

A Parable of Immortality

I am standing by the seashore. A ship at my side spreads her white sails to the morning breeze and starts for the blue ocean. She is an object of beauty and strength, and I stand and watch until at last she hangs like a speck of white cloud just where the sun and sky come down to mingle with each other.

Then someone at my side says, 'There she goes!' Gone where? Gone from my sight - that is all.

She is just as large in mast and hull and spar as she was when she left my side and just as able to bear her load of living freight to the places of destination. Her diminished size is in me, not in her.

And just at the moment when someone at my side says, 'There she goes!', there are other eyes watching her coming, and other voices ready to take up the glad shout: 'Here she comes!'

- by **Henry Van Dyke**

The Point of No Return

A plane, flying across the ocean, will eventually reach the "point of no return." It is a real and definite point, beyond which it is better, in case of mechanical problems, to proceed than to attempt a return to the origination point. In the mind of the pilot, it is impossible to turn back.

There are a number of passages which seem to indicate that it is possible for someone to reach a point in his plunge into apostasy and sin, so that it is impossible to be brought to repentance. Consider the following sobering words:

"But these, as creatures without reason, born mere animals to be taken and destroyed, railing in matters whereof they are ignorant, shall in their destroying surely be destroyed, suffering wrong as the hire of wrong-doing; men that count it pleasure to revel in the day-time, spots and blemishes, revelling in their deceivings while they feast with you; having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; enticing unstedfast souls; having a heart exercised in covetousness; children of cursing" (II Peter 2:12-14).

"For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and then fell away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame" (Hebrews 6:4-6).

How do we reconcile such passages with those that express God's wonderful longsuffering and patience? For example, *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* (II Peter 3:9). *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (I John 1:9). Let me make three observations, which I hope will clear up the difficulty, while at the same time, serve as a serious warning to each and every one of us with regard to living faithfully in our service to God.

First, there is along the pathway that leads away from God, a point, which once passed, that spells final doom for the hardened and impenitent heart. It is a real point. Once this point is reached, it is virtually impossible to reverse the direction one is traveling spiritually. Is this because God will not forgive? No. It is because the heart becomes so hardened that it can no longer be touched with the Gospel. The problem lies not in the power or willingness of God to forgive, but in the inability of the heart to turn away from sin.

Second, realization of such a point ought to motivate us to turn away from sin while it is still within our power to do so. I have had occasion over the last two or three decades, of attempting to persuade individuals to turn away from sin and obey God, whether to become a Christian or to be restored to their first love. Some have obeyed. But a far greater number have convinced themselves that there is plenty of time, and that "someday" they would come to God. I have also witnessed a number of souls delay their return so long that eventually they simply no longer have

the desire to give the least bit of consideration to their spiritual plight. They have, spiritually speaking, passed the point of no return.

Third, if you are outside the safety fold of God's gracious love and salvation, and if you, at this very moment, are giving consideration to a return to your Lord, I would strongly encourage you to act on that desire, even while it is called today. Your delay moves you ever closer to the point of no return.

I cannot think of anything more tragic, or that will bring more remorse to the lost when, having entered into eternity, they remember the numerous opportunities that was theirs to come home to the Lord, but neglected that open door provided by their gracious God. If you would be saved, delay not till the morrow, for tomorrow may be too late!

- by Tom Wacaster

A Question about John's Baptism

We received this question:

I have a question about baptism. John's baptism was before Acts 2: The question is: were those who were baptized by John baptized again when the church was established? I use Acts 19:3 when Paul found some brethren who knew only the baptism of John and they were baptized again to be in a right relationship with God.

While the New Testament doesn't really answer the question about 're-baptism' of those baptized by John, I think there are some indications that they were re-baptized after the preaching of the gospel on the Day of Pentecost. The passage you mentioned about Paul in Ephesus is one that is applicable to the discussion, but some argue that those men were baptized with John's baptism AFTER Pentecost, and thus they claim it doesn't pertain to the question of those who were baptized by John PRIOR to Pentecost. I'm not sure you can prove the 'timing' argument, but they may be right.

Here's an argument that may provide the answer: Matthew 3:5-6 says: "Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins." Thus, we know that John's baptism was VERY popular with the people.

Now, on Pentecost, when the people asked, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37), notice that there were not two answers given, but only one: "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (vs. 38). If those baptized by John didn't have to be baptized again, it seems some exception would have been stated. Surely there were people in that audience that had been baptized with John's baptism, since it was so popular, as noted above. But, there was no exception offered -- everyone was commanded to be baptized. This would indicate that those baptized by John were re-baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ."

- by Greg Gwin