

Our Response to the Holy Spirit Determines Our Eternal Destiny

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**“ Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”
(Romans 8:14)**

The Population Reference Bureau (PRB) in Washington D.C. estimated in 2011 that a total of 108 billion people have lived on Earth. (See

<http://www.prb.org/Publications/Articles/2002/HowManyPeopleHaveEverLivedonEarth.aspx>.)

Since there is no census data on world population for most of Earth's history, all estimates are "best guesses." Even though I think this estimate is excessive, I have chosen to use PRB's total to demonstrate the love and fairness of God in terms of each person's eternal destiny. I believe the Bible teaches that God gives everyone on Earth the same opportunity for eternal life. You may ask, "How is this possible?" Actually, the process is simple. God sends the Holy Spirit to everyone and our response to the Holy Spirit determines our eternal destiny.

God loves each person equally. He will not keep a person out of Heaven because he lived 3,000 years ago in a remote village in Africa, the Amazon forest, or Siberia and worshiped a false God. There will be millions of people in Heaven (including deists, agnostics, and atheists) who know nothing about Jesus! Be assured, I am not advocating universal salvation. (Universal salvation is the notion that at the end of sin's drama, God will save everyone.) On the contrary, I believe the Bible teaches that God will condemn and destroy each person who has blasphemed the Holy Spirit. At the end of sin's drama, I believe this will prove to be a very large number of people. God's fairness in giving each person the same opportunity for eternal life may be a new thought, especially if you believe that your denomination has the only key to eternal life. When we consider that "God so loved the world (all 108 billion people) that He gave His only begotten Son," this becomes a very important concept to understand. This concept becomes critical because the fulfillment of Revelation's story is about to impact the last seven billion people who live on Earth (most of whom have never had a chance to thoughtfully consider the gospel of Jesus).

To get started, I have divided PRB's 108 billion people into four population groups:

1. From Creation to Noah's flood: ~0.5 billion people
2. From Noah's flood to 2014, unaware of the true God: ~90 billion people
3. The totality of Israel's population, from Noah/Abraham to A.D. 70: ~4 billion people
4. The totality of Christian population from Jesus to 2014: ~13.5 billion people

If these population groups are reasonably proportional, a shocking result occurs: More than 90% of the people who have lived on Earth have not heard about the true God. They missed out

on learning about God's love, God's plan to save sinners, the atonement voluntarily made by Jesus for sinners, and the promise of eternal life. It is true that almost everyone who has lived on Earth has had some kind of religious belief, but all religious beliefs are myths if they are not based on divine revelation. The Bible teaches that God does not condemn a person because he was born into Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, or Protestantism. (Romans 2:14,15; 3:29,30) Neither does God save a person because he was born of Christian parents. At all times and within every culture, God has children who have all sorts of religious views. So then, what is the timeless mechanism for salvation and how does it operate? The Bible teaches that there is one mechanism for salvation and it operates the same way for each person.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

Jesus said four things about the Holy Spirit which many Christians fail to understand [I have numbered them]: "And so I tell you, [1] every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but [2] the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. [For example,] Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who [continues to] speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, [3] either in this age or [4] in the age to come." (Matthew 12:31,32, insertions mine)

What amazing grace! Forgiveness is possible for every sin and blasphemy except one. Jesus said blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven in this age or during the age to come. Jesus added the phrase "in the age to come" because God blesses every being with a gift called "the power of choice" and this gift will continue "in the age to come." God gave this gift to the angels when He created them and He gave it to Adam and Eve. Because beings are free to exercise their power of choice, Lucifer and his followers became evil when they chose to blaspheme the Holy Spirit. Adam and Eve became evil when they chose to blaspheme the Holy Spirit. The only way we can blaspheme the Holy Spirit is through choice.

The word "blasphemy" (Greek: blasphemia) means to insult, defy, denigrate, vilify, or to speak evil. For example, if a person speaks against the Father or Jesus, he can be forgiven. (Luke 23:34) However, blaspheming the Holy Spirit is different. Defying the Holy Spirit is dangerous because ignorance is not possible when the Holy Spirit speaks because the voice of the Holy Spirit within each person is strong, clear, and unmistakable. Therefore, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is a willful act of defiance and everyone who has lived on Earth (except Jesus) has, at one time or another, blasphemed the Holy Spirit. However, do not be discouraged or overwhelmed, because a few mistakes do not automatically mean eternal death. (Matthew 18:21-35)

The Sinful Nature Is Like "Ancient Pharaoh on His Throne"

Each person is born with a sinful nature (this is the ongoing result of the curse of sin) and our sinful nature is hostile toward God's authority. (Romans 8:7) Because we have the power of choice, each child has a throne within his heart and shortly after birth, a contest for this throne begins. Jesus, our Creator, wants to sit on our throne and because of our vanity and self-seeking sinful nature, we want to sit on our throne. What is more satisfying to the carnal nature

than singing the Frank Sinatra version of “I did it my way”? Our sinful nature (I call it “Pharaoh” in this illustration) is an ego-centric, selfish, and self-centered king. Because of the curse of sin operating within us, Pharaoh definitely has the “home field” advantage. Parents do not have to teach a child to be selfish or self-centered. Little Pharaoh does not naturally share his toys or submit to a higher authority (just like Pharaoh in ancient Egypt). Anything that challenges “the will” of little Pharaoh is met with resistance (crying, screaming, pouting, defiance, and rebellion). Worse, as a child grows up, the Pharaoh within him also matures, and most of the time, he becomes more devious and difficult to admonish.

The battle between Jesus and Pharaoh is conducted by the Holy Spirit. His mission is to unseat Pharaoh and put him in “the closet” so that Jesus can reign as Lord and Master. When Jesus reigns on the throne in our heart, the fruit of the Spirit naturally occurs. There is peace, joy, and fullness of life, not only within the person, but for everyone around that person! (John 13:35; Galatians 5:22,23) Because God has given us the power of choice, the Holy Spirit cannot violate our will. Each person has the God-given right to determine his eternal destiny. The Holy Spirit will only install Jesus on the throne of our hearts if we allow it. Because Pharaoh is stubborn, the Holy Spirit applies pressure on us in two different ways. Sometimes, there are gentle and gradual steps (sanctification is a nurturing process which the Holy Spirit uses to draw us to God and into His ways), and sometimes there are bold tests of faith (to see if we will listen to God and obey His voice). In either case, we always respond to the Holy Spirit. We answer His prodding with submission or rebellion (blasphemy).

Sanctification is a one-on-one experience with God. God initiates sanctification shortly after each child is born so that each person might come to know Him and walk in His ways. The Holy Spirit knows how to speak to the heart of each unique person, and all 108 billion of us have been permitted, because of the power of choice, to speak back to the Holy Spirit. This communication is totally private – one-on-one. It occurs within the heart and no one else in the world is privy to the personal exchange. (1 Samuel 16:7; John 3:8) When the Holy Spirit speaks to us, a strong conviction arrives that requires action. No one else knows about the conviction unless we reveal it. Every Holy Spirit conviction is righteous because God is righteous. The problem with a Holy Spirit conviction is that doing right in God’s eyes is usually difficult to carry out, when doing wrong is so much easier (or cheaper).

When Holy Spirit conviction occurs, we communicate back to the Holy Spirit through action. Our lips can say anything, but our action reveals submission or rebellion. To put this in the clearest of terms, consider this: During the Great Tribulation, there will be four calls to action. The Holy Spirit will challenge everyone on Earth with four bold tests of faith (the 144,000 will deliver four messages from God) and everyone will communicate back to the Holy Spirit through action. Some people will obey the demands of the Holy Spirit and lose everything, including their lives, and many people will defy the Holy Spirit in an attempt to save themselves from pain and death. (John 12:25)

Holy Spirit Tools

The Holy Spirit works on us in many different ways. For example, each child is born with a

developing sense of fairness, as well as a basic ability to learn right from wrong. When possible, the Holy Spirit uses our conscience to draw us closer to God. When possible, the Holy Spirit uses parents to sanctify the child. Parental training and education, e.g., the home environment and parental example can accelerate the sanctifying process. Of course, some children do not have the blessing of a good role model at home. To compensate, the Holy Spirit may use school teachers, church leaders, grandparents, relatives, neighbors, etc.

As a child matures, so does the Pharaoh within. Therefore, the efforts of the Holy Spirit change with time. As a child becomes increasingly accountable for his decisions, the Holy Spirit respects the choices made by the teen which explains to some extent why rebellion overtakes some adolescents. If a teen does not want to hear from the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit does not give up, He simply steps back, sometimes for years, waiting for an open heart.

Each child comes into this world needing instruction and training, and each child should learn these essential concepts by age seven: Respect and reverence for God; respect for parents, elders, authorities, and the property of others; self-control; and respect for himself and his/her body. Teaching these concepts takes a lot of time, patience, effort, and determination. Wise parents know about the battle for the throne and they have to allow room for the Holy Spirit to battle directly with the little Pharaoh sitting on the throne. When overprotective parents do not give room for the work of the Holy Spirit, they can create a rebellious child because one Pharaoh (the parent) is struggling with the other Pharaoh inside the child.

If a person responds to the ongoing sanctification efforts of the Holy Spirit, he will eventually reach a "tipping point." When this moment arrives, Pharaoh is dethroned and sent to the closet and Jesus takes over the throne. Even though Jesus ascends the throne, Pharaoh can (and does) jump out of the closet and return to the throne from time to time. (Romans 7:14-25) Because God is patient and not willing that anyone should perish (2 Peter 3:9), the Holy Spirit does not give up on us with one or even ten blasphemies. Instead, the Holy Spirit only gives up on us when rebellion becomes constant.

Each time we blaspheme the Holy Spirit, our willingness to blaspheme the Holy Spirit grows stronger. If we continue in defiant rebellion, there will come a point where the Holy Spirit can do nothing more. He cannot violate our will. Therefore, our response to the Holy Spirit is far more serious than many people understand because no one wants to have a relationship with God after the Holy Spirit abandons him. People who commit the unpardonable sin have no desire or interest in doing right. The devil knows this and he uses every imaginable effort to keep Pharaoh seated on the throne.

During the past 6,000 years, 108 billion people have participated in a contest. Paul called this contest the good fight of faith. (2 Timothy 4:7) This fight will continue for all people until the sealing occurs. During the Great Tribulation, millions of people will hear and obey the demands of the Holy Spirit and be sealed. In simplistic terms this means Jesus will take over the throne and slay Pharaoh in His saints and finally, Pharaoh's closet will be sealed shut.

Rebirth

In closing, let us suppose that “rebirth” occurs when the tipping point (mentioned earlier) occurs. When sanctification reaches a point where Pharaoh is dethroned, Jesus takes charge of our life through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This tipping point could come as the result of an altar call at church. At this point, a conscious decision is made to surrender 100% to the authority of Jesus. In such a case, a person might act on a desire that has been forming in his or her heart for some time. The tipping point could also come through a test of faith where the Holy Spirit brings a strong conviction to do something right and submission follows. Either situation is evidence that Jesus is on the throne. Rebirth in an atmosphere of divine truth looks quite different than rebirth in the absence of such knowledge, but whenever rebirth is present, a person obeys the demands of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” (John 3:8)

Each person’s eternal destiny is determined by his response to the Holy Spirit. God has given 108 billion people an equal chance for salvation. Such is God’s amazing grace. One blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not fatal and one rebirth experience does not mean the battle for the throne is over. Remember, because we have a sinful nature, there will be a lifelong battle for the throne of our hearts. We have to fight the good fight of faith every day. The only way we can walk with God is through submission to the voice of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness – for they will be filled.” (Matthew 5:6) The greatest evidence of rebirth is a hunger and thirst to know God, to understand His truth and experience His righteousness. If allowed, the Holy Spirit will ramp up the sanctifying process. He will cause us to grow up spiritually by imposing new convictions on us. He does this to keep us living in the realm of faith where justification is granted.

Using PRB’s 108 billion people estimate, it is fair to say that God loves 94.5 billion non-Christians just as much as He loves 13.5 billion Christians! God is no respecter of people. He made all 108 billion of us and from His point of view, everyone having a sinful nature and is willing to obey the demands of the Holy Spirit will be given eternal life for two reasons. First, Jesus provided the righteousness and paid the penalty for every sinner – whether a sinner is aware or unaware of this fact is immaterial. Second, when our actions indicate that we are willing to live by faith (which occurs when we obey the voice the Holy Spirit), God knows that we are safe to save! From God’s point of view, He knows that once the sinful nature is removed (that is, there is no more Pharaoh), sinners who obeyed the Holy Spirit will have no problem obeying the Holy Spirit throughout the ages to come!

At this point, you may be wondering about the importance of the gospel of Jesus. If salvation is determined by our response to the Holy Spirit, why did Jesus command that His gospel should be presented to the world? The answer is simple: Jesus said, “. . . I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (John 10:10) The gospel of Jesus, when embraced through faith, elevates life to a dimension that is not otherwise possible. The gospel of Jesus, when properly understood, brings knowledge, fullness, peace, and joy to life that cannot be matched. This is why Jesus wants His gospel presented throughout the world. What is sweeter than communion with God? Salvation is not an exclusive offer for post-Calvary Christians. All 108 billion people have had the same opportunity for salvation. Such is the largess of God’s love.

However, those who are led by the Holy Spirit to embrace the gospel of Jesus will have a more abundant life. Remember, whether Christian or non-Christian, those willing to obey the Holy Spirit are Sons of God. (Romans 8:14)

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