

If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, where will the ungodly sinner end up?It is Hard to be Saved. What is the Alternative?

It is hard to be saved. This sounds contradictory to what we know and believe. We don't have to do anything to be saved. Jesus earned our salvation for us through His perfect life and His innocent death on the cross. Salvation was hard for Jesus to earn and die for, but it isn't hard for us. He dies for us. He cleanses us. He brings us to faith. He keeps us in the faith.

So what does this mean? Imagine perhaps jumping on a train to take you to a better country. You are on the train. The ticket is paid for. The train is full of coal. It is good to go. But there are people that want to steal your goods and throw you off of the train. It is a long and uncomfortable ride. You need to keep alert. You need to stay on the train. You need protection from those who would push you off. Having faith, being on the narrow path to heaven through faith in Jesus Christ: it is no easy path. It is hard in a variety of ways.

Let's look at what Peter had to say in this letter. See chapter 2 for instance. He wrote, **Therefore rid yourselves of all evil, all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and all slander.** This means that even after we are baptized believers, there is still plenty of evil within to try and rid yourself of. Later on he also wrote that we are to "**abstain from the desires of the flesh which WAR against your soul.**" When you are saved you are also called to war. It is a lifelong struggle until the day we die.

Take for instance a Christian who is an alcoholic. He knows drunkenness is sinful and he can't control himself to drink in moderation. How difficult it must be to resist something that he has learned to depend on and which is intertwined with so much of our society! How difficult it is to fall for the temptation to drink when you are having a bad day. Life is a battle, and you don't have to be an alcoholic to know that. It could be pornography. It could be pride. It could be impatience. It could be laziness. It could be fear. It could be anger. We consider all of these things sinful that an unbeliever would just shrug his shoulders at and laugh. So there are always wars going on in here, and we as Christians know that God even wants us to fight against the thoughts and the desires. It is the nature of being a Christian. It isn't easy. It's hard. It's supposed to be hard.

Look at the Bible. I can't think of one person who didn't struggle. Abraham struggled with fear. Jeremiah struggled against the government and religious officials who considered him to be a traitor. Paul struggled against his fellow Jews who falsely accused him and had him imprisoned multiple times. He also talked about a thorn in his own flesh that he had to deal with. Peter had to struggle to keep from despair after he had denied Christ. Thomas had to deal with his own pessimism and unbelief. It is hard to be saved because of our sinful nature and because of the opposition that we face.

This is important to remember, I think, because too often we associate struggle with weakness. We think that if we were really strong we wouldn't have any addictions to fight against or we wouldn't even want to do wrong. That's not the nature of being a sinful Christian. Being saved means that there is still a fight that goes on inside

the Christians ears and heart and soul. When Jacob wrestled with God, God didn't chastise him for his LACK of faith. He renamed him for the struggle he had. He called him Israel, which means "one who struggles with God and overcomes." He was wrestling with God all night. So it is hard to be saved.

Maybe you could look at this from God's perspective as well. Sometimes when you are trying to raise a child, you have to let the child suffer the consequences of his or her mistakes. You want to step in and keep them from suffering, but they have to learn. For instance, if your child was dating someone you knew wasn't the best for them, you wouldn't necessarily go in and say, "You can't date this person," because you knew he or she would just rebel and do it anyway. So you would force yourself to patiently endure and bite your tongue and pray for your child to wake up and smell the roses. That's so much harder than trying to force the process. How much of this does God through with us, allowing us to make mistakes and bearing with us through the process? Or how often does He allow a difficulty to come our way for the express purpose of bringing us back to Him, knowing how painful it will be for us? It must be a difficult thing for the Holy God to live inside of us with all of our weaknesses: but He does it patiently, wisely, and lovingly! \

It is hard to be saved. There are other things that are hard for the Christians to do in 1 Peter. He calls on us to willingly and even joyfully submit to the governing authorities, even if they are evil and unjust. He told slaves to submit to their masters "with total respect" in chapter 3, and wives to submit to their husbands. Who has an easy time with that? These are not easy things to do. They go against our very natures that don't want anyone to have any power over us.

He also talked about how when you don't "**plunge into the same overflowing river of filth**" (4:4) that people would be surprised and then slander you. Isn't this exactly what is happening to Christians who are now being called "intolerant" and "judgmental" and "bigoted" for their view of life in the womb and marriage? What else should we have expected? It is hard to be saved. It always has been and it always will be.

This calls for strength, and strength means we need growth - a hunger for growth - where Peter said we are to CRAVE the pure milk of the word. "Crave" is a strong word. We are called on to be very hungry for the truth, so that we can know the difference between right and wrong. This also is hard to do in a sense. It is much easier to become lazy in your faith, and think that since you already believe and are baptized and you were confirmed that there is no way you could fall from faith. It takes more work to really dig into the word and examine yourself in light of the Ten Commandments and ask yourself, "How have I personally failed my spouse, my children, and my God?" It takes work to commit yourself to coming to worship and Bible class on a regular basis. The writer to the Hebrews makes mention of the many Israelites that were on the trip out of slavery, but how many of them ended up dead and buried in the desert because of their unbelief. It can happen to you if you only want an easy life. It isn't easy to be saved, even though it's already been earned by Jesus. It is hard to be saved.

This isn't said to make you live in constant fear of being damned and falling from faith. Jesus blood is always shed for you. His Holy Spirit still works hard to keep you in the faith and keeps pleading for us. When you take the Lord's Supper, you are receiving the forgiveness that He earned for you and wants you to have. When you hear the absolution: yes, it is for you. Behind the scenes, in a hidden and powerful way, God is directing

your lives so that you will end up in heaven. It is written so you don't get lazy with your prayer life, or think that listening to the word or receiving the sacrament really aren't that important. God doesn't want you to fall from the train. Be ready for a battle. Be alert. The devil isn't going to let you get there so easy. He wants you in hell, and he isn't going to rest one minute of your life to try and get you there.

It is Hard to be Saved. What is the Alternative?

Peter writes, “**If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, where will the ungodly sinner end up?**” Well, he will end up in the eternal fires of hell and banned from the presence of God if he doesn't repent. C.S. Lewis described it as a continuation of what the person wanted while on earth. The person wanted to live without God. In hell, his desires are eternally granted when God shuts the door of grace into the eternal fires of hell. Think about that - the eternal fires of hell. God says, “You wanted to live without me? You have been given your wish.” That's bad enough right there.

But that's not all. Even his life in the here and the now will end up being pretty miserable as well in many cases: not all the time: but more times than not. Why? Because when you don't live by God's law, you only end up hurting yourself and the people around you. Immorality leads to broken marriages, diseases, and poverty. The material goods that you think will make you happy, they more than often make you miserable.

The “ungodly” person - who is it? It describes someone who lives without any divine guidance and without the Law and Gospel. Peter is describing what happens to people who just recklessly dive into life without thinking about the consequences. They don't have anyone or anything telling them what to do. They don't have any ultimate goals to live for besides the here and the now. They don't have the love of God. When you live that way, you will end up in a bad place. It isn't good for you.

I can think of when we were first married and we bought into this product called Espial. It was supposed to be all natural shampoo, soap, dish cleaner, all kinds of stuff. We went to a marketing class and they falsely quoted the Bible in hopes that people would buy their product and sell more product in order to make more money. They talked about how the Bible spoke of heaven having “streets of gold,” so we should want more gold here too. Now, I knew that was wrong, and I was hesitant about going forward because I could see how they were appealing to people's greed. But I liked the product, so I talked myself into buying a bunch of the product anyway, and it was a mistake. If I had just followed my conscience - thought about it - prayed about it - I would have saved myself some money by not associating with a company that is willing to falsely quote the Bible. But I didn't, and I suffered as a result. That's what happens when you don't live with more caution and you don't listen to your conscience when it is guided by the Bible.

It's much worse when you have no guidance at all. Think about the marijuana that is going to be coming to Bay City. What will be the consequences of this newly found freedom? Plenty of money wasted on drugs that aren't needed, for one. Inhaling more smoke in their lungs won't be good. The marijuana will loosen their inhibitions from saying and doing things they normally wouldn't do. Their already dull consciences will only become more dull. It will probably be a gateway to more drugs being desired with stronger potency. Many lives will probably focusing on getting better weed and a better high instead of living in the real world and

spending their time and money on their family and loved ones. Where will the ungodly sinner end up? We will see soon enough.

The term “ungodly” is the opposite of godly. But who is godly? It is the person who has God in their lives. How do we have God in our lives? It’s **not** just through prayer. Sometimes people cherry pick counselors. They want ones who will only commiserate with them and not tell them to do anything different. They just want ones who will listen but never talk. That is worthless counseling ultimately. It is a waste of money. In order to be godly, we need God to come to us. This is where the sacraments are all important. In your baptism GOD came into you and gave you the gift of the Holy Spirit. In the Lord’s Supper Jesus comes to you with His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. Godly people receive God literally. They also are willing listening to the Word of God.

Godly people have an interaction with God. Ungodly people don’t do these things. They live their lives according to their own desires and needs. If they have to work, they work. If they want a new boat, they work more. If they want to have sex, they find someone to have sex with. There is nothing governing their desires but themselves and their own consciences and desires. Without divine revelation from the Scriptures and without the Holy Spirit working repentance and faith, you will only end up without any hope on your deathbed, even if you are the richest person in the world.

So how do we respond to this? Peter doesn’t ask this question, “What will become of them,” just so we fear the fires of hell for ourselves. He asks the question to evoke a response of compassion for these people? Don’t you want them to have hope and salvation too? If reaching out to them causes you some pain and suffering, so be it. Isn’t it better than seeing them in hell? Jeremiah was willing to be thrown into a cistern and put to death in order to warn the people of the coming judgment. He wanted his fellow Israelites to be saved from the oncoming disaster and to surrender willingly. They tried to kill him for it. But he was willing to risk his life for them.

Maybe you know someone who is an alcoholic. Maybe you know someone who has been through a lot of bad romances. You see that they are beaten and worn. Maybe they have been excommunicated from the church - and rightfully so. Maybe they have blamed you for their problems. Maybe you have been wronged. Maybe your life has been pretty miserable as you’ve fought to keep the faith. Don’t be bitter about it. Peter says, **“let those who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to their faithful Creator while doing what is good.”** You can always find reasons to be embittered and angry. You can always find reasons to shake your fist at God. Life is hard. It’s difficult. It’s not easy to stay in the faith. But it sure is a lot better than having no hope and no forgiveness.

Sometimes we can get on some real pity parties and feel sorry for ourselves in life. We see the way our world is going here in America and we lament how Christianity is being rejected. But then we hear about how it is for Christians in Pakistan and we realize, “Maybe life isn’t so bad.” Peter says, “It is hard to be saved.” Yes, there are difficulties. But we have forgiveness! We have heaven to hope for. What is the alternative? What about the ungodly? They have no hope. Pray for them. Reach out to them. Consider what is coming for them, if we don’t give them the hope of Jesus. Amen.