

The state of believers at the end

Introduction

There has been a great deal of confusion in church history about the state of a believer at the end of time when the Lord Jesus returns in glory and takes us to be with him.

Some deeply erroneous churches have posited that the work of salvation is incomplete in this life and that a further purification is necessary after death in a sort of limbo. The Roman and the Eastern Orthodox churches aver this in the doctrine of Purgatory. This is based on a wrong division of sin into venial (pardonable) and mortal. Saints and martyrs go straight to heaven. Those who die unrepentant of mortal sins, having totally and deliberately rejected God, are said to go direct to hell. However, souls in Purgatory (the majority of the church) must endure purgatorial fire but can be helped by the prayer, masses and good works of the faithful and the process of salvation continues. This denies multiple doctrines.¹

Variations of this appear in other church groups.

It is common amongst Arminians that salvation is relegated to the individual's faithfulness. A person can be faithful for decades but then commit a sin and die in faithlessness, ending up in hell. Arminianism makes the initiation of salvation, and its termination, dependent upon the will of the individual. Though few Arminians accept Purgatory, like Romanists they make final salvation dependent upon the will and actions of the individual. A single mistake can ruin the testimony of a believer, who finally falls away from grace forever.

In systems like these salvation is dependent on an act of man.

This behoves us to examine what happens at the end: either at death or at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ at the end.

Death is the end of opportunity

We must first affirm that after physical death there is no opportunity to obtain Gospel promises. Death is not the end of the person; conditional immortality (annihilation) is not Biblical. The soul and spirit continue (Eccles 12:7) and the body of sinners is raised up at the end in order to be judged and condemned. Eternal punishment requires an everlasting body.

All believers are raised up with a glorious body at the return of Christ, the dead are raised and the living are changed (1 Thess 4:13-18).

¹ Such as: after death comes judgment (Heb 9:27). Salvation from sin does not continue after death but is completed either at death or at the return of Christ. There is no mortal and venial sin, all sin is sin. One sin is as bad as breaking the whole law (Jm 2:10). The mass is unbiblical. Prayer for the dead is never condoned and cannot change a dead person's condition.

After physical death there is only the immediate prospect of judgment for sinners, 'it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment', (Heb 9:27). There is no Purgatory and no reincarnation.

For we will surely die and *become* like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. 2 Sam 14:13

Since his days *are* determined, the number of his months *is* with You; You have appointed his limits, so that he cannot pass. Job 14:5

For I know *that* You will bring me *to* death, and *to* the house appointed for all living. Job 30:23

What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his life from the power of the grave? Selah Ps 89:48

For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward. Eccles 9:5

God will bring you into judgment. Eccles 11:9

For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil. Eccles 12:14

Whatever your hand finds to do, do *it* with your might; for *there is* no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going. Eccles 9:10

The offer of the Gospel is only available to the living in this life on Earth. Every person has the opportunity to obey the Gospel until his last breath. After death is only the prospect of judgment; the offer of the Gospel has passed.

The end of sinners

The end of sinners is judgment and punishment. This needs no analysis here.

There is no limbo, no Purgatory, no reincarnation, no further chances, no hope.

Sinners are raised to judgment (Rev 1:7) and stand before God to account for their lives (Matt 12:36). After condemnation for their sin and rejecting Christ, they are sentenced to eternal punishment in hell.

The end of believers

In technical terms the believer is raised up in a glorious body with a purified soul and a perfect spirit.

Believers are relocated, after judgment, to a restored and renewed Earth that is once more like the Garden of Eden; all is good.

On this renewed Earth, believers fellowship with God in the flesh and serve the Lord Jesus Christ. Heaven and Earth are one; God dwells with men. The decree of God is finalised; the plan of God is complete.

Let us analyse the state of believers at the end.

Perseverance

The glory of the true Gospel is that salvation is the work of the Lord and not of man. Man neither initiates it nor can he terminate it. 'Salvation is of the Lord' (Jonah 2:9). 'Salvation and glory and honour and power belong to the Lord our God!' (Rev 19:1). 'I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand', (Jn 10:28).

The Gospel begins with the calling of God in eternity (election) and ends with the glorification of the believer at the coming of Christ. From the beginning to the end the believer is preserved by the grace of God. Those he called are protected throughout their pilgrimage.

This is a doctrine that my readers well understand and needs no further development.

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us? Rm 8:29-31

Eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, *that you may be* blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God *is* faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. 1 Cor 1:7-9

And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve *me* for His heavenly kingdom. 2 Tim 4:18

[Saints] Who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 1 Pt 1:5

To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ. Jude 1:1
His favour *is for* life. Ps 30:5

Those who are called by God are certainly saved, preserved and glorified. God cannot be thwarted.

But what actually occurs at the end of our journey?

The saint is perfected

But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, **perfect**, establish, strengthen, and settle *you*. 1 Pt 5:10

Eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, *that you may be* blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God *is* faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. 1 Cor 1:7-9

That He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a **glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish**. Eph 5:26-27

To present you **holy, and blameless, and above reproach** in His sight. Col 1:22

So that He may establish your hearts **blameless in holiness** before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints. 1 Thess 3:13

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present *you faultless* before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. Jude 1:24

Perfection is not attained in this life, despite the false claims of perfectionists of various sorts.² Perfection of holiness is impossible for humans who still have the old nature present and who still succumb to temptation. Everybody makes mistakes, including apostles (Jm 3:2) There is a continual battle for the soul and a warfare against demonic forces (Eph 6). No one is perfected before the end.

At the end of our spiritual pilgrimage and suffering in this vale of tears, we are said to be 'perfected', 'holy and without blemish', 'holy and blameless and above reproach', 'blameless in holiness' and 'faultless'.

There is no doubt that whatever the state of the Christian at death or at the coming of Christ, every believer is presented to God by Christ as holy and blameless. This is because the old nature (long under the sentence of death) is finally eradicated, the soul is perfected in holiness and the body is replaced with a spiritual body. Salvation is consummated by Christ to present a holy bride and church to God.

The caveat

It is true that some texts regarding the perfection of saints at the end have a caveat of continuing faithfulness, such as:

To present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight -- if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard. Col 1:22-23

This does not affirm the Arminian position (that a genuine saint can fall away). It is simply a statement of fact that the only way to ascertain a genuine conversion is that a person continues in faith to the end. Continuing in grace is the only proof of a person's true spiritual state. I have lost count of the number of seemingly wonderful believers who, at some point, deserted God and apostatised forever. This has included very eminent and seemingly godly church leaders.

The true believer does not need to fear falling away; there is a genuine doctrine of assurance. However, outwardly, the only visible proof is that one continues – because of the grace of God. The continuing is not by human effort but God's grace.

The saint is transformed

As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.
Ps 17:15

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Rm 8:29

And as we have borne the image of the *man* of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly *Man*. 1 Cor 15:49

² E.g. Methodists, Holiness groups.

The Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. Phil 3:20-21

Through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature. 2 Pt 1:3-4

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. 1 Jn 3:2

Throughout this life the believer is involved in an inner transformation of the soul (Rm 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:23) by the working of grace (progressive sanctification). The spirit has been regenerated and the new man is in the likeness of Christ (Gal 2:20, 6:15; Eph 2:10, 4:24). However, the old nature is still present causing war in our person and our body is hindered by being material, weak and sinfully derived from Adam.

This all changes at the end. The soul is finally and fully purified and the body is resurrected as a spiritual body (1 Cor 15:44) to be like Jesus' resurrected body. The transformation is complete; saints are then fully like God morally, having inner moral purity but also having a glorified body that can reflect that inner virtue perfectly. [See later 'glorified'.]

The saint receives his inheritance

I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. Acts 20:32

Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'. Matt 25:34

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance. Eph 1:11

Having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory. Eph 1:13-14

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. Eph 1:18

Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. Col 1:12

And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. Heb 9:15

To an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you. 1 Pt 1:4

You were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. 1 Pt 3:9

An inheritance is something that you inherit as an heir. As a result of being in a family you inherit goods, money or property upon the death of someone. It is the giving of gifts that you have not earned and may not even deserve.

The inheritance of the saints in Christ is a popular doctrine amongst the apostles and is frequently mentioned in the NT. It is the culmination of the hope that we have in Christ.

Saints receive this inheritance because they are in Christ, the inheritor of all the promised blessings of God upon the perfect fulfilment of the law. As a man Christ perfectly fulfilled the law and thus inherited all the multitude of promises given to the perfect man.

Jesus is also given a kingdom by God for his obedience to the divine decree. This kingdom involves the authority over everything in the universe (Matt 28:18). The inheritance is the inheritance of a king.

Because saints are in Christ by divine union, they share in the inheritance with Christ in a delegated manner. Some aspects of this inheritance include:

Kingship

Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom. Matt 25:34

Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Rev 1:5-6

You *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light. 1 Pt 2:9

Jesus is the King of Kings, the Lord over all; but his people, the elect saints, are given delegated authority to rule on his behalf over certain regions and responsibilities. I believe that this will certainly include other planets in the glory.

Blessing

That you may inherit a blessing. 1 Pt 3:9

Blessing is happiness, perfect contentment, peace. The inheritance of Christ, being in full righteousness, imparts happiness and peace because all guilt is gone.

Eternal life

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. Matt 19:29

Eternal life is one of the key ingredients of the inheritance. All life is in Christ. Those in Christ have eternal life with Christ.

This is not just everlasting life or immortality, this is a special kind of life that is the life of God.

A full explanation of the inheritance would require a major study and would result in a large book. It involves all the ingredients of salvation. Salvation consummated is the inheritance in Christ. The inheritance is only for the sanctified, the justified and the adoption.

The saint is established

But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, **establish**, strengthen, and settle *you*. 1 Pt 5:10

The Lord is faithful, who will establish you. 2 Thess 3:3

The Greek word for 'establish' means to make firm, to render constant, to confirm.

Despite God's grace in our lives today, we so often fail him and lack constancy. This is due to fighting our old nature every day and warring with the enemy of our souls who entices us to waver and sin.

At the end, this weakness is fully overcome as we become established like Christ; we are made constant and steadfast.

The saint is strengthened

But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, **strengthen**, and settle *you*. 1 Pt 5:10

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Phil 4:13

'Strengthen' clearly means to make strong.

During our lives today we are fully aware that we are weak. We fail in so many ways, despite our best intentions. We falter, we get tired, we get sick, we get hurt emotionally, we get rejected and sometimes we struggle to flee temptation. However, at the end the saint is made strong.

By the grace of God in fulfilling salvation, the trembling saint is made like a lion. The weak saint is fortified. The poor saint is made rich. The fearful saint is given courage. The sick saint is given complete health. The nervous saint is made steadfast.

In short, we are all made to be like Christ. We no longer feature the weakness of Adam and our fathers, but fully put on Christ. What was once only a spiritual union (Gal 2:20) is now a unification of our spirit, soul and body into Christ; we are one with Christ and fully representative of him to God. We think like Christ; we act like Christ, we walk like Christ.

The saint is settled

But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and **settle** *you*. 1 Pt 5:10

The Greek word for 'settle' means to make stable, to lay a foundation.

So often today saints are unstable. This results from a lack of faith, being double-minded (Jm 1:8), being fearful, being doubtful, being ignorant of the truth and many other factors. We are prone to weakness.

At the end we are fully settled; founded upon Christ and stable. We are then unwavering in truth, solid in faith, single-minded in will and brave in spirit.

The saint's hope is fulfilled

Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest *your* hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 1 Pt 1:13

The Lord Jesus Christ, our hope. 1 Tim 1:1

We desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end. Heb 6:11

This *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence *behind* the veil. Heb 6:19

The hope of the Gospel, of Christ, is what we hold on to by faith at this present time. This hope, fixed in Christ, enters beyond the veil into heaven itself; our hope reaches into heaven. Through hope we communicate with God (Heb 7:19).

At the end this hope is realised; it becomes actual. Previously we saw salvation dimly; then we see everything in the clear light of day. All that is involved in our hope (glory, peace, power, fellowship with God, understanding, etc.) is realised and a cause of joy.

Grace is fulfilled

Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest *your* hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 1 Pt 1:13

Grace comes from God's decree; it is the way that he works out his decree, such as giving salvation by grace alone.

Grace is unmerited kindness, favour, free provision and it is bestowed on the elect alone. The beginning of grace on God's part is creation materially and election in eternity, spiritually. Grace on our part begins at conversion. We know God's grace after being called and regenerated. But grace finalised is at the end when grace comes to completion as saints become fully like Christ.

The saint is glorified

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Rm 8:18

When Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Col 3:4

He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Thess 2:14

A partaker of the glory that will be revealed. 1 Pt 5:1

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. 1 Jn 3:2

The details of this glorification are difficult to analyse. What is certain is that saints do not become God; they do not share in the attributes of God and never gain self-existence (aseity). The Charismatic and occultic 'little gods' doctrine is pure heresy.

But saints do share in the glory of God in a reflected way. As united in Christ in body and soul as well as in spirit, saints partake of God's glory.

Some of this glory inherent in the new spiritual body will include things we know about the resurrected Christ. They will not be hindered by material objects, such as walls and doors (Mk 16:14; Lk 24:36; Jn 20:19, 26), and though they can eat (Jn 21:11-15) they will not need material food to survive. They never get sick, suffer and are never sad (Rev 21:4).

However, the true glory is fellowshiping with God. The purpose of the decree, God dwelling with men, is fulfilled and saints live to serve God to manifest his glory in multiple ways of ministering. In a vast universe of glory and beauty, I believe that saints will treat the cosmos like a garden to glorify God on every planet.³ Saints will learn what ministry they have on the renewed Earth and will travel to the stars to make God's glory manifest in every part of space. Can I prove this? No; however, the logic is inescapable. Stewardship will not be limited to Earth in a vast universe.

There is an apocalypse

The basis of the word 'apocalypse' is the Old English, via Old French and ecclesiastical Latin from Greek *apokalupsis*, from *apokaluptein* 'uncover, reveal', from *apo-* 'un-' + *kaluptein* 'to cover'. It is often used today to speak of the final destruction of the world because the end is the revealing of God's glory, but the real meaning is revelation, uncovering.

The world we live in today is not real in the sense of what God intended for life. This is not the illusory shadow world of Hinduism and Buddhism ('maya');⁴ nor is it the ethereal world of conspiracy theories that there is no material reality but only an illusion caused by vibrations. The world we know today is a parody, a shadow, a cursed existence, a darkness which is caused by the Fall of mankind into sin. Even nature itself is damaged by this Fall (Rm 8:20-21).

In this world God is hidden and only seen in reflections in nature or in the faithful actions of saints. In the new world after the end, God is fully manifest to all and believers share in open material fellowship with God because they have spiritual bodies.

The end is thus a time of great uncovering, of revelation, of seeing what was invisible. Even sinners, raised from the dead for judgment, will partake of this uncovering to some degree as they see the reality of the depth of their sin and its offence to God's glory. They will affirm that God's condemnatory judgment is just.

Saints partake in a massive revelation at the end when their eyes are truly opened to the glory of God's decree.

The key part of this revelation is the revelation of Christ (Lk 17:30; 1 Cor 1:7; 1 Pt 1:13). The world sees Jesus Christ as a mere man and indeed many supposed Christians treat the Lord like he is still hiding his glory. But Jesus is no longer a mere man and his glory is no longer subdued; Jesus is Lord, King, and glorified. He is in full authority over all the universe; all authority is his (Matt 28:18). Jesus has full authority in heaven and on Earth.

³ In the unspoiled creation, God was a gardener (Gen 2:8) and Adam was a gardener and a steward over nature.

⁴ The illusion or appearance of the phenomenal world.

The revelation of Jesus causes saints to marvel (2 Thess 1:10);⁵ to the world this glory is terrifying and awesome. Jesus' glory is no longer hidden but open and manifest.

Conclusion

The state of believers at the end is most glorious and wonderful. It is so amazing that it is hard to clarify how wonderful this experience is.

This state has been prepared by God for millennia. It is the fulfilment of God's decree and planning. It is the end that was envisaged in eternity for God to dwell with men and for Christ to be all.

This hope of the saints is what powers their desire to serve God and face much suffering. Throughout church history saints have been willing to sacrifice themselves to appalling prospects because of the hope that was in them for the future. That hope is secure in Christ. This hope involves words that signify wonder and blessedness: 'bliss', (perfect happiness; great joy) 'paradise' (heaven as the abode of the just; an idyllic state, a royal park or garden), 'glory' (magnificence; great beauty).

The fulness of this experience in the glory is expressed in symbolic terms, for example in Revelation, because it is too difficult to express in words. It is where Christ is the light and a river of life for the healing of the nations.

In the glory Christ is all.

Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. 1 Cor 2:9

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⁵ 'Admired' in KJV and NKJV is not strong enough. It is something that causes wonder; something marvellous. Young's Literal translates as 'wondered at'.