

# Backsliding, Divine Chastisement and the Divine Agreement Part 1

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God The Father And Jesus Never Lie And Keep Their Word, Moses Wrote About Jesus, A More Sure Word Of Prophecy, Stipulations Of The Divine Agreement, A Promise Of Eternal Life, Whosoever Believeth, Jesus Christ Paid The Full Ransom Price, Washed In The Blood Of The Lamb, Repent And Believe, Jesus Won't Turn Us Away, We're Only Saved By Grace, Adopted Children Of God, Spiritually Married To Christ, What If We Fall Away?, He Will Never Leave Or Forsake Us, Salvation Is Forever, Temptations Of The World, God Is Married To The Backslider, The Price Of Backsliding Is Shame And Everlasting Contempt, All Christians Are Susceptible To Backsliding From The Lord, A Lifelong Walk Of Faith, Watch Out For The Devil's Subtle Snares And Devices

In the Book of Numbers we find the following interesting verse of Scripture:

"God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?"

Numbers 23:19, KJV

There is something very interesting about that verse. Notice that Moses mentions BOTH God the Father, AND the Son of Man. In other words, it is my belief that Moses is referring to Jesus. We are given a clear indication that Moses is talking about two distinct personalities, because he separates them with the word "neither". This is not the only place in the Old Testament where both God the Father and Jesus Christ are mentioned together -- to the consternation of non-believing Jews who claim that Jesus Christ is not mentioned in the Old Testament. Following is another example where we see this:

"I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the

hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire . . . I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him . . . Until the ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom."

Daniel 7:9, 13, 22, KJV

At any rate, that Moses would even make such a statement in Numbers 23:19 should come as no surprise to those of us who are Bible-believing Christians. After all, as I have pointed out before, on one occasion, Jesus did say the following to the unbelieving Jews in the Gospel of John:

"For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me."

John 5:46, KJV

But the point I wish to make is that God the Father's Word, and Jesus' Word, are a sure thing; or, as the Apostle Peter would later write, we have "a more sure word of prophecy", as we see by this verse:

"We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:"

2 Peter 1:19, KJV

This "sure word of prophecy", which has been foreordained since the foundation of the world, is that God the Father, and Jesus His Son, have crafted an agreement -- a Divine Agreement -- between themselves. This agreement involves the fate of all of humanity. The primary stipulations of this Divine Agreement are embodied in the words of three key verses. That is, John 1:12, John 3:16 and John 3:36, which, as most Christians will already know, state the following:

"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:"

John 1:12, KJV

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but

have everlasting life."

John 3:16, KJV

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

John 3:36, KJV

As these three verses clearly reveal to us, this Divine Agreement, which stands forever and is eternal, specifies that, as its benefactors, we imperfect, sinful creatures of flesh can escape the Wrath of God, obtain Eternal Life, inherit the Kingdom of God, and become the adopted Children of God. As Christian believers everywhere should already know, this Royal Pact of the Kingdom was signed and sealed with the precious Blood of the Lamb. That is, with the shed blood of Jesus Christ. It is an immutable -- or unchanging -- Agreement. As Numbers 23:19 clearly states, neither God the Father, nor Jesus, will ever go back on their word regarding this Divine Agreement. As we read in the Book of Psalms:

"LAMED. For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven."

Psalms 119:89, KJV

The most wonderful part of this Divine Agreement are the two words "whosoever believeth". These words are a clear, open invitation to all men, regardless of race, economic status, political leanings, or any other factors by which we humans tend to judge each other. As I explain in articles such as "Message to the World", "Is the Message of Salvation Meant for All Men?" and "All Are Given A Chance . . . But", with those two key words, God lovingly extends His arms of Mercy and Compassion to all of us, and patiently waits for us to repent of our sins, and embrace the atoning Sacrifice of His dear Son. As the Apostle Peter was inspired to write:

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

2 Peter 3:9, KJV

As I noted a moment ago, the wonderful stipulations of this Divine Agreement are made possible due to the fact that our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, was willing to pay a heavy ransom price for us all; and that price was His own precious

Blood which was shed on the Cross for our sins. As the Bible likewise clearly informs us:

"Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Matthew 20:28, KJV

"Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men."

1 Corinthians 7:23, KJV

"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."

1 Timothy 2:5-6, KJV

"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

1 Corinthians 6:19-20, KJV

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Romans 5:8, KJV

"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;"

1 Corinthians 15:3, KJV

"Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father:"

Galatians 1:3-4, KJV

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."

1 Timothy 1:15, KJV

"Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;"

Hebrews 1:3, KJV

"So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

Hebrews 9:28, KJV

"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed."

1 Peter 2:24, KJV

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

1 John 1:7, KJV

"And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

1 John 2:2, KJV

"And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin."

1 John 3:5, KJV

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

1 John 4:10, KJV

"And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,"

Revelation 1:5, KJV

Thus, it is plain to see that Jesus fulfilled His part of the Divine Agreement when He died a gruesome death on a Roman cross, thereby opening the way for our Salvation. Our part of the Agreement is a two-part process -- repent of our unbelief, and accept Christ. That is it. These are the only conditions by which we are bound -- believe in Christ and accept Christ. We must simply have faith in the words of the two Agreement Makers -- God the Father and Jesus His Son. If we do this, Jesus Himself promises us that He will not turn us away, as we can determine by these two verses:

"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

John 6:37, KJV

"And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

John 10:28, KJV

What the previous verses also make clear, is that Jesus is the only one who could ever meet the conditions of this Divine Agreement. As the Apostle Paul explains at length in a number of his Epistles, no other sacrifice for sin could ever be acceptable or pleasing to God. Furthermore, he tells us in such verses as Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 11:6, and Titus 3:5, that we are saved solely by the Grace of God through the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and that there is absolutely nothing that we can possibly do to save ourselves, because in the words of the Prophet Isaiah:

". . . we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags . . ."

Isaiah 64:6, KJV

Consider what the Apostle Paul actually wrote. He makes the point rather clear:

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."

Ephesians 2:8-9, KJV

"And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work."

Romans 11:6, KJV

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;"

Titus 3:5, KJV

Once we perform our particular part of the Divine Agreement, through an act of true repentance, belief and acceptance, the Bible informs us that we are adopted into the Family of God. We become a part of His Royal Household. Furthermore, the Scriptures inform us that we become spiritually married to Him forever; because unlike the children of the world, God does not believe in divorce, and neither does He ever lose His adopted children. Consider the following group of verses:

"For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together."

Romans 8:15-17, KJV

"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."

Galatians 3:26, KJV

"Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,"

Ephesians 1:5, KJV

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;"

Ephesians 2:19, KJV

"Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God."

Romans 7:4, KJV

Now, some people may be inclined to ask: "Well, what happens if we stop believing for some reason? Will this cause God's Divine Agreement to become null and void?". Personally, it's my belief that our lack of faith, or even our departing from the faith, will have absolutely no bearing on the integrity of the Agreement. Why? Because we are not the actual makers of the Agreement. We are not the Testator. Jesus is. We are merely signatories to it, as well as benefactors of it. The conditions of the Divine Agreement will still stand, simply because in spite of what we do, God will still keep His Word to us, and Jesus will still keep His Word to us as well. As Moses wrote so long ago "hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?".

In other words, once we come to Christ and are washed in the Blood of the Lamb, the Scriptures convince me that Salvation is ours for all time; because whether we weaken in faith or

not, Jesus is most certainly not going to climb back up on that Cross a second time; and God the Father, and Jesus His Son, are not going to deny what they have promised to us, no matter what. Thus, as the Scriptures plainly tell us:

"If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself."

2 Timothy 2:13, KJV

". . . for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

Hebrews 13:5, KJV

Of course, as I point out in other articles, if one does choose to turn away from their faith, the Bible does inform us that they will have a serious price to pay if they do not come to their senses and return to the Lord. The Apostle Peter in particular had this to say regarding those people who turn away from the Lord, and embrace the ways of the world again:

"For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."

2 Peter 2:20-22, KJV

In my view, and contrary to what some Christians apparently believe, the previous verses are not saying that one can lose their Salvation. The theme of this particular chapter is not even Salvation. It is about resisting the temptations of the world and leading a pure life in Christ. Thus, in verse nine, Peter clearly writes:

"The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished:"

2 Peter 2:9, KJV

In addition to the many things that Jesus taught about the ways of the world in the four Gospels, the Apostles John, James and Paul likewise discussed the subtle temptations of



the world, when they wrote verses such as the following:

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."  
1 Corinthians 10:13, KJV

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."  
1 John 2:15-16, KJV

"No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier."  
2 Timothy 2:4, KJV

"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."  
James 4:4, KJV

"And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away."  
1 Corinthians 7:31, KJV

"While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."  
2 Corinthians 4:18, KJV

"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,"  
2 Corinthians 6:17, KJV

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."  
Colossians 3:1-2, KJV

So I remain convinced that the primary emphasis of the verses

from Peter's second Epistle is backsliding from our Christian faith, and returning to a worldly way of living. The Apostle Peter is simply describing the sad state of those people who become polluted by the world again, and nothing more. Nowhere does he even remotely suggest that such Christians have lost their Salvation.

Let's face it. There are many Christians over the centuries who have abandoned their faith, or at the very least, who've fallen back into a very worldly lifestyle, much like what Jesus described in the Parable of the Sower. We all know that this is particularly true in our modern era with all of its creature comforts, worldly temptations, sights and sounds and never-ending Babylonian confusion. While it is lamentable that people backslide from the Lord, and return to their worldly lives, based upon all of the verses that I shared earlier, I simply do not believe that they lose their Salvation if and when they take this route in their lives. It is clear from the Scriptures that even when such people abandon God, or at least become bogged down by worldliness, He still does not abandon them. In fact, the Bible tells us that God is married to the backslider, as we see by this particular verse:

"Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion:"

Jeremiah 3:14, KJV

If, in spite of all of their constant murmuring, backsliding and rebellion, God did not totally abandon the Israelites of the Old Testament era, to the point that He promised that a remnant of the Jews would eventually be saved, how then is it that there are some Christians today who have convinced themselves that Christians can lose their Salvation through backsliding?

Stop and think about this point for a moment. If, as certain Christians suppose, the previous verses from 2nd Peter mean that we can lose our Salvation as a result of returning to our worldly ways, then indirectly, this means that we were never actually saved by the Grace of God in the first place. Rather, we would have to conclude that we were saved by our own "good" works. Thus, the minute that our own works become inadequate -- through backsliding and returning to the world -- we lose our Salvation. Obviously, this is not what God's Word teaches whatsoever. We are saved by Grace, and NOT by our own works. Please refer to the Scriptures which I shared

with you earlier regarding this same topic.

So, if, as I believe, we cannot lose our Salvation, then what happens to people who backslide, fall away from the Lord, and return to the ways of the world? I have often said that many of our questions can be answered simply by reading the Bible. This question is no different; and it seems to me that we can find a clear answer in verses such as the following:

"And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."

Daniel 12:2, KJV

"Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Mark 8:38, KJV

Based on verses such as the above, it is my personal belief that Christians who backslide into the world, and who are no longer effective witnesses for the Lord, will still be raised to Eternal Life. While they will not lose their Salvation -- simply because God is bound by His own word and won't take back His Gift -- sadly, it seems that they will suffer shame and everlasting contempt, because they failed the Lord; and that is a terrible price to pay.

However, I have become convinced through my study of the Word, that such an extreme eventuality is actually a worse case scenario. This is NOT the outcome that God desires in our lives whatsoever. Furthermore, I believe that He does everything within His power to prevent it from happening, while still ultimately honoring our free will and personal choice.

The truth is, most of us eventually stumble in our walk with the Lord sometime during our life. Perhaps we even do it a few times. The longer we serve the Lord, the more likely that this is bound to happen. After all, we are all only human, and the walk of faith is not over until life itself is over. As the Apostle Paul was inspired to write in his second Epistle to Timothy regarding his own personal walk of faith:

"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have

finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

2 Timothy 4:6-8, KJV

Until we each likewise arrive at that point, and the day of our departure from this life, we will undoubtedly continue to encounter pitfalls all along the way; because if there is one thing that I know for certain, it is that Satan is seriously afraid of Christians who are active and effective witnesses for the Lord. Thus, he will take every opportunity to try to hamper us in every possible way. The Apostles Peter, James and Paul also admonish us to be wary of Satan's subtle snares and devices, and to not fall for his many traps, but to resist them, as we see by this set of verses:

"Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices."

2 Corinthians 2:11, KJV

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:"

1 Peter 5:8, KJV

"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

James 4:7, KJV

"Neither give place to the devil."

Ephesians 4:27, KJV

Please go to part two for the conclusion of this article.

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Backsliding, Divine Chastisement and The Divine Agreement  
Part 2

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God's Desire: But Let It Rather Be Healed, The Lord's Rod Of Correction And Divine Chastisement Should Actually Result In The Peaceable Fruit Of Righteousness In Christians' Lives, Divine Chastisement: A Token Of God's Love For His Children, Symbolism In John Chapter 15, The Bible Is Self-Interpreting, Our Fiery Trials, We're Purged And Purified To Make Us Better Witnesses And Vessels For The Lord, Jesus Will Never Cast Us Off Or Forsake Us, Are You A Faithful Fighter For The Lord?, Fight The Good Fight Of Faith, Jesus' Personal Invitation, Christian Walk Is Not A Bed Of Roses, Suggested Reading List

Continuing our discussion from part one, speaking from my own personal experience, I know for a fact that it is not always easy to remain on the path that God has chosen for us. After all, we are weak, pitiful human flesh, and we are simply no match for Satan. As a result, we will sometimes fail, and we will sometimes fall. I will candidly admit that over the decades, there have been times in my own life when I have failed the Lord, and have fallen back into worldly ways and habits. The good news, as I noted a moment ago, is that when such instances occur, God prefers a much better outcome for us, other than shame and everlasting contempt. Exactly what does the Lord prefer? The following verses provide us with a very clear answer:

"And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; BUT LET IT RATHER BE HEALED."  
Hebrews 12:13, KJV

"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."  
James 5:16, KJV

"I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee."

Isaiah 44:22, KJV

So as we saw earlier, and as with the ancient Israelites, it seems that God's answer to our many failures and backsliding is not that we should suffer shame and everlasting contempt, but rather that we should be healed, so that we can return to fruitful service for Him, because He is married to us. Sadly, depending on the degree of our waywardness, the long road to recovery may not be one which we voluntarily choose to walk.

As I point out in other articles, such as "Beholding the Evil and the Good", "The Fruits of Disobedience" and "Love, Mercy, Forgiveness and Chastisement", if we foolishly and stubbornly insist on doing things our way, instead of God's way, quite often, the Lord is forced to pull out the Rod of Correction, administer Divine Chastisement, and give us a good whipping. As King Solomon was inspired to write:

"Open rebuke is better than secret love."

Proverbs 27:5, KJV

The Apostle Paul takes it a step further and informs us that if the Lord is forced to pull out His Rod of Correction and administer Divine Chastisement, we are not going to like it. However, in the end, if we submit to the Lord's dealings, it will yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness in our lives, as we see by this group of verses:

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave

them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed."

Hebrews 12:1-13, KJV

It is encouraging to note that in the previous verses from the Epistle to the Hebrews, we are told that it is precisely because God considers us His own dear children, that He finds us worthy of His Divine Chastisement. In other words, if God did not love us, then like some worldly parents, He would not care what we do, and He would not even bother to chastise us. However, because He is truly concerned about our welfare, He will not hesitate to use the Rod of Correction when He deems it necessary. Furthermore, we see again that the purpose of the Lord's chastisements are that we may live, that we may profit by them, that we may be partakers of His Holiness, and that we may be healed. In short, God's Divine Chastisement is truly motivated by genuine love, and not simply by temporary wrath, as occurs with some worldly parents.

As I lay in my bed early this morning at 2:30 AM, pondering the contents of this current article, I was reminded of the following words of the Lord that are found in John chapter fifteen:

"Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit . . . If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."

John 15:2, 6, KJV

I will admit that for a number of years, I have been troubled by the previous verses; because according to some Christians, they indicate that we can lose our Salvation. They claim that this is what Jesus means when He talks about being cast into the fire; presumably hellfire, or the Lake of Fire. However, this morning as I lay in bed, I gained a new understanding of what the verses mean, which perfectly meshes with everything

we have discussed thus far.

It seems to me that the main problem with those Believers who claim that Jesus is saying that we can lose our Salvation, is that they are taking the verses in a very literal sense, when that is not what Jesus may have intended whatsoever. If one takes the time to read this chapter from the beginning, he will see that the Lord is referring to Himself as the Vine, and we, His followers, as branches on the Vine, which bear fruit, probably grapes.

Now obviously, in a real world sense, Jesus is not actually a vine, anymore than we Believers are actually branches on a vine. Neither can we bear fruit, such as grapes, because we are not plants. Therefore, it seems to me that the Lord is speaking in a purely symbolic sense. In order to maintain continuity in the verses then, if the vine is symbolic, the branches are symbolic, and the fruit is also symbolic, then the fire must likewise be symbolic as well.

Assuming that this is indeed the case, then our next task is to determine what the fire represents. As I have stated many times before, the best way to understand God's Word is by allowing it to interpret itself. That is, by comparing one verse with another, until we arrive at a conclusion. In this particular case, based upon verses such as the following, I have determined that the fire which Jesus mentions in these verses isn't actually real fire, such as hellfire, or even the Lake of Fire, as some Christians erroneously assume, but that in reality, it actually represents Divine Chastisement. That is, personal trials and tribulation which the Lord will sometimes use to purify us -- like gold -- when we misbehave:

"But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

Job 23:10, KJV

"And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, the house of Israel is to me become dross: all they are brass, and tin, and iron, and lead, in the midst of the furnace; they are even the dross of silver. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because ye are all become dross, behold, therefore I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As they gather silver, and brass, and iron, and lead, and tin, into the midst of the furnace, to blow the fire upon it, to melt it; so will I gather you in mine anger and in my fury, and I will leave you there, and melt you. Yea, I will gather



you, and blow upon you in the fire of my wrath, and ye shall be melted in the midst thereof. As silver is melted in the midst of the furnace, so shall ye be melted in the midst thereof; and ye shall know that I the LORD have poured out my fury upon you."

Ezekiel 22:17-22, KJV

"Which I commanded your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, Obey my voice, and do them, according to all which I command you: so shall ye be my people, and I will be your God:"

Jeremiah 11:4, KJV

"And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God."

Zechariah 13:9, KJV

"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

James 1:2-4, KJV

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

1 Peter 1:7, KJV

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified."

1 Peter 4:12-14, KJV

"I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see."

## Revelation 3:18, KJV

As the previous verses indicate, the primary purpose of being cast into the fiery furnace of Divine Chastisement is not so that we will be destroyed or lost, but rather so that we can be purified of our sins and rebellion -- the dross -- and be converted into even finer gold fit for the Master's use. In other words, as we saw earlier, "rather let it be healed".

And, as Jesus said in John 15, if due to our backsliding, we become unfruitful branches, and ineffective witnesses, we are cast into the fires of tribulation, not to be destroyed, but rather to be purged, in order that we might eventually bear even more fruit for the Kingdom of God. I have mentioned in previous articles that this very same process of falling away -- or backsliding -- and being purged of our sins, is likewise mentioned in the Old Testament Book of Daniel, as we see by these verses:

"And they that understand among the people shall instruct many: yet they shall fall by the sword, and by flame, by captivity, and by spoil, many days. Now when they shall fall, they shall be holpen with a little help: but many shall cleave to them with flatteries. And some of them of understanding shall fall, to try them, and to purge, and to make them white, even to the time of the end: because it is yet for a time appointed."

Daniel 11:33-35, KJV

Earlier in this article, we saw clearly how Jesus said that once we come to Him, He will never cast us out, He will never leave us or forsake us, and no man will ever be able to pluck us out of His hand. If this is indeed true -- and I believe that it is -- then in John chapter fifteen, when Jesus says that men gather the unfruitful branches and cast them into the fire where they are burned, it simply cannot mean that we lose our Salvation; because no man -- not even the men that are mentioned in John 15 -- can pluck us out of His hand. It only stands to reason then, that people who interpret those verses as meaning that we can lose our Salvation are clearly wrong.

When personal tribulation does come our way, such as through Divine Chastisement, the real issue that we each need to consider is whether we allow ourselves to remain down and in a state of defeat, and constantly being kicked in the head by Satan, or whether we learn our lesson, and allow the Lord to

pick us up by our bootstraps, and get us marching again for Him. Our biggest error is not in falling, it is in choosing to remain on the ground wallowing in self pity. It is in remaining mired in the clay of defeat. Consider this verse:

"He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings."

Psalms 40:2, KJV

So how about you? Are you a real fighter for Jesus, or do you prefer to suffer shame and everlasting contempt due to your failures to the Lord? As the old axiom goes "Quitters never win, and winners never quit" . . . by the Grace of God. As the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy:

"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses."

1 Timothy 6:12, KJV

In conclusion, if you personally haven't yet signed onto the Divine Agreement, I urge you to do so today. As Jesus tells us in the third chapter of the Book of Revelation, He stands at the symbolic door of our hearts, patiently waiting to enter into spiritual communion with us. Will you let Him in?

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

Revelation 3:20, KJV

And please remember that just because we accept the Lord into our lives does not mean that all of a sudden, everything will become a bed of roses. It won't suddenly become rainbows and unicorns. Let me tell you, dear friend, if you sincerely and faithfully serve the Lord in any capacity, sooner or later, you will have your share of battles to fight. Some of them may be a result of sins in your own life, while others may be persecution from worldly nonbelievers. So when that happens, just remember that Jesus is always there with an outstretched hand, ready to pick you up. Always, because He will never leave you nor forsake you. Remember Hebrews 13:5.

With these thoughts, I will bring this article to a close. It is my hope that you have found it to be informative and enlightening, and I pray that it has been a blessing in your

life as well. If you have an account with Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr or with any other social network, I would also really appreciate if you would take the time to click or tap on the corresponding link that is found on this page. Thank you so much, and may God bless you abundantly!

For additional information, you may want to refer to the list of reading resources below which were also mentioned in this article, or which contain topics which are related to this article, and which are likewise located on the Bill's Bible Basics web server.

All Are Given A Chance . . . But  
Beholding the Evil and the Good  
Do You Want Love and Light, or Rod and Wrath?  
Free Will and Personal Choice  
He Who Fights and Runs Away: Choose Your Battles Wisely  
Is the Message of Salvation Meant for All Men?  
Love, Mercy, Forgiveness and Chastisement  
Message to the World  
OSAS: Are We Once Saved, Always Saved?  
Striving for Perfection: Are You a Sinless Saint?  
The Battle is Not Yours Alone!  
The Fruits of Disobedience  
The Lord Will Lift You Up  
What It Means to Repent

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