

The Book of Life and Eternal Security

The Bible teaches that the names of all the elect were written in the book of life from the foundation of the world. “The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.” (Revelation 17:8)

The elect have their names still written in that book now (Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; Heb 12:23—note the perfect tense for their names being written; point action from the foundation of the world, with continuing results to the time they are in the New Jerusalem; nobody is blotted out). Those with their names in the book live with God forever, and those whose names were not in the book from the foundation of the world are cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20:12, 15). God works in those whose names He has written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, giving them a new heart, and putting his Spirit in them, so that they are characterized by righteousness (Rev 21:27).

What about Revelation 3:5? “He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.”

It is amazing that a verse where Christ promises His elect, those who overcome (all believers, 1 Jn 5:4-5), will not be blotted out, is reversed, and used to affirm that their names will be blotted out! In the apostle John’s day, the king of any land kept a register that was very much like a census. If a man committed a crime against the state, his name was removed from the register and he was no longer considered a citizen. If a person moved, his name was put on another register and erased from the former register. The king also kept a register of the living subjects of his kingdom who had not rebelled against him. Christ is saying in Revelation 3:5, “Some petty kings might blot your name out of their books, but I will never blot your name out of My book.” He had put their names in His book from the foundation of the world (Rev 17:8), and He will not take them out now; they will all be delivered (cf. Dan 12:1).

Gill on Revelation 3:5: “And I will not blot out his name out of the book of life; by which is meant the choice of persons to everlasting life and salvation; and this being signified by a book, and by writing names in it, shows the exact knowledge God has of his elect, the value he has for them, his remembrance of them, his love to them, and care for them; and that this election is of particular persons by name, and is sure and certain; for those whose names are written in it shall never be blotted out, they will always remain in the number of God's elect, and can never become reprobates, or shall ever perish; because of the unchangeableness of the nature and love of God, the firmness of his purposes, the omnipotence of his arm, the death and intercession of Christ for them, their union to him, and being in him, the impossibility of their seduction by false teachers, and the security of their persons, grace, and glory in Christ, and in whose keeping this book of life is; which respects not this temporal life, that belongs to the book of providence, but a spiritual and eternal life, from whence it has its name.”

Poole on Revelation 3:5: “*And I will not blot out his name out of the book of life*; that is, I will give him everlasting life: the phrase is an allusion to men who use to keep books, and in them the names of persons to whom they will show kindness. The *book of life*; applied to God, signifieth his eternal predestination, or purpose to bring some to heaven; out of which book, though none can be blotted out whose name is once wrote in, yet those whose names are in this book may be under some fears and apprehensions to the contrary.”

What about Revelation 22:19? “And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book.” This verse describes an unbeliever. He characteristically “takes away” (Gk. *aphaireo* as an iterative present set in contrast with the point action of God “taking away” in the verse) from the Bible, corrupting and changing it. Such actions will not characterize the elect, who “tremble at His word” (Is 66:2, 5; Prov 13:13). If the elect corrupted His Word instead of receiving it, Christ’s prayers would be a failure (John 17:8, 6, 17; cf. John 6:68; 1 Thess 2:13)—blasphemous thought! The “part” in Revelation 22:19 is *prospective*, not *possessive*. They have no real part, although they may seem to (Luke 8:18). God offers salvation to “whosoever will” (v. 17). Notice the “part” is not just in “the book of life,” but also in “the holy city” and “the things which are written in this book.” People in heaven and hell (obviously) cannot change Scripture; it is people who are alive on earth who do it. Nobody currently on earth is already in *possession* of “the holy city” and “the things which are written in this book.” The world around us sure doesn’t look like the New Jerusalem! The living who are justified certainly aren’t there yet, and the lost certainly aren’t there yet either! Just as God offers a “part” in the holy city and the blessings mentioned in Revelation to the unconverted, so does He offer them a “part” in the book of life; they have a *prospective* “part” in all three, but a *possessive* part in none of them. The person who rejects the blessings offered him in the book of Revelation, choosing to tamper with its text instead, forfeits his offer of eternal life by rejecting the Word instead of doing what all who believe and are saved will do, that is, receive the Word (John 17:8). In the previous chapter of Revelation, John uses “part,” *to meros*, to represent a “part” one has before he actually gets it (21:8; cf. 20:6); there people who repent lose their prospective “part” in the lake of fire for a “part” in glory. In Rev 22:19, people reject a prospective “part” in the New Jerusalem and the book of life for damnation. One has a “part” prospectively before possessing it in Mt 24:51 + Luke 12:46 (*to meros autou*, just as in Rev 22:19; note it was his “part/portion” before he actually got it). In Luke 15:12, the *meros* or “portion” pertained to the younger son before he actually possessed it.

Note as well that the warning of Revelation 22:19 is to “any man,” that is, to all; so the vast span of unconverted humanity have a “part” in the book of life, the holy city, and the blessings of Revelation in the sense mentioned in Revelation 22:19. (Or, based on Revelation 22:18, the warning is at least addressed to all who hear the words of the book of Revelation, many of whom are not converted). If the verse was a warning that men who actually are written in the book of life may have their names actually removed, the verse would read, “If any justified person shall take away . . . he shall have his name

blotted out,” rather than “If any man shall take away . . . God shall take away his [prospective] part,” as the verse actually does read.

In summary: Revelation 22:19 does not mean that one who actually *possesses* a part in the book of life and the New Jerusalem loses it; it means that one who is offered such a part, who has it *prospectively*, may lose it by rejecting Christ and, instead of repenting and believing the gospel, corrupting the Scriptures and rejecting their teachings.

Barnes on Rev 22:19: “When it said here that ‘God would take away his part out of the book of life,’ the meaning is not that his name *had been written* in that book, but that he would take away the part which he might have had, or which he *professed* to have in that book. Such corruption of the Divine oracles would show that they had no true religion, and would be excluded from heaven.”

We have now covered every reference to the book of life in the Bible, although there are many other books mentioned in Scripture, such as the books which record the works of the unsaved (Rev 20:12), the book of the law (Deut 28:61), the book of the wars of the LORD (Num 21:14) the book which records every tear and sorrow of the elect (Ps 56:8), the book of those alive on earth (Ps 69:28; Ex 32:32-33 cf. Num 11:15; Deut 29:20; Is 4:3), the book which records the members of the unborn baby (Ps 139:16), etc.

The book of life supports the doctrine of election, and therefore, eternal security. Those who corrupt Scriptural teaching on the book of life to teach that the Savior fails to save all who come to him are in danger of receiving the curse of Revelation 22:19.