

Bryan Station Baptist Church

INDEPENDENT

ORGANIZED 1786

MISSIONARY

THE PIONEER BAPTIST

"Preaching The Same Truth We Preached Before Kentucky Was A State"

Vol. 12

Lexington, Kentucky

December, 1980

No. 3

Preparation For Heaven

By the late C. D. Cole

We shall begin this message by reading the first five verses of II Corinthians, Chapter 5. "For we know if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit."

Our theme is "Preparation for heaven", and the supporting text is verse five: "Now He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit". The Revised Standard Version renders it like this: "He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee."

Paul here expresses the Christian's longing for immortality. He speaks of our present body as a tent to be pulled down to make place for a heavenly body. He does not want to be without a body, but he wants a better body--one in which he will not have to suffer and groan--a body that will not die--a glorious body that will be eternal in the heavens. Paul is not thinking of any intermediate state between death and the resurrection. He does not interpose any period of time between death and the resurrection. And who can? There may

be a period of time between the day of my death and the day of my resurrection at the return of Christ, but who can fix this period of time? When Christ comes many of the saints will have just been buried, and others will be on their way to the cemetery. Dead today and alive tomorrow, and who knows what tomorrow that will be? Paul is contrasting his present body as a tent with his resurrected body as a house eternal in the heavens. He faces death with calmness, for he knows that this earthly tent will be superseded by a house not made with human hands.

Then the apostle goes on to say, that God has prepared us to dwell forever in the glorified body yet to be prepared. While here on earth we are prepared for heaven. We have the Holy Spirit as the firstfruits or guarantee of future glory.

For every Christian God is to be thanked. And why? Is it not because the Christian is God made and grace made? Does any man make himself a Christian? If so, he may thank himself, for every man may thank His maker.

What is a Christian? He is a person with a new heart - a person with new affections: he loves what he once hated and hates what he once loved. He is a person with a new mind: he understands things once foolish to him. In I Cor. 2:14, Paul says that natural man does not receive nor can he know spiritual truths for they are foolishness to him. Can the lost sinner give himself a new heart or a new mind? When the ethopian can change his skin, or the leopard his spots, then

we may talk about a sinner making himself a Christian (Jer. 13:23). The Christian is called a new creation. Does any man have the ability to create? To sum up: the Christian is either self made or God made, and the Bible says he is God made. We subscribe to this truth, we pray for sinners. In prayer do we not ask God to make them believers? Do we not beg God to give them a new heart and a new mind so they can love the right things and understand the gospel and trust Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour?

Having given this summary of the truth, let us now amplify--let us go more into detail.

CONSIDER I: THE NEED OF PREPARATION

Nearly everybody will admit that some sort of preparation is necessary for heaven. When a person dies, the question is often asked: "Was he prepared?" Or, the hope may be expressed that he was prepared. On the other hand there may be a doubt felt if not expressed.

1. The sinner needs preparation for heaven because of his guilty standing before God as the Supreme lawgiver and judge. In Rom. 3:19, Paul says that the whole world has been found guilty before God. A man must be justified before the court of Heaven before he is ready for heaven.

2. The sinner needs preparation because he is not fit for fellowship with holy beings, such as God, the holy angels, and holy men. The sinner without a change in his very nature would be out of his environment in heaven. He can hardly endure a thirty minute prayer meeting down here, and he would be miserable in a place where God is praised and worshipped and served day and night forever. The natural man in heaven would be worse than a fish out of water.

CONSIDER II: THE NATURE OF THIS PREPARATION

There are two aspects to this work of preparing people for heaven.

1. Our guilt must be removed. This aspect of salvation is called JUSTIFICATION, and is the opposite of condemnation. The bible tells us that God is the author of justification (Rom. 8:33); that the blood of Christ is the ground of justification. God declares us just or righteous because Christ died for us (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7; Rom. 5:9); that grace is the source or moving cause of justification (Rom. 3:24); that faith is the way of justification (Rom. 5:1, Rom. 3:28); and that works are the evidence of justification (Jas. 2:24).

The faith that justifies is the kind of faith that works. We are not saved by works, but by a faith that does work. We are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone, for faith without works is a dead faith - no faith at all. Abraham was justified by faith when he believed God's pro-

mise of a Saviour through Isaac. His faith was tested and found genuine when he offered up Isaac. He was first justified by faith and some 40 years later he was justified by works. He justified his profession of faith by his offering up of Isaac. In this way he proved his faith by his works. He believed God would keep His promise, that Isaac would have a descendant who would be the Saviour. His faith is severely tested when God tells him to slay Isaac before he has any children. Abraham believed God would keep His word, but he was mistaken in how this would be done. As he drew back his knife-held hand to slay Isaac, he believed God would raise him up and give him a posterity. But God's way was to stop his hand so that Isaac was not actually slain, but only in purpose of heart, which God took as if it had been actual and literal.

Every man who is justified by faith will also be justified by works, that is, he will prove that his faith is genuine by the way he lives. He will show his faith by his works, for a faith that cannot be shown by works is dead.

2. In preparing us for heaven, it is not enough to do a work for us in removing guilt and condemnation; a work must also be done in us -- something must be done to our very nature -- else what Christ did for us on the cross -- the blood He shed for our justification will not be appreciated and appropriated. Man's nature keeps him from coming to Jesus Christ for salvation. His fallen nature will cause him to do many foolish and useless things for salvation, but he must be given a new nature through a new birth to understand the gospel way of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." In his natural fallen state, the sinner cannot understand the gospel. Paul said his gospel was hid to the perishing because their minds were blinded by the god of this world (II Cor. 4:4).

3. In preparing us for heaven God uses human agency. When the Lord saved Paul, He said, "I am sending you to the Gentiles to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" (Acts 26:18).

In Romans 10:13, we read that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. And then we read, "How shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" And how shall they hear without a preacher, that is, unless someone tells them about the Lord Jesus Christ. And in verse 17 we read, that faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God. The gospel is the means of salvation but it has no inherent power to make a believer. This is demonstrated over and over and over. Many hear the gospel with the physical organ who never believe. Listen

to Paul's testimony: "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block or scandal, and unto the Greeks it is foolishness. But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. The meaning is plainly this: When Paul preached the gospel of a crucified Christ to the natural Jew, the Jew considered such a thing as a scandal; as if to say, to preach that we are saved by faith in a man who was crucified as a criminal is too scandalous to even consider. And to preach Christ crucified as a Saviour to the natural Greek was to him a foolish thing. But unto the Jew and the Greek who were called they saw in this plan of salvation the wisdom and power of God.

CONSIDER III: THE CAUSE OF THIS PREPARATION

What caused God to prepare a sinner for heaven? What led God to send His beloved Son to this world and to Calvary to redeem sinners at the awful cost of His own precious blood? In the Ephesian letter Paul says that the redemption we have through the blood of Christ was according to the riches of His grace, and to the praise of the glory of His grace. And again, that in the ages to come He might have on display trophies of His grace in His kindness toward us through Jesus Christ. And what led God to send the Holy Spirit into the world to make us His children by a new birth? And the bible answer is that it was because of His own sovereign will. James 1:18: "Having willed it, He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures." In John 1:10-13, we are told that Jesus came into the world that did not know Him, and to His own who did not want Him. However, some did receive Him who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. Quite often when we ask a person if he is saved, the reply will be: "I am trying to be saved." This implies that one has to save himself, a thing utterly impossible.

Not saved are we by trying, From self can come no aid;
'Tis on His blood relying, once for our ransom paid.
'Tis looking unto Jesus, The Holy One and Just;
'Tis His great work that saves us - It is not try but trust.

'Twas vain for Israel bitten, by serpents, on their way,
To look to their own doing, that awful plague to stay;
The only means of healing, When humbled in the dust,
Was of the Lord's revealing - It was not Try, but Trust.

No deeds of ours are needed
to make Christ's merit more; No frames of mind,
or feelings, can add to His great store;
'Tis simply to receive Him, The Holy one and Just'
'Tis only to believe Him -- It is not Try, but Trust.

May the Holy Spirit lead someone to trust him now.

THIS WE BELIEVE

We believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God without error as originally written. We believe in the Genesis account of creation and the fall of man. We believe in total depravity. We believe all are lost unless born again. We believe that we are saved by grace through faith and without works on the part of man. We believe that repentance and faith are inseparable graces and that all who do not repent and believe are lost. We believe in the security of the believer. We believe faith without works is dead. We believe all who have repented and believed should confess the Lord and follow Him in baptism and begin to seek to do His will. We believe that Jesus Christ organized a church while here on earth during His personal ministry (before Pentecost), and that He gave that church a commission. Matt. 28:19,20. We believe that there are two church ordinances; baptism and the Lord's Supper. We believe that the church is local, visible, and that she has the Bible for her one and only and all-sufficient rule of faith and practice. We believe that the way to finance the Lord's work is by tithes and offerings. We believe that all churches should be missionary. We believe in the premillennial second coming of Christ. We believe that Heaven is a real place and that Hell is a real place. We believe in the Trinity of God, and that the Devil is a person, and that there will be two resurrections, one of the just and one of the unjust.

A sin is two sins when it is defended.

-Henry Smith

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