

# THE DOCTRINE OF THE SALVATION OF THE SOUL

BY HUTSON SMELLEY, COPYRIGHT 2019

The purpose of this article is to address and explain the New Testament doctrine of the salvation of the soul. This is information all Christians ought to be aware of. The doctrine is the central point of 1 Peter and so I will build the analysis around a basic exegesis of the prologue of 1 Peter with a focus on the “salvation of the soul” taught about there. But to be clear—this doctrine is pervasive in the New Testament. A proper understanding of this issue, which is bound up with the concept of the bema judgment for believers, our inheritance, and rewards, is often critical in distinguishing whether a particular passage is speaking to salvation from the death penalty of sin or addressing believers about a discipleship issue. With this in mind, we turn to 1 Peter.

1 Peter 1:3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

Following his greeting (vv. 1-2), in what formed the prologue to the book (vv. 3-9), Peter set out the primary subject matter of his epistle, namely their **lively hope**. He began his introduction of this significant concept by praising God, writing **blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**. The reason for giving **God** adoration and praise is that **according to his abundant mercy** He **hath begotten us again**. The phrase **begotten...again** is the Greek *anagennaō* and is used only twice in the New Testament, here and in 1 Peter 1:23. The words translated “born again” in John 3:3 are different. Peter unmistakably spoke of a new birth, sourced in God’s great **mercy** (not human effort), and it was God alone that provided this new birth. The word **mercy** is the Greek *eleos* meaning (according to Strong’s) “compassion (human or divine, especially

active):--(+ tender) mercy.” Paul employed the same term when he wrote: “But God, who is rich in **mercy**, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 2:4-6)

Much could be said from other places in the Bible about God’s mercy and our justification, but we will see in what follows that Peter focused not so much on how or why this new birth was accomplished but on the purpose for which **God** gave us this new birth. In short, Peter spoke to the issue of how believers should live in light of the new birth. We must bear in mind that Peter’s target audience was composed primarily of Jewish believers, and so his central concern in this epistle was not the gospel and how to “get saved” from sin’s penalty, for he affirmed plainly that they were already born again. Rather, it was the purpose and implications of their having been granted the new birth that Peter intended to unravel for his audience, and by application, for us as well. Peter answered the question, “What next?” His focus was on their sanctification. You have been born again and made a child of God, but what comes next? Shall you wait for the day when you are given a harp, a halo and a cloud to rest upon? Or is the reality of the Christian life something far more sobering and spectacular that we are to engage immediately after becoming Christians.

Peter explained first that his readers were born again **unto a lively** or living **hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead**. The preposition **unto** is again the familiar *eis* and is flexible but frequently indicates purpose, so that something is “unto” or “to” in purpose, i.e., with a view to or for the purpose that. That sense will become apparent in this prologue. Peter said they were given a new birth “with a view to” something or “for the purpose that” something. We need to understand what that “something” is. And he began by saying the something is a **lively** or living **hope**.

The Bible never guarantees, and indeed denies, that the Christian life will be an easy one. From the earliest times, there was persecution and even

martyrdom. Jesus told his disciples, “If the world hate you, you know that it hated me before it hated you.” (John 15:18) And aside from persecution, Christians face trials just like everyone else. God does not prevent all trials, but instead uses them to grow us. (e.g., James 1:2-4) Notwithstanding the difficulties and sorrows we may face, the Bible does say a great deal about this concept of **hope**, which Peter will build out. But we do enough for the moment to observe that it is not an empty or uncertain **hope**, like “I am hoping for good weather” or “I hope the fish are biting today.” Rather, our **hope** is rooted in the veracity of God and the certainty that what God says is true. Indeed, as someone has said, reality ever conforms to the Word of God. “[L]et God be true, but every man a liar.” (Romans 3:4) The concept of **hope**, then, is an unwavering conviction that impacts how we live. We see this illustrated by Abraham’s hope in the veracity of God’s promise to him that he would be a father of nations: “Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.” (Romans 4:18)

Peter said the new birth was with a view to a **lively** or living **hope**. So we must seek to understand in what way this **hope** is **lively** or living? The opposite would be a dead **hope**, in other words, a **hope** that is useless, i.e., a hope that does not make a practical difference in our lives. This living **hope** is intended to change us now. It is helpful to consider how the author of Hebrews linked the faith that fuels the Christian life to a **hope** rooted in the Word of God: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1) The eleventh chapter of Hebrews reviews many examples of Christian endurance—believers whose lives in the present were reoriented around God’s Word about the future so that they endured in faithfulness. These examples include Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses and others. They all experienced changed lives because of their firm conviction about the veracity of God’s Word to them. Although God’s Word to them primarily concerned future blessings or future events, their lives changed in the present because they believed God and reoriented their lives around this trust in what God told them. Their hope changed them, and this is the **lively hope** that Peter said is a purpose of the new birth. But **hope**, like faith, requires content, which we will address momentarily.

We are not merely saved from sin's penalty, but our new birth is with a view to our being transformed by a **lively hope** that is made possible **by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead**. **Jesus** rose victorious over sin and death. Because he lives, we also live. This is the substitutionary life of Christ. This living **hope** Peter explained is an aspect of the "newness of life" and "reign[ing] in life" that Paul taught in Romans. We need to understand that what Peter had to say is central to the Christian life. The next verse addressed the content of this **lively hope** that is to transform us.

4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

Peter explained that the new birth is with a view to our having a living hope, which in turn is with a view **to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away**. Thus, it is the **inheritance** that defines the specific content of the hope Peter made the subject of his epistle. But what is this **inheritance**? Remembering that Peter's audience was composed of Jewish believers, this term **inheritance** carried a special meaning to them. Upon hearing the term, they would immediately think of the **inheritance** God promised to national Israel in the Old Testament as He freed them from bondage in Egypt and guided them to the Promise Land, i.e., their inheritance in their time.

Peter made a spiritual application of the familiar Jewish concept of **inheritance**, just as the writer to Hebrews did with the concept of "rest" (inheritance) in the Promise Land. (Hebrews 4) To get hold of the New Testament concept of **inheritance** we need to also understand the notion of heirship, because only heirs receive of the **inheritance**. The Jewish people in the Old Testament understood the concept of heirship, and in particular, that the firstborn son received a double portion of the inheritance from his father. (Deuteronomy 21:17) In the New Testament, we learn that upon his resurrection, Jesus was declared Son, in fulfillment of Psalm 2. (Psalm 2:7-8; Acts 13:33) This declaration of Jesus as Son was a legal declaration (Hebrews 1:5) that Jesus "hath [been] appointed heir of **all things**." (Hebrews 1:2) In Paul's writings, Christians are said to be "in Christ," and indeed, in Christ "we have obtained an

inheritance.” (Ephesians 1:11) We are qualified to inherit because we are heirs through Jesus Christ: “Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.” (Galatians 4:7) And not just heirs, but joint-heirs in Jesus’ inheritance of all things: “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together.” (Romans 8:17)

Peter did not quantify exactly what is included in the **inheritance**, but he explained it is heavenly and permanent. The **inheritance** is **incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away**. The meaning of **incorruptible** is that it is not subject to decay with the passage of time. The **inheritance** is also **undefiled**, meaning it is not soiled in any way. Not only that, it **fadeth not away**, meaning it is eternal in its duration. Reading these words, it is apparent that Peter had in mind Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:19-21 where, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talked about this issue of inheritance in terms of laying up treasure in heaven, i.e., investing our lives in the things of God and, by so doing, laying up in heaven our inheritance:

Matthew 6:19 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: 20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: 21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Recall that the Sermon on the Mount was directed at Jesus’ disciples. (Matthew 5:1-2) He sought to teach them in practical terms about experiential righteousness as contrasted to the empty legalism of so many Jewish religious leaders at that time. Jesus taught them to invest their lives in the things of God and not the accumulation of worldly wealth. I must hasten to add at this point that Jesus was not prohibiting the exercise of diligence and wisdom in financial planning, such as maintaining a savings account or 401K. For Solomon taught that we can learn wisdom from the ant because even ants have the sense to store up food for winter. (Proverbs 6:6 ff.) But clearly, Jesus taught his disciples to

be rich toward God.

Since our lives do not consist of our possessions, we should not invest our lives in the acquisition of things that have only temporal value, but instead lay up treasures in heaven. The **inheritance** Peter referred to is the very same “treasures in heaven” Jesus taught about. We will put more meat on the bones in the notes that follow, but we note that this issue of laying up treasure is not limited to financial giving. Rather, it is about obedience to God’s Word and the investment of one’s life to the things of God, for time and eternity, and that takes many forms. It may be various avenues of service in the local church and generally ministering to those in our respective spheres of influence. But it is broader than that, and in my view would include matters like pouring yourself into the Biblical rearing of your children and caring for elderly parents.

Peter added that this **inheritance... [is] reserved in heaven for you**. The term **reserved** is in the Greek perfect tense, indicating past completed action with continuing consequences. We may have little treasure on earth, but the **inheritance** of the Son that we will share in is safely **reserved in heaven**. But does this mean that the Christian life results in “participation ribbons” for every believer? In other words, can we live any way we please and then all share equally in this **inheritance** in the world to come? The short answer is a resounding “NO.” Or as Paul might say, “God forbid...” (Romans 6:1-2) The treasure is **reserved in heaven** yet Jesus plainly taught to “lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven,” by which he spoke to the issue of appropriating the treasure to our account by our faithful living. We will build out more details about how this **inheritance** is personally appropriated as we continue through Peter’s prologue.

5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time....9 Receiving the end of your faith, *even* the salvation of *your* souls.

Just as the inheritance is kept in heaven, so also are the heirs **kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time**. The word **kept** translates the Greek *phroureō* which means, according to Strong’s, “to be a watcher in advance, i.e. to mount

guard as a sentinel (post spies at gates); figuratively, to hem in, protect....” In other words, it has the sense of being guarded or protected. A common interpretation is that Peter here taught “eternal security,” that is, that a justified or regenerate person cannot lose their justification. While this author agrees the Bible teaches eternal security, what Peter addressed in this context is something different.

To understand better the sense in which believers **are kept** or guarded / protected **by the power of God through faith** we note first that this protection is **unto** (with a view to or for the purpose of) the **salvation ready to be revealed in the last time**. This is a **salvation** in the future, i.e., **in the last time**, and not justification, and as will be further discussed below, this **salvation** relates directly to faithfully living in obedience and is called the **salvation** of the soul. The source of this protection is the **power of God** but the means of that protection is **through** his readers’ **faith**. Thus, it seems best to understand that Peter was speaking of God’s ongoing provision for His people while they lived by **faith** in obedience to God Word so that they would receive this future **salvation**. It is clear from verse 6 that Peter anticipated their going through trials, and so he was not saying his readers were being **kept** from trials or the like. Rather, this verse speaks of their being **kept** through the trials, that is, strengthened and enabled by God to endure in **faith unto the salvation ready to be revealed in the last time**. The opposite of this would be their falling back in the face of adversity and trials. This understanding is confirmed by 1 Peter 4:19, which in the context of suffering and trials, states: “Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls *to him* in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.”

In verse 9, Peter further identified this **salvation** as the **salvation of your souls** that he anticipated his audience **receiving**. The Greek verb translated **receiving** is *komizō*, which has the sense of receiving a wage or something earned. Since we do not earn our salvation from sin’s penalty, justification is not the **salvation** in view. But what is this **salvation** of the soul? For some, any reference to **salvation** brings to mind **salvation** from sin’s penalty, i.e., justification. But the word translates the Greek *soteria*, a very flexible term that means a rescue or

deliverance. When we encounter this term, or the word *sozō* (to save), we must ask what we are being rescued or delivered from, and what we are being delivered to.

We find varied examples including rescue or deliverance from the penalty of sin (Acts 16:31; Ephesians 2:5-8); from a sickness (Matthew 9:21; Mark 5:34; Acts 14:9); from sleep (John 11:12); temporal deliverance from a perverse generation (Acts 2:40); from bondage in Egypt (Acts 7:25); from drowning (Acts 27:20, 31); from dying (Matthew 8:25); from death on the cross (Matthew 27:42); of the soul (1 Peter 1:9). For this reason, to merely assume when we find the words save, saved or **salvation** that deliverance from the penalty of sin is at issue is misguided. As already indicated, the **salvation** Peter had in mind was not the rescue from sin's penalty that occurred at the moment they believed the gospel and trusted Christ as their sin bearer. Instead, there is a future aspect to this **salvation** and it will be received as one receives a wage. At this point, we would benefit from briefly looking at this concept of the **salvation** of the soul in the larger New Testament context.

In 2 Corinthians 5:10, Paul taught about a future judgment of believers, sometimes referred to as the bema judgment: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad." Paul referenced believers appearing before the judgment seat (bema) of Christ to be recompensed based on their works. Note that Paul's use of "receive" is the same Greek verb we find in 1 Peter 1:9. In 1 Corinthians 3:11-15, Paul elaborated on this future judgment for believers:

1 Corinthians 3:11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; 13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. 14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man's work shall be burned, he



shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

The stuff of our lives is pictured as being tested by fire, and either it burns away like wood, hay and stubble, or it survives into eternity with eternal consequence and value. This judgment is not about heaven and hell, nor about whether they have trusted Christ for the forgiveness of sins, but about faithfulness, which will determine whether rewards are received. This is clear because Paul contemplates a hypothetical man whose life has nothing of eternal value to show for it (it all burns up), but he “shall be saved; yet so as by fire.”

This teaching on rewards (or inheritance) for faithful endurance was taught not only by Paul, but Jesus taught on the subject. On the heels of Peter’s great confession in Matthew 16:16 (“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God”), Jesus addressed rewards for faithful endurance:

Matthew 16:24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. 25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. 26 For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

The Bible teaches that justification is by faith alone in Christ alone, but to be a faithful disciple will cost us. Throughout this passage, the Greek term *psuche* is translated as “life” or “soul.” Although some take the English word “soul” to mean spirit it almost never carries that meaning in our Bibles. The term “soul” almost always refers to the conscious experience of our lives. Dr. Harry Leafe defined the “soul” as the temporal experience of human life. It is not merely being alive, but that which we do and experience. We see plainly in the scripture that our experience of life can be restful, physical bliss (Luke 12:19) as well as “exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.” (Matthew 26:38) Broadly speaking, our soul consists of our thoughts (1 Corinthians 4:3-5), words

(Matthew 12:36-37) and actions (Romans 2:6), all of which will be judged.

To his audience Jesus said, "If any man will come after me...." He was not speaking figuratively, but of literally pursuing after him in his earthly ministry as a disciple, as Peter did. The disciple must deny himself, subjecting his will to Jesus' will, his plans to Jesus' plans, etc. When Jesus spoke in verse 25 of "save" and "lose," he spoke to his believing apostles (except Judas Iscariot), and the point Jesus made is that a disciple chooses between (life no. 1) the life Jesus has for him or her and (life no. 2) the life they might otherwise pursue to serve their own self-interest. You cannot have both, Jesus explained, and indeed "whosoever will save his life [no. (2)] shall lose it [no. (1)]." And in contrast, "whosoever will lose his life [no. (2)] for my sake shall find it [shall save no. (1)]." One life can be saved or delivered into eternity, being rewarded and having continuing significance and eternal value, while the other will last no longer than our short time sojourning here. The point Jesus made in Matthew 16 is that a man that chooses to invest his life in pursuing earthly treasures, even to the point (hyperbolically) of gaining the whole world, will profit nothing from it in the world to come. For when "the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels... he shall reward every man according to his works."

Note that Jesus frequently taught about rewards. (e.g., Matthew 5:12, 6:1, 10:42, 19:21; Mark 9:41, 10:21; Luke 6:23, 12:33-34, 18:22) Jesus' Parable of the Pounds (Luke 19:11-27) illustrates the doctrine. There, a nobleman was to journey to a far country to receive a kingdom, then return. For that interim period of his absence he left his ten servants with ten pounds, and then "when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man gained by trading." (Luke 19:15) The first had gained ten pounds, to which the king said, "Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities." (Luke 19:17) Each servant was rewarded in accordance with how that servant used their allotted money, but one servant only returned the pound without any gain. (Luke 19:20) To that servant, the master said, "Take from him

the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds...For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him." (Luke 19:24-26) This pictures a loss of rewards, not salvation, as Luke 19:27 makes clear: "But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me."

We will either be rich toward the world, and then at the bema judgment as Paul described it, all will be burned away and our only reward will be smoke, or we will be rich toward God. In that case, we will lay up treasure in heaven and thus reap an inheritance in the future. Jesus well understood our tendency to invest in things of the world rather than of God when he warned in Luke 12:15: "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." He then told the parable of the rich fool who, in the face of material blessings, invested in bigger barns so he could gain more and more. Hear the fool's thinking: "And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, *and* be merry." (Luke 12:19) In contrast to his perspective, we must heed God's rebuke: "But God said unto him, *Thou* fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" (Luke 12:20) And then Jesus' commentary, which ties the parable back to his teaching in Matthew 6:19-21 about laying up treasure in heaven: "So *is* he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:21)

Putting the pieces together, Jesus taught about the salvation of the soul-life in Matthew 16, and so it is no surprise to find that Peter taught this doctrine in 1 Peter 1:9. Jesus' half-brother James taught the same doctrine in James 1:21 ("save your souls") and the writer of Hebrews addressed the issue in Hebrews 10:39 ("the saving of the soul"). These concepts of saving the soul, laying up treasures in heaven, and our inheritance are all tied together. Dr. Harry Leafe (himself a Calvinist) summarized these verses in his book *Running to Win*:

It is difficult for grace-oriented believers to think in terms of earning anything from God. Certainly, salvation from the

penalty of sin is a free gift of God's grace. However, Peter now tells us that we attain (Gr. *komizō*) as the goal of our faith "the salvation of our souls" (v. 9). Clearly, the salvation of verse 5 is the same as verse 9, "a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Recall...that *komizō* means "to receive something that is due, or to get for oneself by earning."

The point is clear. Our share in the inheritance is determined by that portion of our soul-life that is saved or delivered into eternity. And *that* salvation is demonstrated by our good works or, as Peter put it, the *proven character* of faith. We receive inheritance on the basis of our *demonstrated* faith (good works). And that is what "salvation of the soul" is all about!<sup>1</sup>

Conventional wisdom is that "you cannot take it with you" when this mortal life ends. But there is a sense in which we can. How we invest our lives will determine whether, at the bema, we are rewarded. When we invest our lives so that we are "rich toward God," the outcome at the bema will be that that aspect of our lives will translate into rewards or inheritance. And in that sense, our experience of life, our soul-life, is saved or delivered into eternity as we exchange our experience of life for our inheritance, the treasure in heaven that we appropriated over a lifetime of faithfulness. Verses 6-7 will build on this understanding of the salvation of the soul.

6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

Peter said that we **greatly rejoice** in the inheritance that will be revealed in the last time, but **now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations**. The **if** is what is known in Greek grammar as a first class condition and has the notion of "since." It assumes the reality of what is said. While they have reason to **rejoice**, they also must suffer for a short time in **manifold** or various **temptations** or trials. The word **temptations** here is not about being

---

<sup>1</sup> Leaf, G. Harry, *Running to Win*, Second Edition (Biblical Studies Press 2004), 18.

tempted to sin, but enduring trials, and can include persecution as well as the normal trials of life (e.g., illness, financial struggles). The question is why is it necessary that they suffer, which is answered in the next verse.

7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

Peter next explained the significance of trials in the life of a believer. The noun **trial** is the Greek *dokimion*, which Strong's defines as "a testing; by implication, trustworthiness:--trial, trying." The word can refer either to the test or to the genuineness or proven character of that which is tested, depending on the context in which it is used, and the term could be used, for example, of testing coins for genuineness and testing pottery against defects. The related verbal form of this word, *dokimazō*, means to test with a view to approval. Certainly, Peter was not saying that trials are more valuable than **gold**. Rather, it is the results or responses to those trials as our faith is **tried with fire** and proven that is more valuable. We understand that **gold** is earthly treasure with transient value, while our good works is heavenly treasure with permanent value.

Peter's metaphor is that the quality of precious metals (like **gold**) is **tried with fire** to remove the impurities (the dross) and purify the product to make it more valuable. So also the trials of life prove and refine our **faith**, as we exhibit **faith** responses to the trials, and the product of that testing—our **faith** responses—is **much more precious** or valuable **than of gold that perisheth**. Peter was not talking about determining whether someone is a "true believer," or separating real **faith** from fake **faith**, but instead, that the trials will show what we really believe. Our **faith** responses made on the basis of the Word of God will inherently take the form of thoughts, words and actions. In different ways, every day of our life presents new challenges, some small and others large. As believers engaged in God's training program we are to handle the challenges on the basis of God's Word and His wisdom. Dr. Leafé summarized the role of trials in the salvation of our soul-lives:

The trials Peter has in mind are designed by our heavenly Father to prove the character of our faith (not destroy it!). To be sure, trials also demonstrate lack of faith. But the issue here is the *proven character* (Gr. *dokimion*) of our faith, said to be “more valuable than gold – gold that is tested by fire, even though it is passing away.” The clear implication is that gold, in this analogy, has only temporary value, while the *proven character* of faith has eternal value. This is further expressed in the outcome – such proven faith results in “praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

\* \* \*

Clearly, then, the trials we experience in life are designed to test our faith, and of necessity, the testing involves our thoughts, words and actions. This being the case, will we then evaluate our circumstances on the basis of God’s Word – a biblical worldview – or on some other basis, whatever that might be? Will the intent of our words be to minister and to build up those around us? Will the purpose of our actions be to demonstrate our faith in Christ? If these responses issue from faith in God and His Word, then they become what Peter calls the *proven character* of our faith. And that proven faith will be demonstrated and rewarded “when Jesus Christ is revealed,” an event of great importance....<sup>2</sup>

Recall that Peter said our inheritance is reserved in heaven and we are to live by faith with a view toward a salvation to be revealed in the last time. Consistent with that, our **faith** responses will translate **unto praise and honour and glory** (part of our rewards) when Jesus returns, and that is why it is more valuable than **gold**. The word **praise** means commendation, as Jesus may say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” (Matthew 25:21) The word **honor** means exaltation, and may have to do with our place of authority in the world to come. Again, think of Jesus’ words, “Well done, good and faithful servant; though hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter

---

<sup>2</sup> *Supra* note 161, pp. 15-17.

thou into the joy of the lord.” (Matthew 25:23) Finally, the word **glory** means reputation, and here it is the recognition of a race run well, a life that was rich toward God rather than earthly pursuits.

Before leaving this verse, we must comment that it is especially the **trials** that reveal and grow our faith. We see elsewhere (e.g., James 1:2-4; Hebrews 12:1-11) that God uses the challenges and trials of life to grow us. It seems that when everything is going smoothly, our faith is not tested as strenuously, nor do we have the same opportunity for growth by applying the Word of God to real life issues. And so Peter focused on how the **trials** fit into God’s training program for us and give us the opportunity to lay up treasures in heaven, that is, to appropriate our inheritance in real time as we live by **faith**. But there are a couple of caveats. First, many Christians face trials because they are obnoxious, which is not a spirit gift! They perceive the response of others to their bad attitude and bad behavior as related to their being a Christian, but such is not persecution. Second, some Christians face trials but do not do so on the basis of God’s Word. Either because they do not know God’s Word, or because they choose to set aside God’s Word, they face the trials on the basis of self-sufficiency and worldly wisdom, and the results show. There is no laying up treasure in heaven when the result of the testing does not reflect proven character. Moreover, sometimes when you fail the test, you get to take it again.

8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see *him* not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:

In reference to the return of Christ and echoing Christ’s words in John 20:29, Peter remarked that while they had not **seen** him, they **love** him. The **love** they have is volitional love (Greek *agapaō*), a love necessarily exhibits itself in action. Jesus used the same term in John 14:21 when he said: “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.” Though his readers had not physically **seen** Jesus, their faith motivated their **love** for him, seen in how they lived, and especially how they lived during the trials they faced.

Thus, Peter said, **though now they see him not, yet believing** (moved by faith in what Jesus said), they **rejoice with joy unspeakable** (i.e., indescribable, beyond words) **and full of glory**. In a life full of trials, these Christians **rejoice** in Jesus Christ because of their firm conviction of his imminent return and the revealing of their inheritance in Christ as they enter the Kingdom. It bears saying here that a great many Christians fail to experience this **joy** in a real, tangible sense. These are not just words on a page. God expects us to experience a persistent and overwhelming **joy** rooted in our conviction of things future, things associated with the return of Christ, and especially receiving his approval and commendation as we receive of our inheritance. It is no exaggeration to say that many Christians are not even aware of this inheritance, or if they are, they do not care. We do well to get our myopic focus away from things of the world and toward the things of God, for therein is the key to **joy**.

9 Receiving the end of your faith, *even* the salvation of *your* souls.

The rejoicing of verse 8 does not happen in a vacuum. As already seen in Peter's prologue to this point, the rejoicing is rooted in love for the Saviour and a focus on his return and his rewarding the saints with the inheritance that is reserved in heaven for them. But more than that, the rejoicing is accompanied by an understanding that how we live now presently affects our future. Peter said that as their faith was being tested, and the assumption is that they were meeting the trials with proper faith responses, they were presently **receiving** or appropriating **the end** or final outcome **of** their **faith** lived out, **even the salvation of** their **souls**. As they lived, facing life on the basis of **faith**, specifically trusting the content of God's Word and applying God's Word moment by moment to the challenges of life in this fallen world, they were, to use Jesus' words from the Sermon on the Mount, laying up treasure in heaven.

They chose in each moment to live by faith or by the flesh, and thus chose to invest that moment with God and exchange it for heavenly treasures. To say it a different way, they were presently appropriating



(**receiving**) the inheritance that would be revealed to them at the return of Christ. And insofar as they appropriated that inheritance during this lifetime, they were presently **receiving the end** or product or outcome of their **faith** life, namely the exchange of their present soul-lives (the temporal experience of life, i.e., the substance of their lives—thoughts, words, actions) for an eternal inheritance. Peter did not delineate the precise nature of this inheritance, but it is critical we understand that we are sharing in Jesus' inheritance, and he inherited everything. (Hebrews 1:2) Jesus will exercise complete dominion in the world to come, and we will share in that.

This makes how we live serious business. While we are saved by grace, the idea that how we live now does not have consequences for time and eternity is absurd. One of those consequences is whether we will be rewarded at the return of Christ or just fill the room with smoke as the substance of our lives, all earthly pursuits, burns up. In that event, our **souls** will not be exchanged at the bema for rewards, yet as Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 3, that person is still saved, though as by fire.

Do not miss what Peter was saying in the big picture. God is working through our lives, including especially in the trials, to produce faith responses as we live on the basis of the Word of God, and God rewards us in the process. As Peter indicated in 1 Peter 2:2, it is by the Word of God that we grow. But what does this mean for the Christian that refuses to engage the Word of God as a daily life practice? What of the Christian that will squander their life away on worldly pursuits and largely ignore the Word of God? It means they will meet the challenges of life on the basis of their self-sufficiency, falling back on worldly wisdom, and will make a mess of things. But worse than that, they will be embarrassed at the bema as nothing in their mortal life translated into something permanent in eternity.