

Revelation 21:27 (Harold Primrose Barker) 136958

Bible Questions And Answers On Twelve Basic Subjects, Subject Eight: Fitness for Heaven (21:27)

It is wonderful that people like you and me, full of failures and shortcomings, can be made fit for heaven even while living here on earth. But this is what the grace of God is able to do for us.

The power of the precious blood of Christ is so great that it can completely remove the defilement. It can cleanse away the sins of a lifetime in a moment and wash the sinner white as snow. If anyone felt that his sins were as black as hell itself and more in number than the grains of sand on the seashore, we could still point him to the blood that cleanses from all sin —that makes the guilty, defiled sinner white and pure and fit for God's bright home.

If such things as these can in any way help to fit our souls for heaven, it is strange beyond measure that the Bible does not tell us so! On the contrary, we find that "works," though they have their place in connection with the Christian's life on earth, have no place whatever in connection with his salvation or in fitting him for heaven. Salvation is distinctly said to be "not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:9), and if God has saved His people, it is "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy" (Titus 3:5).

There are many, however, who would energetically disown and denounce the doctrine of salvation by works, who yet cherish the idea that it depends on themselves in some way or other to fit their souls for heaven. So they sing:

A charge to keep I have, a God to glorify, A never-dying soul to save and fit it for the sky.

It is true that the Lord has committed a charge to His people, but that charge is certainly not to save their souls and fit them for heaven. His finished work is the only thing that can do that. Nothing can possibly add to the value of what Christ has done for us or make more perfect that spotless robe of righteousness with which the grace of God has covered us.

Hardly. I might receive an invitation to attend a party at the home of His Excellency the Governor. That would give me a clear title to go there. But I am not fit to attend an elegant function like that. I am not suitably dressed. I should need a complete change of attire before my fitness for the Governor's company would be recognized. On the other hand, my dress might be in every respect suitable, but that would not give me a title to go. In the one case, I should have a title, but no fitness. In the other, I should be fit, but have no title. Now, through the grace of God both a title to heaven and a perfect fitness for that holy place are provided for all who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. His precious blood makes us as perfectly fit for heaven as our sins had made us fit for hell.

But our fitness does not consist merely in the fact of our sins being washed away. Christ Himself is the measure of our fitness. We are so linked up with Him that God sees us in Him, covered with all His loveliness, and fit for the presence of God even as He is fit. Our title, too, though based on the precious blood of Christ, lies in the fact that He Himself has entered heaven for us. We have a right to be there because He, our Substitute, our Saviour and our exalted Head, is there.

I suppose that such a one would feel utterly miserable. With a nature wholly unsuited to God's presence and without any fitness for a place of light and holiness, it would be unbearable to him. His cry would be, "Let me get away from this place!"

I heard once of a gambler on his way to some horse race who, by mistake, went on board the wrong boat. He found himself among a lot of Christians bound for a conference. On deck, everywhere, hymns were being sung and people were talking about Christ. The man felt completely out of place and offered the captain a sum of money to be put ashore at the nearest landing.

People talk easily enough about going to heaven when they die, but they forget that unless they have been made fit for the place and have received a nature that can enjoy the things of God, they would be as miserable in heaven as that gambler was among the Christians on the boat. If an hour in their company was unbearable, what would an eternity in the very presence of God be to a lost sinner?

In Colossians 1:12-14. Let me read the passage: "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son: in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins."

If you will glance at the chapter from which we have just read, you will see that in verses 9-11 we read of various things which, as Christians, we can pray for. We should earnestly pray, for instance, that we might be filled with the knowledge of God's will and walk worthy of the Lord, and be fruitful in every good work, and so on. But verses 12-14 mention things that we can give thanks for. Now, we pray for things we want, but we give thanks for what we have already received. You will note that fitness for the inheritance above is one of the things we are to give thanks for and not one of the things we are to pray for. That is very clear from verse 12. It is something which, by the grace of God, is ours already.

Many have been able to say farewell to all their doubts by seeing that "hath" implies present possession! The same word is used here with reference to our fitness for heaven: "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet." Let us give thanks indeed to Him for this great gift!

Verse 4 of the chapter will answer that question: "Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus." They were people who had come to Christ and believed in Him as their Saviour. The Apostle does not refer to unbelievers or mere professors. They are not made fit to be partakers of the

inheritance of the saints in light. This great blessing is the portion only of those who have trusted in Christ.

One might answer that question by asking another: Can anything worked in our souls or produced in our lives by God's grace and the Holy Spirit add to the value of the precious blood of Christ? Surely not.

God has most assuredly left us on earth for a purpose, but that purpose is not that we might be made more fit for heaven.

I am aware that some good people cherish the thought that Christians are gradually "ripening" for heaven, just as an orange under the influence of the sun's rays becomes sweet and mellow and fit to be picked and eaten. Whatever other aspect of a Christian's blessing that orange may illustrate, it certainly does not show how he is made fit for heaven.

If, from the day of your conversion to the day of your death, you could live a life of holy zeal and devotedness in the Master's service, or if by continual prayer and the study of His Word you became a giant in spiritual knowledge, you would be no more fit for heaven at your last moment than when, as a poor sinner, you first trusted in Christ. There would be growth in many respects—in knowledge, in experience, in devotedness, in zeal—but there would and could be no growth in fitness for heaven.

Such a place exists only in the imagination of men's minds. The Bible is not only silent as to there being such a place, but its testimony is dead against it.

I know that many are accustomed to hearing about what is called purgatory. Is there any suffering through which I might pass that could accomplish more than the suffering through which my Saviour passed for me? Would my sufferings be more effective in fitting my soul for heaven than His sufferings were? Impossible!

Oh no; thanks be unto God, my Saviour has won for me by His finished work, not a place in purgatory, but in the Father's house. His work is all that is needed to fit the believing sinner for that place, and we are only waiting till He comes to enter the place He has made us fit for. If called to die, it will not be to undergo a further process of purification by purgatorial fire, but "to be with Christ; which is far better" (Phil. 1:23). To depart and to be with Christ is a very different thing from departing to be in purgatory.

Their case in no way invalidates the truth we are insisting on. The Apostle Paul himself said to those same Christians, "But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." The place that they were not fit for was Corinth. Instead of living for God's glory and being bright and shining witnesses for Christ, their discreditable conduct was bringing reproach on His name and making Christianity a byword among the heathen. It was for this reason that God intervened and removed them from the earth by death.

There is all the difference in the world between being "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light," and being "meet for the master's use" (2 Tim. 2:21). Many are fit for glory who are very far from being fit vessels for the Master to use here on earth. So God has to chasten them and discipline them and sometimes to take them away from earth altogether.

Yes, I think so. If God has made Himself known to us in grace, we must not conclude that He ceases to be a wise and just Governor. He cannot allow sin to go on among His people unchecked. But even though the sin be of such a nature that God sees necessary to check it by the removal of the one who sins, yet that one, if a believer in Jesus, is removed to heaven.

We will suppose that a father, as he sits in his house, hears his son's voice joining with the voices of some bad, rough boys in the street. He is shocked to hear the language that comes from his own boy's lips. Opening the window, he calls, "George, come here!" George turns around, and his father continues, "I have seen how you have been misbehaving yourself. I cannot trust you out there any longer. Come in at once!"

He calls the boy away from the street where he was bringing discredit on his father's name, but where does he call the boy to? He calls him home.

That is what God sometimes has to do with His children. Their sin is a sin unto death. God removes them from earth (the place they are not fit for) and takes them to heaven (the place that, through the blood of Jesus, they are fit for).

Yes, the case of Moses. He was a wonderful servant of God, but he sinned in disobeying God's directions on one occasion and failed to maintain God's honor in the eyes of the people. For this God said to him, "Get thee up into this mountain Abarim ... and die in the mount whither thou goest up" (Deut. 32:49-50). Moses was not allowed to lead God's people into the promised land. His service was given to Joshua, and God called him away from earth.

If anyone asks, "But how do you know that after his failure Moses went to heaven?" I reply, "Because when the Lord Jesus was transfigured on the mount, Moses was one of His companions who appeared in glory with Him." (See Luke 9:30-31.)

Moses' fitness for heaven did not depend on his faithfulness, or he never would have gotten there. His continuance as God's chosen servant on earth did depend on his faithfulness, and because he failed he was called away. So with us. If unfaithful, we are not "meet for the master's use," and God will have to deal with us as He sees fit. But our fitness for glory depends on the value of something which no failure on our part can ever diminish, the precious blood of Christ.

It is enough for me that it is the doctrine of Scripture. But after all, do its practical effects strike you as so very bad? Are those who are assured that Christ's precious blood is all that is needed to make them fit for heaven such very careless and dreadful people? As a matter of fact, it is the other way around, and in real life full confidence in the power of Christ's blood to cleanse and the assurance that through it we are made fit for glory are found to go hand in hand with a godly walk and a concern for God's glory on earth.

It does indeed. Poor man! With his hands nailed to the cross, what work could he do? He could only turn to the Lord in all his vileness and helplessness. This he did and was blessed at once with the promise, "Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise." It matters little what men say

or think as to what or where "paradise" was. The point is that he was there and then made fit for the company of Christ and had the assurance of being with Him.

I am not in any way implying that the Lord's supper, or the sacrament, as you call it, is unimportant. I myself partake of it, when possible, every Sunday. But in doing so, I have not the remotest thought of being made more fit for heaven thereby. If you wish to know why the Lord Jesus instituted the supper, you have only to turn to the Scriptures for the reason. It is stated distinctly enough. See Luke 22:19. He Himself said, "This do in remembrance of Me." That is a very different thing from saying, "This do in order to be made more fit for heaven."

The truth is that the bread and wine are given to us that we might be constantly reminded of our absent Lord, in His death. He desires that we should not forget Him, and He instituted the supper as a simple means of remembrance. There is no hint anywhere in the Bible of its being a "means of grace" or of its having any virtue in it for helping to make us fit for heaven. Only those who know that they are saved and made fit for heaven through Christ's precious blood can rightly take the supper, for they only are able to remember Him as His own loved ones, who owe all their blessing to His death.

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