

• *A closer look*

'If you conquer . . . ,' says the Lord Jesus Christ, 'I will not blot your name out of the book of life'<sup>□1</sup>. It will be worthwhile for us to look more closely at the phrase 'book of life'.

□1 3:5

**The book of life**

1. *The list of the citizens of the kingdom of God*

**The book of life is the list of the citizens of the kingdom of God.** This idea of having a list of citizens was a common one, known throughout the ancient world. The idea is used in the Bible also (see Exodus 32:32–33; Psalm 69:28; Isaiah 4:3; Daniel 12:1; Malachi 3:16; Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3).

2. *The list of God's elect*

**The book of life is the list of God's elect.** We are written down 'unto' life<sup>□1</sup>. The idea that our names are written in God's book at the time of our conversion is a mistake. We who come to faith in Jesus were on God's mind even from before we were born, and our very birth was specially shaped by God<sup>□2</sup>. God has his list, even before the foundation of the world, of those to be saved<sup>□3</sup>. I don't say I understand it; I simply say this is the biblical teaching.

□1 Isaiah 4:3

□2 Galatians 1:15

□3 Revelation 13:9

3. *The list of those who potentially qualify for reward*

**The book of life is the list of those who potentially qualify for reward.** A good illustration of this point is to be found in Esther 2:21–23; 6:1–11. The king was reading through his list of citizens. Mordecai had served the king, but he had not yet been rewarded. His name was written down with a note beside it of what he had done for the king. The citizen-list was a list of those who were the king's servants and who might possibly do something for the king and so qualify for reward. This was the way in which 'citizenship-lists' worked in the ancient world. The Christian is in the book of life because he or she **qualifies** for reward<sup>□1</sup>.

□1 remember Colossians 1:12

**What can a Christian lose?**

1. *Not justified – sonship – new birth*

**Can a Christian lose his or her salvation?** It is a subject about which sincere Christians disagree (and we have to accept each other without breaking fellowship over these things). Yet, as I see it, the answer is, 'No, a truly saved person does not lose justification or sonship or new birth.' God keeps his people, chastening them when necessary. **We are given eternal life** and never perish. Those whom the Father justified he glorified – with no exceptions. The promise of the new covenant is: 'I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from following them, to do them good; and I will put my fear in their hearts, that they may not depart from me'<sup>□1</sup>. God does not depart from us; we do not **ultimately** depart from him.

□1 Jeremiah 32:40

2. *Being named in the book of life*

• *Being saved through fire is not a doctrine of purgatory*

**Can a Christian be taken out of the book of life?** Yes. This would involve loss of reward.

**What about Revelation 20:15?** We shall get to it in due course! As I understand the matter a Christian does not go to everlasting hell, but he or she may taste God's fiery judgement. He or she may be saved **through fire**. Is this a doctrine of purgatory? No. The Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory teaches that (i) salvation is by **cleansing** of sin, not by the **imputed** righteousness of Christ. (ii) The cleansing has generally to continue after death (it is said). There is no salvation (they say) generally speaking without purgatory. None of this is what I am asserting here. 'Salvation through fire' was taught by some early Christians (notably Augustine) but the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory developed later. Being 'saved through fire' is different.

Can a Christian be taken out of the book of life? (i) Some think the answer

**Removal from the book of life – what does it mean?**

• Three approaches

• Removal means loss of reward

• The great promises are to overcomers

- Eating from the tree of life

- Escaping the second death

- Hidden manna, white stone and a new name

- Authority over the nations

And much more for overcomers!

is 'yes' and that it means loss of salvation. (ii) Some think the answer is 'no' and that it means salvation cannot be lost. After all, the statement here is **negative**. On this view of the matter it is said that Christians always eventually recover and get their reward. (iii) But personally I think the answer is 'yes' but that it relates to loss of reward. This approach is **encouraging**. Our basic status in God's kingdom is not lost. It is **motivating**. Although there is a status that cannot be lost, yet at the same time there are things to be gained and things that could be lost. This is why the Scripture says, 'Look to yourselves, that you do not lose the things which we have achieved, but that you receive a full reward'<sup>□1</sup>. 'Do not throw away therefore your bold faith; it has a great return of reward'<sup>□2</sup>. If our names stay in the book of life we are richly rewarded. If our names are taken out of the book of life we are saved (if we have faith at all) only through fiery judgement.

We must distinguish between what happens when we are initially saved and what we gain by persistent faith. We are 'justified', clothed with the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are given new birth. The life of the Holy Spirit comes into us. We are adopted as God's sons and daughters. Nowhere in the Bible is there any statement that any of this will ever be taken away. But reward, inheritance, usefulness in God's kingdom, hearing Jesus' 'Well done', receiving a level of glory in which we shine like the brightness of the skies and wear a crown of honour – all these things are conditional upon 'overcoming'. They are not automatic. It is 'to the one that overcomes' that great promises are given, and these promises are there to be gained or lost. We shall have great fellowship with God 'eating of the tree of life'<sup>□1</sup>. We shall not be hurt by the second death; others will<sup>□2</sup>! We shall have hidden manna, and a white stone, and a new name<sup>□3</sup>. Even in this life we shall have authority over the nations<sup>□4</sup> and will receive the morning star<sup>□5</sup>. Our names will stay in the book of life. God will honour us<sup>□6</sup>. We shall be pillars in the temple of God<sup>□7</sup>. We shall have upon us the name of God, and the name of the city of God, the new Jerusalem<sup>□8</sup>. The overcomer will be Jesus' companion, sitting down with Jesus on his throne<sup>□9</sup>. None of this is automatic. I do not say we shall lose our basic-salvation, but I do say our reward may be gained or lost. We must be overcomers!

□1 2 John:8  
□2 Hebrews 10:35

□1 2:7  
□2 2:11  
□3 2:17  
□4 2:26  
□5 2:28  
□6 3:5  
□7 3:12  
□8 3:12  
□9 3:21



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