

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.*

(Philippians 3.13-14 NASB)

#02-0826

MAY 16, 2008

THAT I MAY NOT BE DISQUALIFIED

I purposely listen to radio ministries because often what I hear gives me material for issues of *The Upward Call*.

One pastor-teacher who has a radio ministry answers questions phoned in to him. Over the last year, I have heard one question in particular asked more than once: What happens to a believer who commits suicide? This pastor is very clear on the fact that believers cannot lose their salvation, which I appreciate. Once we are given the faith to believe in Jesus, saved by grace through faith, we are forever saved; and one day, we will receive immortal life. However, having heard this brother before, I knew that he would answer this question in a certain way, and he did not let me down. His answer went something like this: "A believer cannot lose his salvation no matter what the person does, even if he takes his own life. Eternal salvation cannot be lost. The person will go to heaven when he dies; I presume he will lose some reward, but he is saved eternally."

First, only the Lord can truly judge His people; it is the responsibility of the Judge. *Second*, some might argue that a believer could never take his or her own life. However, believers are capable of sinning; surely, suicide is a sin, so it would seem that we cannot rightfully conclude that a believer could never take his own life. *Third*, rather than answer the question directly, I would prefer to answer it in a more generic way based on who will enter the coming kingdom of Christ in the next eon.

Now, how one answers this question will be dependent on what I call the framework upon which one builds his understanding of Scripture. Although there might be many schools of thought on this matter, I see two primary schools of thought that will determine how one answers this question.

The first school is what I call the *heaven-hell* school that is held by many evangelicals. This school of thought builds its framework on the following: All believers *in* death go to heaven for eternity, and all unbelievers *in* death go to hell for eternity. When believers die, they go to heaven in some type of body so that they can walk on streets of gold. Later, they will receive a new body in the resurrection that comes with what many call the rapture at the coming of the Lord. The unbelievers will be resurrected out of hell at the end of the 1,000-year reign of Christ to appear before the great white throne and to be cast into the lake of fire, a more extreme version of hell, which is described as if it were a torture chamber in which people will be tormented forever and ever and ever with no chance of reprieve. Generally, this school sees all believers entering the coming kingdom of Christ. In many respects, the future millennial kingdom is not a main emphasis. Obviously, there are many permutations of this school of thought, but these are the main points. The pastor-teacher answered the question based on this school, at least in part.

The second school of thought is based on the following: The hope of mankind, especially of believers, is to come into immortality, that is, to be beyond death; and resurrection and transfiguration is the only way into immortal life. Everything is based on the dead being resurrected, either in the first resurrection (*out-resurrection* or former, better, or select resurrection [Philippians 3.11; Revelation 20.4-6; Hebrews 11.35]), which occurs at the end of our present wicked eon, or the second or general resurrection (great white throne) that occurs after the millennial reign of Christ (Revelation 20.11-15). All the dead remain in the state of death, unconsciousness, for the dead do not know anything (Ecclesiastes 9.5); they wait to be raised from the state of death in either the first or the second

resurrection. Until then, the dead in Christ (believers) are asleep in Jesus (1 Thessalonians 4.14, 16), which is very similar to our natural sleep; they simply are asleep and kept by Christ for the resurrection. The unbelievers are merely dead and waiting to be raised up in the second resurrection. At this point in time, no one is in heaven or in what many erroneously call hell, for Christ alone has immortality (1 Timothy 6.16).

Now, it is safe to assume that many within this school, just as in the first school of thought, see all the dead in Christ being raised in the first resurrection, regardless of the life they have lived. Each will be judged for rewards, but some will receive no reward, being saved, yet so as through fire (1 Corinthians 3.15). However, there is another view that all believers will receive immortal life but not all at the same time. Only the believers who conquer while in their bodies of humiliation will be raised in the first resurrection; the ones who do not conquer will be raised in the second resurrection to receive immortal life but without reward, for they will be saved, yet so as through fire. Robert Govett (1813-1901) and T. Austin-Sparks (1888-1971) both held this view, and this is the view that I see is validated in Scripture as well. Although no one can say with absolute confidence that the one who commits suicide will be raised in the second resurrection, the likelihood is greatest for this to happen; but then again, we must leave the matter of judgment to the Lord who is the Judge of all.

Again, it is not a question of whether a believer will receive immortal life but of when. Of course, I hold that, ultimately, all mankind born of Adam's race will eventually come into immortal life at the consummation of the eons (or sometime during the day of God before the grand Jubilee of creation) because I believe Scripture teaches universal reconciliation. **For even as, in Adam, all are dying, thus also, in Christ, shall all be vivified** [made alive] (1 Corinthians 15.22 CV). [See my book on the purpose of the eons.] The question is whether a believer is counted worthy to be raised in the first resurrection to reign with Christ because he (she) endured to the end and conquered, or he is not counted worthy and must wait *in* death for the second resurrection, missing the glory of Christ's millennial (1,000 years) kingdom, but not missing the glory of God's day when there is a new heaven and a new earth. Immortal life is a gift by the grace of God. Eonian life (life in the coming eon) and reigning with Christ in His millennial kingdom is a reward for running the race and winning the prize.

Many scriptural proofs could be offered to make the point (e.g., 1 Corinthians 6.9-10; 1 Corinthians 10.1-14; Galatians 5.19-21; Revelation 21.8; 22.15), but consider Paul's exhortation to run the race to win.

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified. (1 Corinthians 9.24-27 NASB)

Paul was running the race so that he would not be disqualified from being raised from among the dead in the first or, what he called, the *out*-resurrection (Philippians 3.11 WAET) through which the conquering believers (read Revelation 2-3; 20.4-6) will receive immortal life and eonian life as they enter the kingdom of Christ to reign with Him during the next eon. **If we endure, we will also reign with Him** (2 Timothy 2.12 NASB). Disqualification refers to not entering into and reigning in the coming kingdom of Christ. All believers will receive immortal life, but only those who endure and run the race to win will receive it in the first resurrection; the others must remain dead for 1,000 years.

So, let us run the race to win so that we too will reign with Christ and enjoy the 1,000 years of glory that precedes God's day. But let us also rejoice that in God's day, all believers will be reunited to enter into the glory of New Jerusalem on the new earth.

Praise God!