

David Ahlgren – 30 Jan 2014
SOF 10 - Response and Eternal Destiny

This paper examines Statement of Faith #10, which discusses man's response to the Gospel and the Eternal Destiny of believers and unbelievers. It states, "We believe that God commands everyone everywhere to believe the gospel by turning to Him in repentance and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that God will raise the dead bodily and judge the world, assigning the unbeliever to condemnation and eternal conscious punishment, and the believer to eternal blessedness and joy with the Lord, in the new heaven and the new earth, to the praise of His glorious grace. Amen."

Acts 17:30 speaks of the need for everyone to repent, μετανοέω, to 'perceive afterward, with the implication of being too late to avoid consequences of a change in the way one thinks and acts.' The following verse defines the reason why – we will all be judged. "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel (Mk. 1:15)." Faith, believing the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ, is also required along with repentance, which is the work of works – God's work for us in Christ. Without repentance and faith, we will all die in our sin (Jn.8:24). According to John 20:31, the main reason we have the Bible containing God's word is so all "may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." Paul even used himself as God's example of mercy and patience in bringing others to faith in Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 1:16).

This message of repentance and forgiveness in Christ is seen even in Isaiah 55:6-7, ""Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; 7 let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Acts 2:37-38 speaks clearly of what to do when we see our state in God's eyes – repent, believe, be baptized – and then forgiveness and God's presence as the Holy Spirit in us will be ours. Of course, action is part of true faith, as John 1:12 says, "12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

We will also be raised in a body as Daniel 12:2 and Job 19:26-27 reveal this certain hope. In 1 Cor. 15:35 we are told, “But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?”” – verse 44 answers with, “It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.” We will be raised bodily, but not with a body as we now know it; it must be eternal, not corruptible if we are to live forever with our Lord.

At the end, God will judge the world with finality and in totality (for everything we do and say as Ecc. 12:14 and Mat. 12:36 say). “And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment (Heb.9:27).” Not one will escape this judgment apart from Christ. Jesus will do this when He returns (2Tim.4:1). Matthew 25:44 points out that there is either eternal punishment, or eternal life. Unbelievers will suffer and believers will find a life unending of blessed joy in the Lord’s presence. Revelation 21:1-3 sums this up with, “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

This new life will be in a new heaven and new earth as Isaiah 66:22 and 2 Peter 3:13 say. “But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.” His promise of a new life in Christ in this new creation will be in a new body that can finally be righteous as He is righteous! We can then worship Him in the beauty of holiness as Revelation 22:3 points out. This is to the praise of His glorious grace (Eph. 1:6, 12).

This new life is possible when we heed God’s command to repent and believe the work of Jesus Christ, being reborn to a living hope of a bodily resurrection in which we are able to escape our just and earned punishment for our sin – and then have true joy and blessings in His presence forevermore in the new heaven and earth before the Lamb. All this will allow God’s glory to be sung throughout the ages before His throne as the angels demonstrated in Isaiah 6, but now we will be there as well!