

**Mark 8:31-38** <sup>31</sup> He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup> He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup> But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." <sup>34</sup> Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For whoever wants to save his life {35 The Greek word means either life or soul; also in verse 36.} will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. <sup>36</sup> What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? <sup>37</sup> Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? <sup>38</sup> If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

### **"Forfeiting the Soul"**

I'm sure we have all been to a little league sports event where one team had to forfeit. It's a huge disappointment because it is an automatic loss. They've trained hard but for some petty reason the team has to forfeit without having the chance to prove themselves. When I think of what the word forfeit, children having to forfeit a game is where I begin. But, considering the word's origin in criminal and contractual law, I think it is overkill to use this word to describe an automatic loss in children's sports. So, how about some better examples.

Have any of you been to a police auction? At police auctions you can find some great buys on fancy cars, huge houses, exotic firearms, even exotic animals; all things forfeited by criminals or rather seized by the police as the consequence of crime. Here's another example. A friend of mine was selling his house and an interested buyer put down \$15,000 to keep my friend from selling the house to somebody else while the buyer researched the feasibility of being able to buy and renovate the house. They established a date before which the buyer was to either continue with purchasing or forfeit the \$15,000. The date came and the date went with no action by the buyer. My friend made an easy \$15,000. Last example; a couple buys a house on a twenty year mortgage. They are under legal obligation, a contract, to pay a monthly sum of money until the mortgage is paid. If at any time the couple does not or is not able to pay the monthly sum, the bank has the right to foreclose on the loan and the couple must forfeit their right to the house and all moneys paid to date.

So, as you can see forfeiture is a serious matter, much more serious than a little league sports team having to accept an automatic loss due to being unable to field a team. To forfeit is to surrender or be deprived of one's rights to an asset as the consequence of a crime, an error of judgment, or a breach of contract. Thus, with that in mind we must ask what was Jesus saying when he asked, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" What is it to forfeit the soul?

Well, first we must understand what the Bible means by the word soul. Incidentally, in our NIV passage that we have everywhere you see the word life read soul because it is the same word throughout. The New Testament Greek word for soul or life is one that is actually familiar to us, *psyche*. From it we get psychiatrist, psychologist, and psycho. When we modern-types think of the *psyche*, we think not of the soul but of the mental makeup of a person; the motive force behind a person – that which makes that particular person do what that particular person does. But, our ideas of psychological makeup are not what *psyche* meant to the writers of the Bible. Those ideas didn't even exist then.

The writers of the Bible were all of an ancient Hebrew cultural mindset and I must also add, not of the Greek. When most people today think of what the soul is they tend to think like the Greeks who thought that the *psyche* or soul was a bit of immortal “being” accidentally trapped in a body of which it must be freed. If a Greek said “body and soul”, he meant two distinctively separate parts – the immortal soul and the body in which it was trapped. Hebrew people saw it differently. When they said “body and soul”, they meant a person in their entirety. The soul and body could not be separated as the Greeks thought.

The New Testament writers used the Greek word *psyche* to translate the Hebrew word *nephesh* which was basically the entirety of a person as she or he stands before God in a covenantal relationship to God. They did not think of humans as having a soul, but rather as being a soul, a human body made alive by God's own breath of life which when God ceases to breath into a person, life stops. The life that God breathes into us isn't some mystical entity or power. It is the ability for us human beings who are made in the image of God to be in relationship with God, a covenantal relationship that entails certain responsibilities. Before the Living God, we are people who are responsible for being what God has created us to be as those created in God's own image. Therefore, real life is obedience to God; obedience that froths forth from prayer, praise, and the study of and meditation upon Scripture so that we live together as God's people according to his image. So, basically to have life, or rather, to be a soul is to be in a covenantal, not a contractual relationship with God. It is covenantal in that God is God and humans are his creatures to whom he has given life that we might live together as God's image, God's reflection within his creation. Since, God has given us life we must live it in loving obedience.

Now, back to the question; what is it to forfeit the soul? It is to surrender or be deprived of one's right to live in a fulfilling relationship to God and one another as the consequence of doing other than living up to our covenantal responsibility of living as those created in the image of God. When we forfeit the soul, we forfeit our person and purpose in relationship to God and each other and are thus useless, good for nothing with respect to God's intended purpose for his creation. We forfeit our God given breath of life and are in essence dead before God and one another. Forfeiting the soul is a serious matter.

Jesus identifies two ways that we forfeit our soul; trying to save it and trying to gain the world. As I mentioned early when Jesus says here, “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.” he is really saying, “For whoever wants to save his soul will lose it, but

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whoever loses his soul for me and for the gospel will save it.” The forfeiture of the soul leaves us with a huge gaping hole in us that we try to fill with some form of idolatry. We try to create our own means of salvation; of trying to bring to life our dead souls we only destroy them more. We invest ourselves in things that we think will give us the meaning and purpose that the covenantal relationship to God would have given us. Jesus renames this idolatry this self saving as gaining the world. By this he means using the things of the creation for our own advantage, our own profit, for building a name for ourselves rather than causing the things of creation to bring forth praise.

Let me talk about art here for a moment. I have on a couple of occasions been to the Philadelphia Museum of Fine Arts and it is a grand collection. It's good to sit and stare at a Monet for awhile and just let it come to life before you, let it reveal itself and its perspective to you so that in you the gazer it awakens emotions and memories and ideas and most importantly sparks a creative urge. To me that's what art is supposed to do and I think in similar way this creation is a painting in which we are co-painters with God. Unfortunately, in the world of art in the past century there has been a whole lot of ugly art, art portraying violence and death. This ugly art portrays very well what has happened in God's creation since humanity has forfeited its soul. What the world needs today is worshipful art. I would deeply appreciate sitting for awhile in front of some of Merle's paintings which she has painted at a time when her heart was lifted by the Holy Spirit into worship. The world truly needs Christian artists who can somehow paint the mystery of the glory of God. At this time, human culture desperately needs artistic hope because humanity truly has gained the world by forfeiting the soul and is having a very difficult time finding any good in it.

To close, Jesus offers us a way out of the forfeiture of the soul. He says, “If anyone would come after me, he must renounce claim to himself and take up his cross and follow me.” We must renounce claim to ourselves and take the “shameful, weak” way of life in being Jesus' disciples, the way of the cross, the way of self-giving love. We must stop trying to make names for ourselves and live in Jesus' name. Only in following him can we rediscover the souls that we have forfeited. God has re-breathed his life into with the gift of the Holy Spirit. This new life will begin to froth forth in us as I have said in prayer, praise, and the study of and meditation upon Scripture so that we live together as God's people according to his image. It is a wonderful thing to get the soul back, to find oneself in a covenantal relationship with God through Christ Jesus in the Holy Spirit. It is a wonderful thing to go beyond blind believing to true faith as the result of God touching you with his steadfast love and faithfulness. But, we still need to make the choice between discipleship and gaining the world. Our question is what good is it to twice forfeit one's soul? Amen.