains a sacrifice of bulls and goats for sins." Some people think that if, unfortunately, a Christian commits sins willfully, there will be no more sacrifice for sins for him. In this case, it would mean that he will surely perish. Hebrews 10:26 is a problem to many people. When I was first saved, I also thought that this verse was a big problem. For over a year, I considered myself unsaved because of this verse. For this reason, we have to spend an amount of time to find out what Hebrews 10:26 speaks of.

The first thing that we need to mention is the word "willfully." What is meant by "willfully"? Does this word mean "consciously"? This may be the answer that we would give. But I would ask if there are many Christians who sin unconsciously? Every day we sin. Yet how many times do we sin unconsciously? I believe that probably every time we sin, we sin "willfully." Very few people commit sins unconsciously. Most of the time, we sin "willfully." In Romans 7, Paul says, "For what I work out, I do not acknowledge; for what I will, this I do not practice; but what I hate, this I do" (v. 15). By this we know that Paul did not fall into sin accidentally. All of his sins were committed after he was fully conscious of their wrong. Hence, it is clear from Romans 7 that all of Paul's sins were committed "willfully." If Paul sinned "willfully," then according to Hebrews 10:26, there would remain no longer any sacrifice for sins. If a person perished and went to hell, he would see Paul there, because even Paul had no more sacrifice for sins. Hence, we need to see that the word "willfully" in Hebrews 10:26 does not mean consciously. If this were the case, then all of the Christians would perish. No matter what kind of Christian you may be, countless times in your life, you sin consciously rather than unconsciously. If the above situation were true, no Christian would be saved. Hence, "willfully" here must mean something else.

A second point is that verse 26 begins with the word "for." For this particular word to be used at the beginning of a sentence, something has gone on prior to its use. This word cannot be used without a preceding sentence. In verses 26 through 29, the first sentence begins with "for," which means that there was something mentioned before. Prior to this, verse 25 says, "Not abandoning our own assembling together, as the custom with some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more as you see the day drawing near." Why should we not abandon our own assembling together, but exhort one another? It is because when we sin willfully after receiving the full knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins. If we do not read this portion carefully, we will not realize that these two verses go together. If we read it carefully, we will realize that these two verses are linked together. They are very meaningful. We must realize that not abandoning our own assembling together and sinning willfully go together. We must not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, but exhort one another, for when we sin willfully, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins. Negatively, we should not forsake the assembling of ourselves together. Positively, we must not sin willfully. If we assemble ourselves together, then we are not ones who sin willfully. If we customarily forsake the assembling of ourselves together, we are ones who sin willfully. Here, the apostle put the abandoning of our assembling and sinning willfully together. Why is there such a close relationship between abandoning the assembling of ourselves and sinning willfully? At this juncture we must come to the third point. We have to know the background of the book of Hebrews. Who were the ones mentioned in this book? They were the Jews who believed in the Lord Jesus. Hence, the book of Hebrews was written to believing Jews. The position of the Jews is different from that of the Gentiles. The Gentiles have the spiritual position only and not the earthly, physical position. The Jews have both a spiritual and a physical position. They have a heavenly as well as an earthly position. Today when we speak of the Holy of Holies, immediately we think of a place where God dwells in heaven. But to the Jews, when they consider the Holy of Holies, what occurs in their thought is the Holy of Holies inside the temple at Jerusalem on Mount Moriah. Not only do the Jews have a Holy of Holies in heaven, but they also have a Holy of Holies on the earth. Not only do they have a temple in heaven, but a temple on earth also. Thus, in their mind, there is the spiritual aspect as well as the physical aspect, the heavenly aspect as well as the earthly. They

have the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. They still have the physical Holy of Holies, and with it the offerings.

To us, the sacrifice for sins is the Lord Jesus Christ; He is our sin offering. Yet, the Jews were still not clear whether the Lord Jesus Christ or bulls and goats was their sacrifice for sins. At that time, they still had the priests, the altar, and the sacrifices of bulls and goats on the altar. Not only did they have the spiritual sacrifice for sins, they also had the earthly sacrifices for sins. Christians and Jews do not stand on the same ground. The Gentile believers are different from the Hebrew believers. In A.D. 70 the Roman prince Titus destroyed the temple at Jerusalem, and not one stone was left upon another. However, when the book of Hebrews was written, the earthly temple was still there, and the sacrifices were still being offered. After a number of Jews had believed in the Lord Jesus, they had to make a decision whether they wanted the earthly altar or the heavenly one, the earthly sacrifices or the heavenly sacrifice. At that time, the Jews could not have both the heavenly and the earthly sacrifices at the same time. Everyone who reads the book of Hebrews knows that this book was written with the purpose that Christians would forsake Judaism and would accept Christianity. The purpose of the book of Hebrews is to encourage the Christians to drop the earthly sacrifices and to accept the heavenly sacrifice. This is the background of the book.

Therefore, when it says that one should not abandon the assembling of oneself together, it does not mean that the assembling of Christians can save them or qualify them to have eternal life. The assembling of Christians indicates whether a believer wants Judaism or Christ. The assembling of ourselves becomes an expression of our attitude toward Christ. At that time, all those who assembled together were Christians. No matter if you were a Gentile or a Jew, if you assembled together, you were a Christian. Hence, assembling together became a sign of accepting Christ, and forsaking the assembling together was a sign of forsaking Christ to embrace Judaism. In the same way, sinning willfully here does not refer to things such as murder, arson, eating, drinking, gambling, and licentiousness. Sinning willfully here does not refer to moral sins; it refers to doctrinal sins. This does not pertain to whether or not your walk is proper. This refers to the fact of whether or not you receive Christ or Judaism. To assemble yourselves together means that you want Christ and that you stand on the ground of Christ. To abandon the assembling together shows that you have your back toward Christ and that your face is toward Judaism. To abandon the assembling means that you want the earthly temple, the earthly altar, and the earthly sacrifices. This indicates that you want to go back to Judaism and forsake Christ. If this is the fact, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.

Now let us return to the first point. Verse 26 says, "After receiving the knowledge of the truth." It does not say, "After being regenerated," nor does it say, "After our sinful deeds are washed away." If it had said, "After being regenerated" or "After being washed," then to sin willfully would be a matter of our conduct. However, it says, "After receiving the knowledge of the truth"; it is a matter of knowing. Do we know what the truth is? The truth is the faith of a Christian. The truth is that God sent His Son into the world that He would become the sin offering. The truth is that God sent His Son to die for us and resurrect to satisfy all of God's requirements. All of these have to do with the items of faith on God's side. Hence, to sin willfully does not mean transgressions in life. It means to sin against the truth. This is not a behavioral sin, but a doctrinal

sin, and a sin regarding one's belief. This is a sin that opposes the faith and the truth, after receiving the full knowledge of the truth.

The Hebrew believers were Jews and had been in Judaism for years. Now that they were Christians, if they still wanted to go back to Judaism, if they still wanted both, that is, if they wanted to stand on the ground of Judaism and also wanted to stand on the ground of Christianity, there would no longer remain a sacrifice for sins. In ancient times, the Chinese worshipped idols. The Temple of Heaven in Beijing was the place where emperors offered sacrifices. There men killed bulls and offered them to the highest deity in heaven. It was the earthly emperor offering up sacrifices to the highest deity in heaven in order to redeem the sins of the people. Suppose the earthly emperor believed in the Lord Jesus. Do you think that he could go back to the Temple of Heaven to offer sacrifices? After he received Christ as the sacrifice for sin, he could not go back to the Temple of Heaven to offer sacrifices anymore. Either he took the Temple of Heaven or the Lord Jesus. This is what the Bible means by sinning willfully. This is not a matter of sin in our conduct.

Verse 26 continues, "There no longer remains a sacrifice of bulls and goats for sins." The words "no longer" mean "again." Whenever the words "no longer" appear, this shows that there must be something in the foregoing verses. Some misunderstand the Word of God. They think that the sentence, "There no longer remains a sacrifice of bulls and goats for sins" implies perdition. This is absolutely not God's thought.

We have to look at Hebrews 7:27b, which says, "For this He did once for all when He offered up Himself." This tells us that after the Lord Jesus offered up Himself once before God as the sacrifice for sins, everything was fully accomplished. Please take heed to the word "once." Let us take a look at Hebrews 9:12b, which says, "Entered once for all into the Holy of Holies, obtaining an eternal redemption." Here it tells us again that the Lord Jesus offered Himself only once, and then the work of redemption was eternally accomplished. Let us look at the word "once" again. Hebrews 9:25-28 says, "Nor in order that He might offer Himself often, just as the high priest enters into the Holy of Holies year by year by the blood of other creatures; since then He would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world. But now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested for the putting away of sin through the sacrifice of Himself. And inasmuch as it is reserved for men to die once, and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time to those who eagerly await Him, apart from sin, unto salvation." Twice these verses mention "often," and twice the word "once" is used in reference to Christ. Not often, but once for all, Christ offered Himself up before God as the sacrifice for sins and completed the work of redemption. Please take heed to the word "often" and the word "once" here.

Hebrews 10:10 says, "By which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Verse 12 says, "But this One, having offered one sacrifice for sins, sat down forever on the right hand of God." Verse 14 continues, "For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified." The earthly priests had to offer sacrifices to God time after time. Yet, Christ offered Himself only

once, and we are sanctified. After Christ offered Himself once as the eternal sacrifice, He sat down on the right hand of God. He sat down because He does not have to work anymore. He offered Himself once, and we are eternally perfected. Since He has already completed His work, there is no problem anymore.

Therefore, after reading so many verses, we can know the meaning of the verse, "There no longer remains a sacrifice of bulls and goats for sins." The portion of Hebrews from chapters seven through ten, with the exception of chapter eight, says that the work of redemption, once finished, is eternally accomplished. If you do not want Christ, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins. Christ only offered Himself once as the sacrifice for sins. If you do not want the redemption of Christ, but turn to Judaism, you will no longer find any other sacrifice for sins. So, it is not a matter of being saved or perishing here. What is said here is that the work of Christ is accomplished once. If you do not want this sacrifice, you will no longer have a second one.

If you take heed to the words "no longer," you will see what they are linked to. The foregoing verses repeatedly mention the words "once for all," and the following verse says, "There no longer remains." It is equivalent to saying, for example, in chapter eight, "Here is the only pencil." Then in chapter nine I repeat, "Here is the only pencil." Again in chapter ten I say, "Here is the only pencil." After this I may explain, "If you do not want this pencil, or if you want to exchange this for another one, there will not be another one. Take this one if you want it. If you do not want it, there is no other one left for you." This verse does not mean that after receiving the knowledge of the truth, and then sinning willfully, you will not receive forgiveness anymore. This is not a matter of sin. This is a matter of the truth, a matter of the Christian faith. If you forsake the Christian faith and look for another Savior, another sacrifice for sins, you will not find it.

Some of the Jews at that time probably thought that if they rejected the Christian faith, they could still go back to the temple. They could still go back to the altar and have the priests offer bulls and goats for them. But this would indicate another sacrifice for sins. The Jews during that time still had the priests and the altar. Their believing in Christ was different from our believing in Christ. To them, they could choose to believe or not to believe. They were not like the Gentile believers, who could only go back to idol worship if they did not believe. If the Gentile believers wanted God, they could choose God. But if they did not want God, their only choice would be the world. They did not have a third choice. With the Jews, it was different. The Jews thought that if they did not want Christ, they could still be saved. If they did not want Christ, they could still have redemption for sins, because they still could keep the priests and the offerings. If they had more money, they could buy a bull. If they did not have that much money, they could still purchase a goat.

The apostle was telling the Jews that Christ had already offered Himself once for all and had completed the eternal redemptive work before God. God had already abolished the old covenant together with the old sacrifices. Before the coming of Christ, the bulls and goats could atone for their sins. But after the coming of Christ, the sacrifices of the bulls and goats could no longer take away their sins; these sacrifices have actually been abolished. This is what Hebrews chapters seven through ten point out. God not only

gave His Son as the sacrifice, but He abolished the sacrifices of bulls and goats. The first half of chapter ten mentions that God does not take pleasure in bulls and goats, nor does He take pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sins. God prepared His Son. Bulls and goats cannot redeem men from their sins. Only His Son can redeem us from sins. The sacrifice of bulls and goats in the Old Testament were only types and shadows. They refer to the Son of God as the sacrifice. God said that the old covenant is a thing of the past; the types are over, and the reality is here. It will no longer be acceptable if they reject God's Son, that is, if they reject the reality and offer up the types. According to God, there is only one sacrifice for sins. Besides Him, there is no other sacrifice for sins. Hebrews 10:26 tells us that if we forsake Christ to look for another Savior, we will not find one.

Hence, strictly speaking, this portion is not for us at all. If some say that after a man receives the Lord Jesus and sins willfully, he will perish, this will contradict the context of the passage; it will also contradict the entire book of Hebrews. The speaking here is about a doctrinal issue. Hebrews shows us that besides the name of Jesus Christ, "there is salvation in no other, for neither is there another name under heaven given among men in which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). This does not mean that a Christian will go to hell if he sins.

Hebrews 10:27 says, "But a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fervor of fire, which is to consume the adversaries." After receiving the knowledge of the truth, and after having a clear knowledge that the Lord Jesus Christ is the God-ordained sacrifice for sins, if the Jewish believers forsake the assembling of themselves and reject Christ, and if they go back to Judaism to look for other sacrifices for sins, there will no longer remain any sacrifice for sins. They can only expect judgment in fear and the fervor of fire that consumes the adversaries. Before they were saved, they could depend on bulls and goats to atone for their sins. But after they realize that the Lord Jesus is the only Savior, they cannot depend on bulls and goats anymore. If they reject the Lord Jesus, they can only expect a fearful judgment and fervor of fire about to consume the adversaries. They can only take the Lord Jesus as the Savior. Besides Him, there is no other way of salvation. All of the bulls and goats point to Christ. Bulls and goats are but types of Christ. Christ is the reality of the bulls and goats. It is impossible for them to reject the reality of the bulls and goats and ask for the types instead. Hence, Hebrews 10:26-27 never says that after a person is saved he may still perish. This is man's twisting of God's truth.

When we read the Bible, we have to read what is there instead of reading into it what is not there. Someone asked me once how he could understand the Bible. I answered that to understand the Bible, we must first be those who do not understand the Bible. If we do not understand, then we will understand. If we say that we know this and that, then we are not sober-minded. Once we are not sober-minded, we will have problems. Hebrews 6 and 10 should be as easy and simple and clear as John 3:16. The reason the human mind is unclear is that man puts his own words into the Bible. Many people find it difficult to read the Bible, not because the Bible is unclear, but because in their minds they have prejudices and preconceived ideas.