

SOTERIOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

PART 60

REWARDS & INHERITANCE, PART 12

Dillow also entertains the idea of a Protestant purgatory although he rejects the Catholic understanding of purgatory. “Is there a Protestant Purgatory? I believe evangelicals should be open to thinking about this. Those inclined to interpret the meaning of *Gehenna* in the New Testament with reference to Pseudepigrapha should be aware that whatever *Gehenna* meant in those writings, it was purgatorial. Of course, we cannot accept the Catholic understanding mentioned in the three points above, nor should we use the term ‘purgatory’ which implies cleansing, purgation, and atonement. That said, this book does argue that there will be a time of grief. Clark Pinnock suggests that we consider ridding ourselves of our knee-jerk reaction to the idea and consider our purgatory, ‘not as a place of punishment or atonement (because of our view of the sufficient and finished work of Christ), but we can think of it as an opportunity for maturation and growth.’ We would add that it is initially a time of rebuke, regret, reflection, and repentance” [Joseph Dillow, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 923].

Roman Catholic theology dealing with purgatory is based on a Scripture in 2 Maccabees which is in the Apocrypha. They didn’t use it until the Reformation and it was a reaction to Protestant criticism of the doctrine. “The Council of Trent (1545-63) was the first official proclamation of the Roman Catholic Church on the Apocrypha, and it came a millennium and a half after the books were written, in an obvious polemical action against Protestantism. Furthermore, the addition of books that support salvation by works and prayers for the dead at that time—only twenty-nine years after Luther posted his Ninety-five Theses—is highly suspect” [Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, p. 269]. They also use 1 Corinthians 3:15 to justify purgatory. Their reasoning is that “Catholic theology finds here the idea of purgatorial fires burning away the dross of sin in preparation of the souls in purgatory for their ultimate salvation.” They also use the condemnation Jesus pronounced against the Jewish leadership for blasphemy of the Holy Spirit as the unpardonable sin. “Catholic theology focuses on the implications of the last phrase [“but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven either in this current age or in the age to come”], reasoning in this fashion: if there is one sin—blasphemy against the Holy Spirit—that cannot be forgiven either in this current age or in the one to come, then there may be other sins that, if not forgiven in this present age, can be forgiven in the age to come—that is, in purgatory” [Gregg R. Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology & Practice: An Evangelical Assessment*, p. 218-219].

The point I want to make is that while Dr. Dillow rejects the Roman Catholic details that form the foundation of their doctrine, he embraces the concept of purgatory for Protestants.

Dillow makes several serious errors in this presentation of his doctrine affirming some sort of purgatorial judgment of believer's sins at the judgment seat. First, he resorts to extra-biblical writings, the Pseudepigrapha, as a basis for this exegetical conclusion. Actually, using these sources is worse than simply using materials from outside the bounds of Scripture; these Old Testament period writings were rejected by "virtually everyone." The very name, Pseudepigrapha means "false writings, spurious." "The Pseudepigrapha books are those that are distinctly spurious and unauthentic in their overall content. Although they claim to have been written by biblical authors, they actually express religious fancy and magic from the period between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200....Most of these books are comprised of dreams, visions, and revelations in the apocalyptic style of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah" [Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, pp. 257, 262-263]. There is only one reason to resort to using such sources and that is because they confirm the argument you are making when Scripture does not support it. The Pseudepigrapha may be used as secondary sources primarily for historical, contextual purposes but only that which is verified by other reliable sources may be considered useful for developing any theological position. Second, quoting Clark Pinnock concerning hell is absurd. Pinnock believes in annihilation rather than the biblical doctrine of eternal punishment in the lake of fire. "...it is more scriptural, theologically coherent, and practical to interpret the nature of hell as the destruction rather than the endless torture of the wicked. ...the ultimate result of rejecting God is self-destruction, closure with God, and absolute death in body, soul, and spirit...This view [Pinnock's view of annihilation] does not portray God as being a vindictive and sadistic punisher....Hell is not the beginning of a new immortal life in torment but the end of a life of rebellion" [Clark H. Pinnock, "The Conditional View" in *Four Views on Hell*, p. 137]. Pinnock's understanding of hell is unbiblical from the beginning so using him as an authoritative source for developing your theology is a hermeneutically unsound practice. Third, Dillow didn't completely state Pinnock's view. Pinnock believes we must be perfected after death and he calls that Purgatory [p. 130]. Obviously, Pinnock does not believe we are perfect in Christ, which we are, and Dillow, by virtue of his silence and his embrace of Pinnock's explanation, seems to affirm that false notion. Fourth, in this paragraph of his book, Dillow has abandoned literal hermeneutics in order to support his doctrinal position. We have to let the Bible speak on these issues and resorting to highly questionable extra-biblical sources and theologians as the basis for our interpretive conclusions is hermeneutically inexcusable.

Walvoord ably refuted this Protestant Purgatory idea. “The central passage on the judgment of the church is 2 Corinthians 5:8–10...Paul declares that it is his fundamental purpose in life to live in such a way that his life will be well spent in the Master’s service. When he is judged at this judgment seat, it will be determined what is good and what is bad. Although some have attempted to make this a Protestant purgatory, i.e., a time of punishment for unconfessed sin, it seems clear from the general doctrine of justification by faith that no condemnation is possible for one who is in Christ. Discipline such as is administered in this life will be of no value to those already made perfect in heaven. The bad works are discarded as unworthy of reward but good works are rewarded. The penalty is limited to the loss of reward. It is obvious that with imperfections which beset every Christian, no one will be able to claim perfection in that day. All will have a measure of failure, and it may be that all will have some reward. The judgment will be a general evaluation of a summary kind, but it is gracious rather than retributive” [John F. Walvoord, “The Church in Heaven” in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123, no. 490 (April-June 1966): 99-100].

“Where will we spend our Millennial Kingdom days? Will we be rejoicing and fellowshiping with each other in the presence of the King of Kings, or will we be in some other separate region or ‘separate place’ experiencing profound regret and remorse as we look back on a life full of lost opportunities? [p. 49]...It’s [outer darkness] simply *the darkness outside the light of God’s presence*. It’s another region or another area outside of where the joy of the Lord was being experienced....It’s a place *outside* the room where the obedient servants are enjoying God’s presence, but evidently contiguous to it. The unprofitable servant can see what is going on in the other region, but he cannot enter in. He is a castaway—he was cast out of fellowship. [p. 88] [Chuck and Nancy Missler, *The Kingdom, Power, & Glory: The Overcomer’s Handbook*]....There will be no equality. All will be in the kingdom, but some will occupy positions of honor and glory, while others will occupy positions of shame and disgrace. This determination will influence our attendance at the Wedding Ceremony, the Marriage Feast, and where we will spend the Millennium.” [Nancy Missler, “The Kingdom, Power, and Glory: The Parable of the Ten Talents” www.khouse.org].

I agree with Mrs. Missler that equality in the sense that everyone is the same in the Kingdom and beyond is untrue. We are all one in Christ and unified in Him but there will be varying levels of responsibility and rewards based on our experiential sanctification. I emphatically reject the notion that any believer will be barred from attending the wedding ceremony or the Wedding Supper of the Lamb, or that they will somehow be outside the bounds of the Kingdom for those 1,000 years. These are unbiblical concepts.

Some theologians view the concepts of outer darkness and the wailing and gnashing of teeth as metaphorical pictures of believer’s being punished at the judgment seat of

Christ. "To be in the 'outer darkness' is to be in the kingdom of God but outside the circle of men and women whose faithfulness on this earth earned them a special rank or position of authority. The 'outer darkness' represents not so much an actual place as it does a sphere of influence and privilege. It is not a geographical area in the kingdom where certain men and women are consigned to stay. It is simply a figure of speech describing their low rank or status in God's kingdom. The reason there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth by those who find themselves in this position becomes obvious once we eliminate some confusion over the phrase 'gnashing of teeth.' This figure of speech does not symbolize pain as many have thought" [Charles Stanley, *Eternal Security: Can You be Sure?* p. 127].

The outer darkness and the gnashing of teeth and the wailing are all characteristic of unbelievers who are not in the Kingdom at all. It is biblically untenable to place believers in the position of experiencing anguish in the outer darkness. He is correct that some people will be rewarded with more responsibility than others but that isn't punishment. When we have our glorified bodies and our renewed minds, these kinds of issues will be moot. We will not be jealous over who was rewarded with what.

Dillow claims that if we are temporally punished for sinning in this age, then we must certainly be punished at the judgment seat of Christ for the Kingdom to come. That is simply a deductive leap that is scripturally unsupported. These two periods of time, this age and the Millennium, cannot be compared one to the other. He misapplies Scriptures that pertain to temporal judgment by relating and connecting them to eternal penal judgment. Dillow asserts, "Scripture shows that any believer may experience a penal judgment either in time or eternity. The Bible does not teach that it is impossible for a believer to ever experience a penal judgment" [Joseph Dillow, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 942]. Notice how he confuses the issue between temporal and eternal and how he employs an exegetical trick to convince his readers that eschatological punishment can occur. If you consider divine discipline for believers to be a penal judgment, which I'm not going to concede, he is correct for temporal issues but that still doesn't apply to eternal issues. However, divine discipline is designed to be corrective in nature and judgment is strictly penal; therefore, the basis for his conclusion is faulty from the start. His trick is to take something temporal and then write as though it was referring to the eternal. Scripture nowhere at no time states that believers will experience an eschatological penal judgment. Those who agree with Dillow will claim there are not Scriptures that say we do escape penal judgment (Dr. Ken Wilson, for example) but that is incorrect; there are Scriptures that say that in one way or another. His assertions are simply untrue and biblically unsupportable and by mixing time and eternity together, he confuses the issues. During our experiential sanctification, we are not perfected and we still have a sin nature; at the judgment seat we will be perfected in Christ and without a sin nature. Dillow simply makes the

leap from temporal punishment to eschatological judgment with no biblical support for his assertion. "Not only will Christians face temporal punishment from God as the above passages indicate, but they will also face eschatological punishment for willful and unrepentant failure" [Joseph Dillow, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 941]. Dillow uses the Sermon on the Mount and the Olivet Discourse as Scriptures that are in large measure addressing the church rather than addressing Israel. Then he uses those Scriptures to justify his doctrine of eschatological punishment. This is most likely where Dillow gets on the wrong path. He does not understand the Kingdom offer of the gospels to Israel and he mixes the church back into the gospels in contexts where the church is clearly not in view. All this is difficult to comprehend because he is a premillennial dispensational theologian. He also does this in the Olivet Discourse concerning the Judgment of the Sheep and Goats and the story of the ten virgin bridal attendants which is a picture of Jewish belief and unbelief. The sheep are Tribulation saints and they are not members of the church. They will not be present at the judgment seat of Christ which takes place in heaven during the Tribulation. This misuse of the book of Matthew may be the most serious error that has led Dillow to conclude that believers can and will suffer judgmental punishment at the judgment seat of Christ.

Dillow seems to suggest that because unbelievers can be judged at the Great White Throne judgment even though Christ has paid their sin debt on the cross, then believers can be judged at the judgment seat of Christ even though Christ has paid their sin debt on the cross as well. This fails to consider the fact that God has been fully satisfied only in Christ. Those who refuse to believe in Him remain apart from the satisfaction God has in Christ's work on the cross because they are not in Him. The work has been done but everyone must personally appropriate it in order for it to be specifically applicable to their personal eschatological eternal destiny. Believers and unbelievers are categorically different because of their position in Christ and even though Christ has paid the sin debt for the world reconciliation is found only in Him. It is only in Christ that people are reconciled to God and have peace with God. It is out of order to consider in any way God's judgment on unbelievers as the basis for any doctrine that teaches believers have to make a second payment for their personal sins at the judgment seat of Christ.

Dillow's understanding of the outer darkness refers to believers who are being punished by being excluded from the Wedding Supper of the Lamb and the Millennial Kingdom. These words occur in only three Scriptures and all three are in Matthew (8:12, 22:13, and 25:30).

Matthew 8:10–12 ¹⁰Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. ¹¹"I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table

with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; ¹²but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

He assumes the “sons of the kingdom” are believers but in this context, the Lord is referring to Gentile believers contrasted with unbelieving Jews who thought they were saved simply by virtue of the fact they were Jews i.e., “sons of the kingdom.” As Jews, they are in fact sons of the kingdom but that is positional truth applicable to all Jews; context has to determine whether or not believing or unbelieving Jews are the subject of the narrative. Because he claims these Jews are believers in the same sense that Christians are believers, he unjustifiably applies this to Christian believers at the judgment seat of Christ. These are totally different situations. These unbelieving Jews will be excluded from the Kingdom for eternity. Dillow attempts to soften this concept of Kingdom exclusion for believers by saying it won’t last forever. He says Christians will be restored sometime after the Millennial Kingdom begins. “...for some [the judgment seat of Christ] will be a time of great remorse. However, the Scriptures give us no reason to assume that these unfaithful Christians will spend their eternity in remorse and regret. Those unfaithful Christians who did not repent in life will repent then. In fact, at His name every knee will bow (Philippians 2:10). [He then quotes Romans 14:10-12 which ends saying “each of us will give an account of himself to God”.] We are told here that unfaithful Christians will bow down and confess. When a Christian confesses, he is forgiven. [He then quotes 1 John 1:9.]...In view of the glorious promises of heavenly life promised to justified saints, we can be assured that this remorse cannot continue throughout the millennium or eternal state” [Joseph Dillow, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*, pp. 775-776].

There are several exegetical problems in what Dillow wrote here. His understanding of repentance is that it means being sorry for your personal sins. He defined repentance “to acknowledge, to change one’s mind about something, to admit, to feel sorry for....the word [*metanoeo*] means to admit one is wrong and to regret it in the majority of contexts” [Joseph Dillow, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*, pp. 38-39]. To repent simply means to change one’s mind about something; Dillow uses theology to add to the meaning and his conclusion is absolutely incorrect. He assumes that believers will bow down at the Βῆμα and confess their sins. He bases that on Philippians 2:11, but what is happening in that Scripture concerning believers is they are paying homage to the Christ as verse 11 tells us. Lightner writes this act is “In keeping with Christ’s exaltation and high name...every knee will one day bow and acknowledge Him for who He really is” [Robert Lightner, “Philippians” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 654]. Dillow assumes that to confess means to admit to personal sins but that isn’t the meaning. The word is ἐξομολογέω and it simply means to agree or to acknowledge something. In this case, everyone will

acknowledge that “Jesus Christ is Lord.” Paul wrote that we would give an account to God and Dillow assumes this means confessing sins we didn’t repent of in life during this age. Personal sins will not be an issue at the judgment seat. The account we will give relates to how we served Him in life and He will reward us accordingly.

Philippians 2:9–11 ⁹For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and that every tongue will confess [ἐξομολογέω] that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Dillow tries to have it both ways. He says we won’t be permanently banished from the Lord’s presence in either the Millennium or the eternal state but he does say that unfaithful Christians will be banned from His presence for the Wedding Supper of the Lamb and perhaps longer. Surprisingly, he then writes, “In fact we will ‘always be’ with Him (1 Thessalonians 4:17) which is true. I would add that Jesus also promised us that when He came back for us we would be with Him where He is (John 14:3). These Scriptures mean believers cannot be banished from His presence for any period of time whether short or long. The problem Dillow presents is a real conflict in his reasoning when he does say carnal, unrepentant Christians will be banished from his presence for some period of time. He also says, “The exclusion from the banquet is a temporary act of divine discipline and cannot be an eternal exclusion from fellowship with the King” [Joseph Dillow, *Final Destiny: The Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 776]. These things are all mixed together on one page of his book but they are contradictory. You can’t hold a doctrinal position that says, on the one hand, we can never be separated from Christ and then turn around and write we will be separated from Him for some period of time as judicial punishment.

1 Thessalonians 4:17 ¹⁷Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.

John 14:3 ³“If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.

When you really think about it, a major component of Christ’s purpose in the incarnation was that He came to die in order to eliminate the state of separation man has from God. Before we come to faith, we have a sin nature inherited from our father Adam and that sin nature renders us spiritually dead and totally separated from God. When we come to faith, we are made spiritually alive and united with Him; we are indwelt by the Spirit of God. The sin debt has been completely paid and cancelled through His sacrificial death. His resurrection tells us His work was accepted by the

Father as entirely sufficient to propitiate Him and to reconcile fallen humanity with God. How then, can any personal sins committed after coming to faith possibly separate us from Christ for even a moment much less some period of years even up to the duration of the Tribulation and/or the Millennium as some teach? Once we come to faith in this age, we cannot be separated from God. How could we then be separated from Christ, who is God, for any moment once we have been glorified and finally perfected? Any separation from Him does not seem to be possible based on His finished work.

Romans 8:38–39 ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I don't want anyone to misunderstand. Dr. Dillow is not saying, and he would not say, that believers ever become spiritually separated from Christ as judgmental punishment at the Βῆμα. But physical separation from Christ also seems to be precluded by the Scriptures we've just looked at both in this age and in the one to come.

Dillow believes the banquet is during the Tribulation period in heaven instead of on earth when it will be the inaugural event kicking off the Millennium but for reasons previously discussed, that is not true. He bases that on Luke 13:28 which is parallel to Matthew 8:12 and refers to unbelieving Jews and their exclusion from the Kingdom in unbelief contrasted with believing Gentiles who will recline at the table with the Patriarchs. "Whatever the time period of remorse during their exclusion from the marriage banquet in the New Jerusalem during the tribulation, we are told that even in the kingdom that unfaithful saints of all ages will know the experience of weeping because of being excluded from the Messianic Banquet (Luke 13:28). One can imagine the Lord at some time after the beginning of the millennium, forgiving and restoring to fellowship all those unfaithful Christians for whom He died and for whom His loving heart still desires. There is no eternity of weeping and remorse. While some may disagree, this is what I believe. However, they will miss the joy of the fellowship of the *Metachoi*, and they will forfeit the right to 'reign with Him' in the thousand-year kingdom to follow. As Luke expresses it, they will not 'recline at the table' (Lk. 13:29). They will be in the kingdom but not at the table" [Joseph Dillow, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*, p. 777].