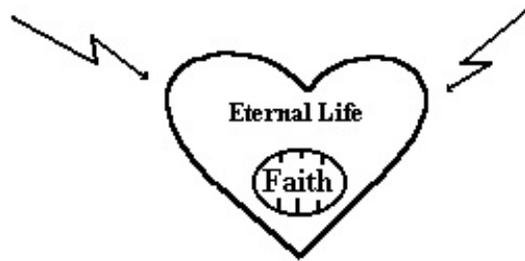


Peter's Epistles # 27

Threats to Salvation

(also available on-line at Ichthys.com)
by Dr. Robert D. Luginbill

False Doctrines + False Teachings



“Faith is the heartbeat of our eternal life.”

Introduction: Before completing our treatment of 1st Peter 1:6-9, we need to examine three false doctrines related to salvation. All three can have a devastating effect upon the believer's faith. They are the false teachings of ...

- 1) Institutional Security
- 2) Positional Security
- 3) Tribulational Security

These three false teachings have proved harmful throughout the history of the Church, and they continue to damage faith today. Even more alarming is the potential threat they pose to believers of the future who will face the Great Tribulation.

The Insidious Nature of False Teaching: False teaching has been around from the beginning of the human experience, ever since the Garden of Eden, when the devil perverted our Lord's injunction against eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil:

“You will surely *not* die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that on the day you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”
Genesis 3:4-5

This was a lie. Our first parents *did* die an immediate *spiritual* death (alienation from God), followed by an eventual *physical* death (one of the consequences of their disobedience). Satan's words uttered through the serpent in Genesis 3:4-5 provide a chilling example that all believers should take to heart, for the temptation in the garden is a paradigm for all subsequent satanic deception. The essence of a good lie is this: it contains at least a *kernel* of truth, it is very *appealing* to believe, and it *seems* holy and sanctified:

1) *the kernel of truth*: Adam and Eve did not immediately fall to the ground, physically dead; and their eyes *were* “opened” – as sinners, they became cognizant of good and evil, and, consequently, of their alienation from that “Good”, namely God.

2) *the appeal*: How do you tempt two people who have just about everything? They were living in paradise itself, after all. Satan very cleverly found a way. Adam and Eve *did* have an authority figure in the Lord God, with whom they shared regular fellowship (Gen.3:8; 2:19). Wouldn't you like to be “like God?”, the devil asks. It is, without a doubt, the most arrogant of presumptions for a creature to assume he could ever be on an equal level with his Creator, but the phrasing is clever, for it *sounds* like a “good thing”. God is good. Wouldn't being like Him be good too? Of course “being like God” by your own efforts is only the first step in an arrogant delusion of becoming “equal to God”, “a God”, then, ultimately “replacing God”. This, after all, was *exactly* the process the devil went through, that most favored of cherubs, who is even now still in revolt against the Lord, still intent upon replacing Him. The appeal of becoming “divine” in a self-willed way is a very powerful one, and it is precisely this incentive (couched in various forms) that lies behind all of the world's cults and false religions (especially those masquerading as Christian).

3) *the appearance of sanctity*: Through his medium, the serpent, the devil, in his pithy, yet diabolically constructed remarks, talks about God, God's knowledge, and personal spiritual improvement. He speaks of God in a favorable way, as someone he knows and respects. He doesn't directly malign Him, but rather insinuates a bit of doubt into Eve's understanding of the situation: she doesn't have all the facts or have them straight, he suggests; but now here's the way things *really* are, the full story; and if you *do* eat this desirable fruit, you'll be much the better for it; don't you think that God would *want* you to be a better person, one who knows about good and evil? Truly effective lies never directly *oppose* the truth; they attempt instead to *supplant* the truth. To do so, they try and look as much like the truth as possible (hence almost all cults that really have nothing to do with Christianity will say good things about Christ, at least initially). Satan dressed up this first big lie in holy-looking garments to the point where Eve was

apparently convinced that what she was doing was perfectly alright, even progressive. It's really no wonder when we consider the subtlety and effectiveness of the devil's attack:

a. *a friendly agent*: Satan was far too clever to approach Eve directly. Instead, he used the serpent, whom we assume must have been a familiar and friendly companion to Eve.

b. *a familiarity with God*: He speaks to her using the same language the Lord used (nearly identical in the Hebrew except for the "not"!). He seems to know the Lord well, although he calls Him the more familiar and generic "God", not Lord, the appropriate term of respect (cf. 1Pet.3:6).

c. *a legitimizing of secret desires*: Satan's promise had two parts: "to know good and evil" and "to be like God". It was a package deal. This very effective lie persuaded Eve that the *price* ("knowing good and evil") was worth the *benefit* ("to be like God"). It was unquestionably a terrible bargain, for the truth of it was that she only became "like" God in that she shared His recognition that she had become a sinner, while the price of the vaunted knowledge was horrendous: alienation from God, incurring His wrath and judgment in the form of spiritual, physical, and, eventually, eternal death. Thanks be to God for the One who paid this price for her and for us by His death in our place, our Lord, Jesus Christ!

Neither Eve, nor later Adam, were mentally challenged. This was a persuasive attack cleverly crafted to their particular circumstances, and we would do very well to resist a modern-day equivalent. How could a close friend (or authority figure or organization), who seems to know God, and who is offering you something that's going to be spiritually beneficial to you (something you *really* find attractive) *possibly* be telling you a lie? But sometimes it *is* a lie, and we believers have to develop the discernment to combat such deceptive attacks on our faith.

Now Adam and Eve had a good source of information: the Lord Himself! And our source is no less impressive: the very Word of God. Our first parents did not heed the spoken Word of God. It should not be too surprising, therefore, that many Christians are capable of being deceived, for far too many do not heed the written Word, and so fall for deceptions in cases where they should know better, in fact *do* know better, but fail to heed the knowledge they have in faith. Even more often, many Christians make themselves vulnerable by passing up their opportunities to learn about what God thinks (reading their Bibles, receiving teaching), so that when the testing and tempting comes, they are all the more easily deceived by false teaching and false teachers. As it was for Adam and Eve, the information is available to us, and God will not withhold the necessary wisdom from any who ask Him for it (Jas.1:5). By being diligent in our commitment to learn God's truth, it becomes more difficult for the devil to insert an appealing and subtle lie capable of driving a wedge in between us and the truth, and therefore in between us and God.

Three False Doctrines That Threaten Faith: For us as Christians, there is no more critical issue than the nurturing, building and preservation of our living faith in our Lord and Master

Jesus Christ. That is why I believe that it is so important for believers to be alert and informed about these three wide-spread and often well-respected false doctrines that so threaten our faith (if ever we accept and rely upon them). Institutional Security, Positional Security, and Tribulational Security may seem innocuous enough on the surface, but in this respect they are similar to the devil's original lie – not *direct* assaults upon our faith, but rather insidious and stealthy attacks that can make our faith vulnerable in times of pressure.

Institutional Security: Institutional Security is the teaching that salvation is the result of church membership. Of course there are many varieties of this teaching, and it is often not put in exactly these terms. From direct assertions, such as the Roman Catholic *non salus extra Ecclesiam* (“there is no salvation outside of the [Roman Catholic] Church”), to more guarded insinuations that without “joining”, one is risking one's eternal future, expressions of Institutional Security most commonly put the shoe on the wrong foot, making participation in the organization a prerequisite for security. This is because the doctrine is designed to bring people into the organization and keep them there once in. However, the flip-side of this fear-appeal teaching is the equally false corollary (affirmed by many of the groups that propound this doctrine) that if you *do* join and stay a member in good standing, then *you will be saved* simply by the fact of your membership. Neither the premise nor the corollary have any biblical basis whatsoever.

Other manifestations of this false doctrine include the dispensing of rituals (such as baptism), blessings (such as the charismatic “second blessing”), or special knowledge – anything whether otherwise legitimate or illegitimate, when the dispensation *must* come through a certain group or person *exclusively* in order to provide salvation. The conviction that a church leader, or church or group has something so important, even necessary to salvation, something that can't be obtained elsewhere, leads people to think that it is their allegiance to this earthly person or organization that counts for salvation, rather than allegiance to Christ and His true Church.

There is no better illustration of the phenomenon of Institutional Security and its problems than the contemporary situation faced by our Lord. In Jesus' day, the worship of God had been so “institutionalized” beyond the Mosaic Law, and with so little real feeling for and understanding of the true substance of the truth contained therein, that while the three-fold system of Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes offered many ways of searching for God, it provided no real way of finding Him. At one point, our Lord tells some representatives of the religious community bluntly that while they assume that they have eternal life in the scriptures they proclaim, in reality they have missed the whole point: the scriptures are about Him (Jn.5:39; see also Matt.23:13-28). This is indeed the whole point. We are to believe in and follow Jesus Christ. Ministers of God, organizations formed to serve Him, are for helping believers accomplish their assigned task of living as Christians. Problems arise when the personalities and institutions that should do so become instead ends unto themselves.

From the point of view of the believer, the danger is first and foremost one of salvation. For one simply cannot put one's primary allegiance in a person other than Christ, or in any organization

over Christ and truly be a believer *in* Christ. At the very least, where personalities and institutional loyalties begin to cloud the picture of faith and hold out the prospect of security based on such loyalty, another (and only slightly lesser) danger is complacency. Once the personality or institution becomes the focus of faith, then the need, the drive to grow spiritually, to seek God and draw nearer to Him, inevitably diminishes. And such complacency, ironically, only increases the danger of spiritual vulnerability as we shall discuss below.

In the long history of the Church, Institutional Security has been the most harmful of the three false doctrines we are in the process of discussing. As in the devil's deception of Eve, it is a persuasive lie:

1) *It has a kernel of truth:* The importance of being a vital part of Christ's Church is beyond question, but it is wrong to equate this universal spiritual status of all true believers with any particular earthly person or group. As Christians, we are indeed part of one body, all of us possessing special gifts and entrusted with specific ministries designed to build up the faith of our fellow members (Eph.4:11-16). That "body" is the Body of Christ, and our Lord knows who belongs to Him (2Tim.2:19; cf. Jn.10:14; 1Cor.8:3). No person holds the patent on true faith in Him. No organization holds the key to our salvation. If we truly *do* believe in Jesus Christ, then we *are* part of His Church. Throughout the development of so many forms of worship, of service and of collective organization over the last two millennia of Christian history, that fact has never changed. A Christian's loyalty must be to Christ, not to a tradition, to an organization, or to a person. For it is our steadfast loyalty to Christ, our continued faith in Him, that leads to salvation, not loyalty to any earthly person or group.

2) *It has a strong appeal:* There are a number of facets of this false doctrine that many have found attractive. The first (and most obvious) is that the institutional follower is spared the trouble of undergoing the internal transformation that for true believers in Christ is a life long process (Rom.12:1-2; Eph.4:23-24). Even pseudo-Christian groups generally require some cosmetic changes from their members, but a real commitment to God from the heart, a serious (biblical) discipleship to Christ, a daily picking up of one's cross and really following Him – such troublesome devotion is not normally necessary in order to remain a member in good standing. For by merely following the organizations rules, one's "insurance policy" will remain current. The second part of the appeal is a bit more subtle. What God requires of us is a change of heart and a genuine seeking of Him through His Son, but many people want to do things their own way, that is, seek God through their own efforts and be rewarded for their merits. Now God's policy is grace, and a good thing for us too, because as naturally sinful human beings, anything we do without Him is by definition repugnant to the perfect, pristine and holy character of God. That is why Jesus Christ had to die for us so that we might be able to approach a truly righteous God on the basis of Christ's work, not our own. But ever since Cain, who preferred to offer God products of his own efforts (rather than the blood sacrifices that bespoke our need for a substitute to die for us), there have been those who are more impressed by what they can do for God than by what God has done for them (consider the case of Naaman the Syrian: 2Kng.5). Works of "supererogation" of this sort play a large role in institutions catering to this particular

brand of Institutional Security: not only are you safe because you belong, but just look what you've done for God! All such approaches are dangerous folly.

3) *It has the appearance of sanctity:*

a) *a friendly agent:* With all the trappings of tradition, the established church of Martin Luther's day had the air of sole and irreproachable authority. Where else was one to turn? We may thank God that he and other men who truly sought the Lord turned to God and His Word rather than relying on what was comfortable, safe and traditional. But we should never underestimate the draw of such traditional agents. The recipients of the book of Hebrews found the temple worship in Jerusalem an irresistible lure, and even though they had been well taught that these symbols had been superceded by Christ's death, out of nostalgia and fear of persecution they were drawn back into a system of ritual that was tantamount to denying the efficacy of Christ's real sacrifice (Heb.6:4-6).

b) *a familiarity with God:* Large institutionalized religions, even pseudo-Christian ones, invariably speak well of God and reserve a special place for Christ. But we know that there is only one way to God the Father, and that is *exclusively* through His Son. No combination worship of other "deities" or saints or angels or mortal men and women, living or dead, is acceptable to God (Jn.14:6).

c) *a legitimizing of secret desires:* It is all too human to have the need to belong to something bigger than ourselves, to have all our insecurities and doubts eased by something larger than we are. Now this is a legitimate desire, properly satisfied by our relationship with our loving Father through Christ's mediation. But to seek satisfaction of this desire in people or human institutions is folly, and to surrender our will and our judgment to the same is to court spiritual disaster, for, ultimately, we are responsible for such choices, even when we have abdicated that responsibility to something or someone "bigger". The danger is real enough, for there is something extremely comforting to human beings about belonging to a large group. "So many people must be right" and "there's safety in numbers". Perhaps, if God had not given us any place to go for the truth, no canon of scripture, no teaching of His Word, this point of view would be more persuasive. But we have the Bible to consider at our leisure, and we must follow the Lord, wherever He leads, no matter how large the crowd heading the other way (Rev.14:4).

Positional Security: Positional Security is the teaching that salvation is unconditional and irreversible once a person first puts his faith in Christ. At least indirectly, we have been addressing the fallacy of this doctrine throughout much of the 1st Peter series (see especially lesson #12). For while the idea of "once saved always saved" is extremely reassuring, such a teaching is never expressed in scripture. In fact, the whole tenor and tone of our Lord's preaching speaks to the need for faithfulness in following Him, and we have seen (and will revisit below) numerous Bible passages that very clearly express a point of view diametrically

opposed to this false doctrine: “He who endures *to the end* shall be saved” (Matt.10:22). As in the parable of the sower, scripture admits of a category of people who believe the Word (apparently genuinely), but then fall away from the faith in times of personal trouble and persecution (Matt.13:20-21); still others take deeper root than these, but fail to be productive for Christ because of the distractions of this world (Matt.13:22). Make no mistake – God wants *and expects* us to stay faithful. Indeed, His will is to have all come to salvation (1Tim.2:4; 2Pet.3:9). Those who never seek Him out, those who do yet later turn away, those who go to meet Him empty-handed – all do so of their *own* free will.

Also known as “eternal security”, this doctrine is an understandable development from a historical point of view. Reacting to the extreme abuses of the medieval church that had set the faithful the impossible and non-biblical task of working their way into heaven, it is no wonder that reformed theologians wished to stress the un-conditionality of God’s choice and election. Nor is it strange that modern-day evangelicals have sought to clarify election-theology and resolve it into the more easily understood doctrine of “once saved always saved”. But the truth is that God chooses those who seek Him (see lessons #3 & 8), and delivers those who faithfully follow Him – not sinlessly perfect people (for such do not exist; see the discussion in lesson #15), but consistently faithful people who continue throughout their lives through all the ups and downs to choose Him and His Son over the world. The false doctrine of Positional Security offers much in the way of comfort to Christians, and certainly goes a long way toward removing the false drive of working for salvation. For believers who are naturally motivated to pursue actively their relationship with God, to follow their Savior, and to faithfully exercise the gifts and ministries they have been given, the doctrine of Positional Security is not much of a threat – at least in good times. The main problem with believing that once you have committed yourself to Christ you are saved – no matter what – is complacency. “Once saved always saved” leads to complacency about one’s faith and complacency about sin (which, when indulged to a gross degree without repentance, is ultimately the biggest threat to faith).

The problem is not unprecedented in the early history of the Church. The author of the book of Hebrews is quick to point out to his complacent listeners that they are in danger of “letting their salvation drift away” (Heb.2:1). Rebelling from God and allowing sin to harden their hearts, he tells them, results in unbelief (Greek *apistia* – literally, lack of faith):

Make sure, brothers, that none of you develop an evil heart of unbelief [lack of faith] by turning away [or “rebell[ing]”] from the living God. Rather keep encouraging each other every day as long as we still call it “today” (i.e. remain in this world), lest any of you be hardened [in heart] by the deception of sin. For we all have a share in Christ, as long as we hang onto that original confidence [of our faith in Him] firmly to the end ...

Hebrews 3:12-14

Sad to say, this was exactly the pattern of faithlessness that led the generation of the Exodus to fall away from God, even after having experienced such dramatic miracles of deliverance by the Lord’s hand (Heb.3:15-19; 12:25). Thus the false teaching of “eternal security” is not much of a problem in normal times for those Christians who are diligently following Christ in any case.

The real problem is that such a doctrine taken seriously can engender a dangerous complacency in those of us who are less than super-human in our Christian application. “Once saved always saved” removes a large part of our “early warning system”, has a tendency to make us more relaxed about the threat personal sin poses to our spirituality, and can deaden to a certain degree our motivation to continue serving the Lord with vigor day by day. In the worst case, under times of intense pressure and tribulation, times that may push faith to the edge, it is doubly dangerous to believe that everything will be alright no matter what. This *is* true ... *for believers*, only as long as we are careful not to compromise or abandon our faith.

For present day Christians, Positional security has been the most harmful of the three false doctrines we are in the process of discussing. As in the devil’s deception of Eve, it too has proved to be a persuasive lie:

1) *It has a kernel of truth*: God does love us and Jesus Christ did die for us. We are now part of the family of God. We are redeemed, sanctified, elected – and we possess eternal life (and the Holy Spirit as the pledge for that eternal life). All these doctrines and more do speak to the eternal significance and ultimately unbreakable security of our relationship with God the Father through our faith in Jesus Christ, His Son. But we are not yet experiencing that eternal life. We have not been placed in our new, eternal body. We have not been removed from the world, been taken to heaven, evaluated, rewarded and come to be with Christ forever. We are still here – in the devil’s world. And as long as we are, the fight continues; as long as we are in this life, we must be faithful, and, above all, maintain our faith. All the eternal blessings promised us are appropriated by and based on this faith we have in our Lord Jesus Christ. But if we abandon that faith, we abandon all the benefits that come with it (see below on this important condition).

2) *It has a strong appeal*: The strongest appeal of this incorrect teaching is the false assurance it gives the Christian that his behavior has no consequences, at least not the most grave of consequences – loss of salvation. Having a problem with personal sin? Can’t be bothered to pursue a relationship with the Lord? Not interested in serving God through the gift and ministry given to you? None of these things will endanger your salvation. Relax and be at peace – you may have trouble in this life, but no matter how lazy, how irreverent, how evil you become in this life, the fact that you – at one point – expressed faith in Christ will be sufficient for God to vouchsafe you an eternal life with Him and His Son – *even if you went so far as to reject His Son*. But as we shall see below, neglecting our relationship with God and surrendering to sin will, over time, harden our hearts to such a degree that we become capable of things we wouldn’t even have imagined – even rejecting the Lord who bought us, and in whom we once believed:

And there arose among the people false prophets, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who shall introduce destructive false doctrines – even denying the Master who bought them – and bringing swift destruction on themselves.

2nd Peter 2:1

3) *It has the appearance of sanctity:*

a) *a friendly agent:* Some of the best respected evangelical preachers and teachers hold to this view.

b) *a familiarity with God:* The teaching of Positional Security rightly emphasizes the love of God, but ignores His justice and righteousness.

c) *a legitimizing of secret desires:* At one time or another, we would all like to believe that a loving God would never cast us aside, no matter what we have done. And in fact, God does forgive us our sins on the basis of His Son's work on the cross in our behalf. But if we reject His Son and deny His work, He cannot deny Himself (2Tim.2:11-13).

Tribulational Security: Tribulational Security is the teaching that believers of this present age will not have to undergo the period of Tribulation, but will instead be gathered up in a living resurrection just before the start of that dark age. Otherwise known as the Pre-tribulational Rapture (or simply "rapture", for short: see below on the post-tribulational rapture), this doctrine is comparatively modern. It arose in the 19th century amid the well-spring of interest in Biblical prophecy and the Bible's teachings regarding the predicted future events. The central core of this teaching is based almost exclusively on 1st Thessalonians 4:13-18, where Paul is seeking to disabuse the Thessalonians of their angst over some false information that had infected that church. The rumor was apparently being spread that the resurrection applied only to those alive at Christ's return – the obvious implication being that those who had died had missed their chance for an eternal body and eternal life. Paul assures them that such is not the case, and that, in fact, the dead in Christ will be the first to rise at Christ's return:

For we tell you this by the Lord's own Word, that we who are alive and remain until the coming (*parousia*) of the Lord will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout of command, with the archangel's blast on the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first (in resurrection), then we who are alive and remain will be snatched up (*harpazo*) together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and in this way we shall always be with the Lord.

1st Thessalonians 4:15-17

On account of the controversial nature of this teaching, a brief rebuttal of the doctrine of a pre-millennial, pre-tribulational rapture is necessary:

1. The word *parousia*: In the passage above, the word translated "coming" is the Greek *parousia*, a word used almost exclusively in theological contexts in the New Testament for the return of Christ, that is, the 2nd Advent when our Lord will return to earth to establish the Kingdom of Heaven (cf. Matt.24:3; 24:27; 24:37-39; 1Cor.15:23; Jas.5:7; 2Pet.1:16, 3:4 & 12; 1Jn.2:28).

Even within the context of this very letter, 1st Thessalonians, the rule holds true (cf. 1Thes.2:19; 5:23), leading us to conclude that our Lord's gathering up of the believers in this passage too will take place at the 2nd Advent, and not (as the pre-tribulation position claims) prior to the Tribulation.

Furthermore, that Paul's use of *parousia* in the passage above was meant to be taken by the Thessalonian church as the 2nd Advent is made unmistakably clear in the apostle's second letter to these same believers. For in 2nd Thessalonians 2:1-3 and 2:8 Paul states in no uncertain terms that the *parousia* of the Lord must *follow* the Great Apostasy and the advent of the Beast (unquestionably events of the Tribulation), so that the word *parousia* in those verses must also refer to the 2nd Advent, the final return of Christ *after* the Tribulation, not to a hypothetical, temporary return *prior to* the Tribulation in order to "rapture the Church" – for it is at that time, at Christ's return, that antichrist will be "annihilated with the appearance of His coming / *parousia*" (2Thes.2:8).

The immediate context of the passage above confirms this view. With the Thessalonians so confused about the time of the resurrection, surely a clarification would have been essential here had Paul really been using *parousia* to refer *not* to the "final return" of our Lord, but only to a brief, pre-Tribulation rendezvous (especially since it is an event unprecedented elsewhere in scripture). The associated language used by Paul in this passage would also – without any explanation to the contrary – most naturally have been taken by his readers to mean the 2nd Advent. The shout of command (Jn.5:28; and cf. Jn.11:43), the archangel and his trumpet blast (Matt.24:31; 1Cor.15:52; Rev.11:15 and cf. Rev.19:1-6) are signs of the gathering together of the faithful, both dead and alive, prophesied to occur at the return of the King (Matt.24:31; Mk.13:27; cf. the Feast of Trumpets, which celebrates the predicted regathering of Israel at the 2nd Advent: Lev.23:23-25 & Num.29:1-6). Even the mention of the "clouds" (the armies of the returning, resurrected believers: Rev.19:14) is a clear allusion to the 2nd Advent (Dan.7:13-14; Matt.24:30; 26:64; Mk.13:26; 14:62; Lk.21:27; Rev.1:7).

2. Absence of any evidence for raptured believers: Despite the importance which this doctrine of a rapture should have for all believers of the present age, we find no mention in prophecy of resurrected believers biding their time in heaven until the 2nd Advent. This argument from silence possesses merit, because Revelation 6:9-11 *does* clearly mention the non-resurrected believers who have been martyred during the Tribulation and are in heaven awaiting their resurrection at the 2nd Advent (also mentioned in Rev.7:9-16; 12:11; 15:2-4).

3. The three echelons of the resurrection: Paul's description of the phases or "echelons" of the resurrection in 1st Corinthians 15:20-28 paints a clear picture of how the resurrection of the righteous will unfold historically (see lesson #20). It will happen in three increments. These three "echelons" of resurrection will occur as follows:

a. "Christ, the first-fruits" (v.23). Our Lord, of course, has already been resurrected, the event occurring on that first Easter morning!

b. “Then those who are Christ’s at His coming” (v.23). The word “coming” is *parousia* again (see point #1 above), so that this second phase is certainly composed of all believers in heaven and on earth at the time of the 2nd Advent. These are the “clouds” of believers who return with the King of Glory (cf. point #1 above, and Rev.19:14, which describes their return with Him).

c. “Then the end, when He shall hand over the Kingdom to our God and Father” (v.24). At the conclusion of Christ’s millennial reign, human history will come to an end, and the heavens and earth as we know them will be replaced by “the new Jerusalem, the new heaven and the new earth” (Ps.102:25-27; Is.34:4; 51:6; 65:17ff; 66:22; Matt.24:35; Heb.1:10-12; 12:22-27; 2Pet.3:10-13; Rev.20:11; 21:1-4). At this point, the “Kingdom of Heaven” (Christ’s millennial rule) will become the “Kingdom of God” (the eternal state, governed by Father and Son from the New Jerusalem: see especially Rev.21:22; 22:2-3), and the final phase of the resurrection of the millennial believers (still alive at the end of the millennium, still in mortal bodies) will take place. For “flesh and blood cannot receive an inheritance in the Kingdom of God” (1Cor.15:50), “so that what cannot be shaken may remain” (Heb.12:27). This is what Paul means at 1st Corinthians 15:25-26 when he says that Christ must reign until *all* His enemies are put under His feet, the last enemy being death itself. With the final phase of the resurrection completed and the eternal state begun, death will no longer be an issue or, for that matter, a possibility for any member of the human race. At that point, all shall have received their resurrection, some to eternal life, that is, the believers, others to eternal condemnation, that is, the unbelievers (Dan.12:2; Matt.25:46; Jn.5:28-29; Rev.20:11-14).

As the discussion above shows, the three phases of resurrection Paul describes mesh perfectly with other pertinent scripture. The idea of an additional phase of the resurrection (which a pre-tribulational rapture would need to constitute) occurs nowhere in scripture.

4. Other 2nd Advent Passages: A pre-millennial, pre-tribulational rapture of believers is also difficult to assume from other passages treating the return of our Lord. What these other 2nd Advent scriptures all have in common is that they look forward to Christ’s *final return* (i.e. the 2nd Advent) as the focus for our hope, not to a rapture that precedes this event by seven years.

a. 2nd Thessalonians 1:3-12: In this the lengthiest Pauline treatment of the 2nd Advent, these same Thessalonian believers would have a hard time with Paul’s description of imminent events, assuming 1st Thessalonians chapter four teaches a pre-tribulational rapture. For the picture painted in the context of 2nd Thessalonians 1:3-12 is one of long-suffering believers granted relief at the “revelation of Jesus Christ” (1Thes.1:7: clearly the 2nd Advent; cf. Rev.1:1-3), while their tormenters receive a just judgment at the hands of the returning King “on the day when He comes to be glorified among all His holy people and be marveled at by all who believe” (v.10). If Paul had really taught the Thessalonians at 1st Thessalonians 4:15-18 that they would be raptured seven years prior to this point and be waiting out the Tribulation safely in heaven, we might well imagine their shock and confusion to learn from this passage that instead they would still be in need of relief from persecution on the day of Christ’s glorious return (v.7).

b. 1st Thessalonians 5:1-11: In the chapter immediately following Paul's supposed discussion of the pre-tribulational rapture, the Thessalonian believers are told not to worry about the exact time of future events (v.1), for "the day of the Lord" (i.e., the 2nd Advent) will come "like a thief in the night" (that is, without warning). For unbelievers, this means "swift destruction" which "they shall not escape" (v.3). Believers are to stay "sober and alert" (v.6), donning their "breastplate of faith and love" and "helmet of the hope of deliverance" (v.8). And it is for "taking possession of this deliverance" (v.9) that we have been appointed. As in 2nd Thessalonians 1:3-12, this is clearly a context of the judgment of unbelievers contrasted with the deliverance of believers at the ultimate return of our Lord. The meaning of the passage is clear: had they lived long enough, the Thessalonians would have had to maintain their faith and vigilance through the dark days of the Tribulation until the "day of the Lord", with no early release through a pre-tribulational rapture.

c. The parable of the virgins (Matt.25:1-13), and the parable of the talents (Matt.25:14-30), both of which occur in the context of our Lord's discussion of His return (in the immediately preceding Matt.24), speak of the imminency of Christ's return in terms of the 2nd Advent, not a pre-tribulational rapture. We are to be diligent with the resources God has given us, like the faithful stewards, because our Lord's return is imminent and can come without any warning. Following His return, He will dispense rewards to the faithful and punishment to the unfaithful (as at the 2nd Advent; cf. Rev.11:18; see lesson #18 for further references). And like the wise virgins, we are to keep our lamp of faith burning brightly until the time of our Lord's final return. When He does come back, those who have let their faith expire will not enter the Kingdom with the bridegroom (cf. Rev.19:5-10), but will be excluded. Both parables clearly set the 2nd Advent, the time of Christ's final return following the trials of the Tribulation, as event to be anticipated, hoped for and watched for, not a rapture that precedes the Tribulation and our Lord's final, glorious return.

d. Other passages that fix our hope on the 2nd Advent:

i. Titus 2:13: ... as we await our blessed hope, namely the glorious and majestic *appearance* of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ ...

[Note: *appearance* is the Greek *epiphaneia* which, along with its cognate adjective refers in the New Testament to the 2nd Advent of Christ, highlighting the splendor of His appearance: Acts 2:20; 2Thes.2:8; 1Tim.6:14; 2Tim.4:1; 4:8; the lone exception is 2Tim.1:10 which refers to Christ's 1st Advent]

ii. 2nd Peter 1:19-20: You too would do well to pay the closest attention to this [prophetically inspired Word], just as to a lamp shining in a dark place (cf. Ps.119:105), until the day dawns, and the Morning Star rises (i.e. Christ returns in glory), pondering in your hearts this

principle of prime importance: no single verse of prophetically inspired scripture has ever come into being as a result of personal reflection.

iii. 1st Corinthians 1:7: So that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you await the *revelation* of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[Note: *revelation* is the Greek *apokaylpsis* which, along with its cognate verb, often refers in the New Testament to the 2nd Advent of Christ, emphasizing the unveiling of His glory: Lk.17:30; Rom.2:5; 8:18 & 8:19; 2Thes.1:7; 1Pet.1:5 & 1:7 & 1:13; 4:13; 5:1; Rev.1:1]

iv. Luke 21:25-28: When these things (i.e., the signs and wonders of vv.25-27) begin to happen, stand up and raise up your heads, because your *redemption* is near.

[Note: *redemption* is the Greek *apolutrosis* which, along with its cognates, means deliverance from bondage. In the New Testament, these words usually refer to our deliverance from sin by the saving work of Christ, but also sometimes refers to the ultimate deliverance of our mortal bodies through resurrection (Rom.8:23; Eph.1:14). The important point is that deliverance is always *from* something. Here the reference is to our deliverance from trouble, specifically from the horrors of the Tribulation (cf. Eph.4:30 – resurrection deliverance on the other side of the Tribulation; and Hebrews 11:35 – eternal deliverance preferred to a temporal substitute)]

v. Philippians 1:6: I am confident of this very thing – that He who has begun such a good work in you will keep on perfecting it until the Day of Christ Jesus.

[Note: The “Day of Christ” is a synonym for the “Day of the Lord [Christ]”, both references to the 2nd Advent. See 5.b. above, and 1Cor.1:8; 5:5; 2Cor.1:14; Phil.1:10; 2:16]

In addition to the evidence cited above, one may say that the tone of imminency running throughout all prophecy in the New Testament is difficult to ignore. To cite but two examples where our Lord speaks to us about His return, He tells us at Matthew 16:27 that “the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His holy angels, and then He will pay each in full according to his deeds”, and at Revelation 2:25 that we should “hold on tight to what you have accomplished until I return”. Especially in light of our discussion above, it would seem best that to take these words of Christ – one set from the gospels and one from the last book of the New Testament – as actually applying to us, His disciples, so that the day of His revealing is clearly the Second Advent.

The issue is of some consequence. Even in times of little spiritual pressure, alertness toward these future events helps to develop a more heavenly, less earthly point of view. For, after all, we may be *in* this world, but we are not *of* this world (Jn.17:11-16). A belief in Tribulational

Security allows a false compartmentalization of all the issues of biblical eschatology,¹ shutting out of our hearts a rich, valuable part of the Bible, and pulling our thoughts back down to this earth with its earthly pursuits (1Cor.7:29-31). Instead, we should be eagerly looking forward to that future day, striving for a heavenly reward rather than the transitive things of this life:

Don't stock up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and corrosion eat them away and where thieves dig through and steal [them]. But stock up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor corrosion eat them away and where thieves neither dig through nor steal [them]. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:19-21

Since the teaching of Tribulational Security has the effect of redirecting the believer's focus entirely *away* from any concern for eschatology (for the end times would then be, essentially, non-applicable to one's own life), that focus naturally comes to rest, not on heavenly things, but on the ebb and flow of worldly events (cf. Col.3:1-4). The less we think that the Bible's prophetic scriptures really have (or will have) anything to do with us, the more we tend to lose touch with our heavenly citizenship (Phil.3:20), and concentrate on the things of this life instead (Jn.2:15-17). Such a perspective cannot help but adversely affect our Christian motivation.

Another, particularly damaging aspect of the worldly focus caused by buying into the false doctrine of Tribulational Security is that it has a tendency to cause believers to be complacent about personal tribulation (see lessons #25-26). This complacency in turn makes them vulnerable when particularly severe waves of testing hit. The reason is simple enough: the belief that you personally will not have to experience the actual Tribulation, an event of severe testing upon which the scriptures focus much attention, tends to nourish the assumption that one's own personal testing will also always be of a moderate type. Whereas in fact, we shall face much *personal tribulation* in our lives right here and now, and we must handle this in similar fashion to the way in which believers of that future day will have to negotiate the actual Tribulation (Acts 14:22b). In the early days of the Church, or during the Reformation, when believers were, with regularity, being martyred for their faith, such an attitude would have been more difficult to develop. But in our modern, western world (with some exceptions), personal tribulation *of such an obviously extreme degree* is relatively rare. As we have been recently studying, however, personal tribulation itself is, in fact, anything but rare. By the grace of God, we know that we can endure whatever testing He sends our way (1Cor.10:13). But the danger comes in should we be unprepared and thus fail to make use of that grace when such episodes of tribulation come our way, be they personal or eschatological. In such cases, faith may be shaken to its very foundations. By shifting our focus from heavenly things to the things of this world, and by

¹ The word, eschatology, comes from the Greek *eschaton*, or "last thing", so that the Biblical study of Eschatology is properly the study of future events as prophesied and revealed in the Bible.

rendering us unprepared for severe testing, the false doctrine of Tribulational Security weakens faith and can thus be hazardous to our eternal life.

The teaching of Tribulational Security is even more likely to do damage in the future, specifically to that generation of believers who suddenly and undeniably find themselves in the middle of a Tribulation they had thought to avoid. Once again, as is the case with all false teachings, this false doctrine too follows the pattern of the devil's original deception of mankind:

1) *It has a kernel of truth:* 1st Thessalonians chapter four does indeed teach that we, living believers will be gathered up to be with the Lord when He returns for us. And to a casual observer, it may well seem that the exact time of this event is of little or no consequence – a trifling fact. But as we saw with the serpent's clever bending of the truth, such “small distinctions” can mean everything. God does protect and preserve those who trust in Him and in His Son. Sometimes, however, his deliverance brings us *through* the fire, rather than delivering us *from* having to face it at all. This is an important lesson, an important distinction to which all believers must remain alert, lest “that day come upon you like a thief” (1Thes.5:4).

2) *It has a strong appeal:* The appeal of a pre-tribulational rapture should be obvious. Especially for believers who have an interest in or have otherwise made a study of eschatology and have learned something about the terrors of the Tribulation. It is very comforting to be able to keep a mental distance from such foreboding events, to be able to contemplate the deliverance of being gathered up to be with the Lord, but without the corresponding furnace of testing that the believers of that day will actually be delivered *through*. The main problem with this, as we have said, is that this false view can lull the believer into worldliness and complacency, leaving him unprepared – not only for *the* Tribulation, a future event that may or may not occur within his lifetime, but perhaps even more importantly for *personal* tribulation, the fiery furnace of testing into which all who diligently seek the Lord will eventually be thrown (1Pet.1:7; 4:12; 5:9).

3) *It has the appearance of sanctity:*

a) *a friendly agent:* The Christian credentials of many individuals and groups who teach the doctrine of a pre-tribulational rapture are beyond reproach. This is one reason why this belief, though relatively modern as we have mentioned, has come to be endowed with such authority. The pre-tribulational rapture teaching comes out of a legitimate interest in an important area of scripture that was largely overlooked in the Reformation (believers of that era had enough personal tribulation to deal with). But individuals and groups who belong to the tradition and philosophy of searching out the truth of scripture in spite of the strictures of tradition should be wary about exempting their own teachings from the same test of scripture.

b) *a familiarity with God:* What could be wrong with anticipating the return of the Lord to gather His people up to be with Him? We all do look forward to this blessed hope of being with Christ and God the Father at last and forever, but the belief that this event will occur before

rather than after the great time of testing that will come upon the whole earth trivializes it. The rapture becomes, essentially, an excuse for not having to worry about the prophetic future at all, rather than what it should be: the anticipation of God's deliverance of all those who "hold out until the end" (Matt.24:13). Believing in a pre-deliverance of this sort skews our focus. Instead of training ourselves, steeling ourselves for life's many challenges to our faith, the false teaching of a pre-tribulational rapture tempts us to look for the easy way out and therefore leaves us unprepared to deal with the reality of testing.

c) *a legitimizing of secret desires*: The fact is, no one would choose pain or suffering or severe testing. We understand from scripture that the testing experience is good for us, a refining process that strengthens and purifies our faith (as we have seen throughout this series), but we are not actively seeking it out. How much more then would we like to avoid the actual, coming Tribulation. In our heart of hearts, we don't want to lose everything we have – our possessions, our freedom, even our lives. We don't want even to have to think about the consequences of the terrible events described in Revelation, Daniel and elsewhere in scripture, let alone actually have to suffer through that horrendous future. The truth of the matter, however, is that the Kingdom of Heaven and Satan's kingdom of this world are at war. By choosing Christ, we have chosen sides, and, since the time of our Lord's death on the cross for us, many of our fellow believers have had to take a life-ending stand for their faith and undergo martyrdom for His holy Name. We personally may never be called upon to make this ultimate sacrifice, but we are called upon to be *ready* to do so:

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wants to follow Me, let him [first] abandon his own aspirations, [then] pick up his cross and follow Me. For whoever makes it his purpose to preserve his life will end up losing it, but whoever forfeits his life for My sake will find that he has preserved it. What point is there for a man to come to possess the entire world, if he should then come to lose his life? Or what can a man pay to regain his life? For the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay every man in his own coin."

Matthew 16:24-27

In His great and matchless grace, God has given us His Son – to die that we might live. He has already given us everything. Will He not then also be faithful to bring us safely through whatever it is His will that we endure? Whatever the trials, whatever the fiery furnace of testing it be our lot to endure, if we will but walk with Him, He will gently lead us by the hand till He has brought us safely home to be with Him and our Lord Jesus Christ forever (Rom.8:31-39).

A Note on the Post-Tribulational Rapture: As we have demonstrated above, the rapture does not occur before the period of Tribulation prophesied in scripture, but afterwards, at the moment of the 2nd Advent. Our Lord was very specific about our "gathering together" after the events of those days, when He returns to deliver His own from that inferno of testing:

Then [the Son of Man] will send forth His angels with a loud trumpet call, and will assemble His elect ones from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.
Matthew 24:31

The word “rapture” is meant to convey this idea of our being “snatched up” from the earth to be with the Lord (cf. Matt.24:36-44; Lk.17:34-37). The idea itself is derived from the Greek word *harpazo*, translated “snatched up” in our quotation for 1st Thessalonians 4:15-18 (see above), and it is that passage which is ultimately responsible for the fact that we call the living-resurrection of believers at the 2nd Advent a “rapture”. This nomenclature originates in the Latin Vulgate, where *harpazo* is translated by the Latin verb *rapio*. *Rapio*’s past participle *rapt-*, joined with the resultative suffix *-tura*, yields the Latin *raptura* – our English “rapture” – which means, literally, “the state of having been snatched up”. There are two other New Testament instances of believers being “snatched up” by God, though neither entail a living-resurrection. The first occurs in Acts 8:39, where Philip is “snatched up” (*harpazo*) by the Holy Spirit and transported to Azotus (Ashdod), a good day’s journey from the spot where he had been conversing with the Ethiopian eunuch. Philip’s location changes, but he himself remains in his original, mortal body. Likewise Paul’s description of the “man who was snatched up to heaven – whether in the body or out of the body” most likely describes a temporary ecstatic state, but this particular individual remained among the mortal Christian community and passed on his vision (2Cor.12:2-4). Only in the 1st Thessalonians 4:15-18 passage does *harpazo* (Lat. *raptura*) refer to the actual “rapture”, the resurrection of living believers at the time of Christ’s return.²

Passages that Support a Post-Tribulational Rapture: There are a number of key passages in the New Testament that firmly fix our “blessed hope” of resurrection to the time of Christ’s return:

1. 1st Corinthians 15:51-52: Behold, I tell you a mystery: not all of us will fall asleep (i.e., some will experience the living resurrection at Christ’s return), but all of us will be **changed** (52) in [that] moment of time, in the blink of an eye, at the **final** trumpet blast (i.e., announcing the end of the Tribulation and the Lord’s return). For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will rise incorruptible, and we too (i.e., believers still alive) will be **changed** [at that time (i.e., the Lord’s Second Advent return)].

[Note: This passage clearly connects the rapture with the resurrection at the 2nd Advent. At the occurrence of this next echelon of the resurrection (see above and lesson #20), that is, the believers who “are Christ’s at His coming”, not only do the dead in Christ rise, but the living in Christ are also “changed”, that is, transformed while still alive. This “change” is a mystery, because until Paul received special revelation of the fact, it had not been specifically revealed

² At Rev.12:5, *harpazo* is used in the allegory of the Woman and the Dragon to describe the “snatching up to heaven” of the Woman’s Son. The events depicted in synopsis by this reference are the resurrection, ascension and session of Christ.

that even those living and gathered up at the time of Christ's return would also be transformed into their eternal forms, receiving a resurrection body just like all those who had already passed on to be with the Lord.]

2. Colossians 3:1-4: Therefore since you have been resurrected [positionally³] with Christ, strive for the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Think on the things above, and not the things on the earth. For you are already [positionally] dead [to all that], and your [true] life has been hidden away with Christ in God. When Christ – your [true] life – is **revealed** [at the 2nd Advent], then you too will be **revealed in glory** (i.e. resurrection).⁴

3. 1st John 3:2: Beloved, we are already the children of God, but what we shall be has not yet been **revealed**. We know that when He is **revealed**, we will be like Him, that we shall see Him exactly like He is.

4. Philippians 3:20-21: For our [true] citizenship has a heavenly existence, and it is from there that we expectantly await our Savior, Lord Jesus Christ, who will **transform this humble body** of ours into one that matches His glorious body through His powerful ability to subordinate everything to Himself.

5. Romans 8:18-24: For I do not consider these present hardships in any way comparable to the glory destined to be **revealed** for us [at the 2nd Advent]. For all creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God. For the created world is now subject to futility – not of its own choosing, but because of Him who subjected it [as a consequence of Adam's sin] – but not without hope. For [at the 2nd Advent] the created world will be liberated from its enslavement to decay at the glorious liberation of the sons of God (i.e. our resurrection). For we know that the

³ i.e. by virtue of belonging to Him, we share in all He has, and have been resurrected “in pledge”, that is, since He has been resurrected, we share in that resurrection. It has not happened to us yet, but we have the sure and certain *promise* of it. Therefore Paul presents it as a fact, because it is just as sure as a fact, since God is the one who has promised it. So our resurrection has already been “posted to our account” so to speak, though the actual “withdrawal date” remains in the future. Compare positional sanctification (see Peter lesson #13).

⁴ The word “revealed” is the Greek *phaneroo*, from the same *phan-* root as *epiphaneia*, on which see point 4 d. under Tribulational Security above (cf. 1Pet.5:4). In the New Testament, this group of words is frequently used to refer to the unveiling of Christ to the world at the 2nd Advent. Along with referring to the brilliant and matchless splendor and reputation of God, “glory” is also a term often used to refer to the splendor of our resurrection and eternal life thereafter: cf. Rom.2:7, 8:17; 8:18; 1Cor.15:43; 2Cor.3:18; 4:17; Col.1:27; 1Thes.2:12; Heb.2:10; 1Pet.5:1; 5:10.

whole creation has been experiencing intense pain and agony right up until this present time. And not only the created world, but we too who have received the Holy Spirit as a foretaste [of the good things to come] agonize within ourselves as we eagerly await our adoption, that is, *the redemption of our body* (i.e. resurrection). This is the hope with which we were saved.

The Future Threat: We are now ready to summarize the dangers of the three false doctrines threatening our faith. The “last days” (2Tim.3:1; 2Pet.3:3), that final prophesied period of time that culminates in the return of our Lord (i.e. the Tribulation ended by the 2nd Advent), will bring unique and intense challenges to our faith. It is an era that has been imminent since the early days of the Church, but we should not assume that it will never touch us, or become like the mockers of 2nd Peter 3:4 who ask sarcastically, “Where is His promised return? For from the days of the patriarchs who have long since died, the world has been carrying on in the exact same way – ever since the beginning of creation.” Peter’s response to them is blunt, explaining that the very world upon whose constancy they depend will eventually be blasted from existence to make way for the New Heaven and New Earth (vv.5-13). We may not be the generation whose faith will have to run the gauntlet of the Tribulation, but – whether we are or not – it is unwise to make such an assumption, and ultimately unhealthy for our faith, as we have already seen. Reliance upon any one of the three false doctrines we have studied, Institutional Security, Positional Security, or Tribulational Security, is dangerous because of the threat such reliance poses to our most precious faith. The dangers are real, here and now, but belief in any of these false teachings will be an even greater liability for those who carry such a belief into the Tribulation:

Institutional Security:

Danger now: Depending upon a particular church or individual for salvation risks “drifting away” from true salvation through faith in Christ (Heb.2:1-4).

Future danger: Those with this perspective will be tremendously vulnerable to being drawn in by the great, world-wide false religion of the Tribulation, and may end up worshiping the beast instead of the Lamb of God (Matt.24:24; 2Thes.2:1-12; Rev.13:1-18).⁵

Solution: If instead of loyalty to an individual or organization we rely on our membership in the Body of Christ through true faith in Christ for our salvation, that faith will remain incorruptible no matter what false steps our leaders or organizations may take.

Positional Security:

⁵ On the methodology of the false teachers of this religion see also 1Tim.4:1-5; 2Tim.2:16-3:9; 2Pet.2:1-3:13; Jude 3-19.

Danger Now: Belief in a salvation that is secure completely apart from our behavior weakens our resolve to withstand sin and can lead to the hardening of our heart, apostasy and loss of our eternal life (Gal.6:7-8; Jas.1:14-16).

Future Danger: This danger will intensify geometrically when the Great Apostasy of the Tribulation begins, and the intense pressures of that era cause many to fall away from the faith (Matt.24:9-13; 2Thes.2:3ff.; see lesson #26).

Solution: If we are progressing with our spiritual growth, our faith will be growing apace and we will never need to have any fear of falling into this trap (1Tim.4:16; Jas.1:21; see the discussion below).

Tribulational Security:

Danger Now: The conviction that we will not have to face the ultimate threat to our faith, the Tribulation, negatively affects our alertness here and now. It renders us unprepared for the personal tribulations of life, and shifts our focus away from Christ's return, and instead attracts our gaze to the "things of this earth", thus sapping much of our motivation to be productive for the Lord as we look to our future reward (Col.3:1-4; Phil.3:19).

Future Danger: If it is our lot to face that last, terrible period of Satan's world rule, alertness will be essential for the survival of our faith. Nothing could conceivably better set us up to be blind-sided by the peculiar threats of the Tribulation (including the Satanic, world-wide religion) than a belief that we shall never face such threats. Such a perspective will render its adherents unprepared for the crisis and unalert to its dangers (Lk.12:37 & 40; 18:8).

Solution: Waiting and watching for our Lord's imminent return helps us fix our hope squarely on Him, on our eternal life, eternal reward, and resurrection. Looking to Christ's establishment of His kingdom as a genuine, near-term reality (as we pray daily in the Lord's prayer) sets our hope truly in heaven, like an anchor that keeps our thoughts and aspirations directed towards eternity, protecting us from what is false in this world (Heb. 6:18-20).

"How narrow is the gate, and how constricted the road which leads to life!" (Matt.7:14). We Christians know *who* it is in whom we must believe: our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – and no personal or organizational affiliation (Institutional Security) can substitute for faith in Him. We know *what* it is we must do in this life: follow our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – and no once-upon-a-time expression of faith in Him that has long since withered away will cause Him to affirm those who now deny Him (Positional Security). Finally, we know *how* we must follow Him: pick up our cross – and no wishful thinking about an easy deliverance from our trials (Tribulational Security) will exempt us from the testing, both prophetic and personal, that must be borne if faith is to endure.

In our Christian lives, truth is the issue. Our Lord is the “way, the truth and the life” (Jn.14:6), and all who would worship Him and the Father must do so in “spirit and in truth” (Jn.4:24). Our source for truth is the Word of God (Jn.17:17a), and it is by means of the truth in His Word that we are to sanctify ourselves, to set ourselves apart from the devil’s corrupt world (Jn.17:17b). Since false teaching and false doctrines corrupt this truth and thus attack the very marrow of our faith (Matt.7:15; Jn.10:1-18; Acts 20:29), we need to develop the same respect for scripture that our Lord demonstrated (Matt.5:17-20; Jn.10:34-35; Jn.17:12), and take full advantage of our marvelous opportunity to read, study and learn from the Bible every day. By doing so, and by progressing with our spiritual growth, we will insulate ourselves not only against the false teachings discussed in this lesson, but against any and all fabrications that may fall upon our ears in the future.

Summary:

1. *There is no Institutional Security:* To lay hold of our salvation, we must put our faith in Christ for that salvation, and not trust instead in any organizational affiliation or allegiance to any charismatic personality. Lest, like the seed that fell by the roadside, our faith lack true roots (Matt.13:4, 19; Mk.4:4, 15; Lk.8:5, 12):

For there is no salvation through any other person, nor has any other name on earth been given by which we must be saved.

Acts 4:12

I am the way and the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.

John 14:6

2. *There is no Positional Security:* To preserve our salvation, we must continue to follow Christ with our faith, and not assume that having once believed, our behavior is longer at issue (for our behavior affects our faith – whether for good or for ill). Lest, like the seed that fell on the rocky ground, we abandon our faith amid temptation and testing (Matt.13:5-6, 20-21; Mk.4:5-6, 16-17; Lk.8:6, 13):

Consider then both the mercy and the severity of God . For He is severe towards those who have fallen away, but merciful towards you – if, that is, you continue in that mercy. But if you don’t, you too will be cut off. And if they don’t continue in their unbelief, they will be grafted back in.

Romans 11:22-23a

3. *There is no Tribulational Security:* To be secure in our salvation, we must continue to grow spiritually in Christ and help others do the same through our spiritual gifts, and not substitute earthly goals for the hope of our eternal reward. Lest, like the seed that fell among the weeds,

our faith lose its eternal focus and be choked by life's temptations and tribulations, so that our production and growth are stunted (Matt.13:7, 22; Mk.4:7, 18-19; Lk.8:7, 14):

For if these [virtues of vv.5-7] be in your possession and increasing, they will render you neither unfit nor unproductive in your confession of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not possess these [virtues of vv.5-7] is nearsighted or even blind, having forgotten the cleansing of his previous sins. Strive all that much more then, brothers, ***to make your calling and election secure***. By devoting yourselves to these things [virtue, growth and Christian production] you shall never be tripped up along your way. For it is by such means that your path into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be smoothly and generously paved.

2nd Peter 1:8-11

The Danger of Backsliding: It is not only the three false doctrines treated above that pose a threat to the faith of individual believers. In fact, all teachings that give the believer a false sense of security but in the end leave him feeling confused, betrayed and abandoned can bring spiritual growth to a standstill, and even reverse a positive growth trend. The term often used to describe such a reversal of spiritual direction is “backsliding”, and the process of such spiritual degeneration is an alarmingly simple one that gradually undermines the whole-hearted allegiance to Christ we call faith in Him:

1) *a negligent attitude*: What does the Lord require of us but that we act justly, love mercy and walk humbly before Him (Mic.6:8)? We cannot walk with Him without listening to Him, learning from Him and seeking Him with our whole heart, and this is impossible without devoting ourselves to His Word (Jn.4:24). Neglecting our spiritual growth adversely affects everything in our lives, for it is only by the truth of the Word that we are transformed, that we are sanctified (Jn.17:17-19). Carried to an extreme, indifference toward the truth of the Word of God, produces a void in our hearts which will inevitably be filled by lies (Eph.4:17-19).

2) *an openness to lies*: As we saw earlier in this study of the devil's clever original deception in the garden, every lie begins with an attack on the truth. The believer who fails to follow the Lord cannot remain at a standstill. In the Christian life, it is impossible to “halt between two opinions” for very long (1Kng.18:21), and loss of interest in God's way will soon be replaced by a curiosity for other ways. Abandoning our search for God's truth is the first stage in exchanging that truth for a pack of lies that will stream into the void in our hearts (Rom.1:25). Becoming indifferent to the truth leaves us vulnerable to the lie.

3) *permissiveness toward sin*: Sin will always be a danger – at least as long as we are in these mortal bodies. Once we start to drift away from the truth of God's Word as our standard and begin instead to operate on false information, the pattern of sinful degeneration described in the book of James becomes that much easier to slip into (Jas.1:14-15). Outside of the Word of God, earthly desires of all sorts are often deemed acceptable, even justifiable, so that the process of desire, leading to sin, leading to unrestrained sin is accelerated (1Pet.2:11; Jas.4:1b).

4) *hardening of the heart*:⁶ Increased sin in the life, whether that sin is obvious or hidden, socially unacceptable or commonplace, intensifies our alienation from God. When we become complacent to sin, we begin to lose all sensitivity to what He desires, and He is seldom in our thoughts (Jn.12:40; 2Cor.3:14). At that point, we are no longer interested in coming to Him, because our deeds are evil, and we have no desire for Him to shine His light upon them (Jn.3:19-21; Eph.4:17-24; 5:8-14). The way of sin has alienated us from Him (Is.59:2). Severe discipline from the Lord is often necessary at this point to penetrate the thick wall that the renegade believer has thrown up between himself and God (1Cor.5:5; Rev.3:19-20).

5) *spiritual death*: Finally, as James describes it, this unrestrained sin gives birth to death, that is, spiritual death (Jas.1:15). Spiritual death, our original state at birth, is the eventual outcome of the backsliding process. For to continue following the path of sin, without repentance, without restoration, requires that we constantly and deliberately choose against our Master, Jesus Christ, until He gradually becomes less and less in our thinking, and gradually disappears from our hearts altogether when our faith completely dies out (Matt.7:21-23). That is why sin's reward is always death (Rom.6:23). At that point, separation from God is complete, and the former believer in Christ has become an enemy of His cross (Phil.3:18), and has been enslaved again in sin's captivity (Jn.8:34-35). And the ending is worse than the beginning (2Pet.2:20-23), for, in the end, this path leads to the rejection of Christ (1Jn.5:16-17; cf. Matt.12:31; Heb.6:4-6).

It is no wonder, then, that scripture is replete with passages that warn us to be alert and to evaluate our manner of life carefully. Such passages should never be taken lightly, since the issue at stake is our faith and our eternal life.

1. Passages demonstrating that salvation is conditional upon continued faith:

You were once alienated from God – your very thoughts were hostile towards Him and your deeds were evil. Yet God has now made peace with you through the death of Christ in His physical body so that you may stand before Him as holy, without blemish and free from accusation – [this you will do] ***if you remain solidly grounded and firmly fixed in the faith***, and un-moved from your hope in the gospel ...

Colossians 1:21-23

Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we persevere, we will also reign with Him. ***If we disown Him, He will also disown us***; If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself.

2nd Timothy 2:11-13

It is through this gospel that you are being saved, ***if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you*** – otherwise you have believed in vain.

⁶ See the series Exodus 14: Hardening Pharaoh's Heart

1st Corinthians 15:2

We are of [Christ's] household, *if we hold fast to our courage and confidence* in this hope.

Hebrews 3:6

For we have all become partners of Christ, *if we hold fast to our original conviction* firmly to the end.

Hebrews 3:14

2. Passages that warn us to protect our faith:

Examine yourselves to see whether you still stand steady in the faith. Put your qualifications [as Christians] to the test. Or didn't you know this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is at home in you (cf. Jn.14:23) – if He's not, then you are already disqualified.

2nd Corinthians 13:5

These things all happened [to the Exodus generation] by way of an example so that we might not lust after what is evil as they did. Don't practice idolatry, as some of them did (as the scripture says "the people sat down to eat and got up to frolic"). Don't fornicate, as some of them did, and 23,000 of them fell dead in a single day. And let's not put the Lord to the test, as some of them did, and were killed by snakes. And don't complain, as some of them did, and were killed by the destroying angel. All these things happened to them to give us an example, and have been written in scripture to warn us as we confront history's final epoch. ***So let whoever thinks he's standing firm be careful not to fall!***

1st Corinthians 10:6-12

Watch out for yourselves, so you don't lose what you've worked so hard for, but receive a full reward instead. No one who goes wandering off – that is, does not keep to the teachings about Jesus Christ – has a share in God.

2nd John 8-9

I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in Him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in Me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

John 15:5-6

3. Passages teaching that sinful behavior is antithetical to faith:

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition,

dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies – and whatever is similar to all these things. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Galatians 5:19-21

Don't you know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor practitioners of homosexuality nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

1st Corinthians 6:9-10

But among you there must not even be a hint of sexual immorality, or any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse jesting – things that have no place [among you].

Thanksgiving [is what ought to be heard coming from you] instead. For of this you can be sure: no immoral, impure, or greedy person – such a man is an idolater – has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Don't let anyone deceive you about this with empty words, for it is because of just such things that God's wrath comes upon those who refuse to obey and believe. So don't enter into partnership with them.

Ephesians 5:3-7

Those who want to get rich fall into temptations, traps, and many senseless and harmful lusts – the kind which swamp men[']s hearts] to their destruction and damnation.

1st Timothy 6:9

Preserving Your Eternal Life: As believers in Jesus Christ, we possess eternal life. And it is our most valuable possession. Like the man who found a treasure hidden in a field and sold all that he had to purchase that field (Matt.13:44), life everlasting is a joy beyond comparison to anything this world has to offer. Also like that hidden treasure, our eternal life has not yet been unearthed. It is hidden in Christ, ready to be unveiled at the resurrection (Col.3:1-4). Nevertheless, we possess that life, that eternal life, right here and now, and nothing could be more important than safeguarding our most valuable possession. As long as faith lives, our eternal life endures, for our faith is the very heartbeat of our eternal life (Jn.5:24). By protecting and strengthening our faith, we keep our eternal life secure (2Pet.1:10). No organization can provide this life. No one-time declaration can guarantee this life. And no denial of the pressures of life, now or in the future to come, can protect it from the worries and trials we must face. Security is not to be found in turning back to the Egypt of this world, but in pressing ahead towards the promised land of eternity. In seeking God through His Word (1Pet.2:2), and in serving God through the gifts He has given us (1Tim.3:13, 4:15-16) we shall continue our walk up that steep eternal path no matter the cost, knowing that at the end of the road lie all the wonders of eternity, the blessings and rewards of victory, the new heaven, the new earth, the new Jerusalem, the resurrection, and life everlasting in fellowship with our Master Jesus Christ forever.

If we build our lives on this Rock, our Savior Jesus Christ, our foundations will be secure come what may. For He is our only true security, firm and solid no matter what tribulations we are called upon to endure. If we keep on trusting in Him, if we keep on picking up our cross and following Him every day, then we shall never have anything to fear, and our faith will grow like the mustard seed, until we discover that what had started as a mere seedling has grown before our eyes into a mighty, magnificent tree, one which cannot be shaken by the stormy tribulations of life, no matter how severe.