

# 7734

If you do not know the meaning of those numbers, it means you come from probably a more contemporary culture. In this country, there was a time when certain things were not talked about in polite and even in impolite company. “7734” is one of those things. In writing this I learned there are very few fonts available in Windows that have the number “4” written as it was in the past with an open top. If you turn the paper over and look at the numbers, you know the topic of this article.

The Eastern Fathers write very little about the subject, even though it is mentioned in Scripture. I conjecture there are two reasons for this. The *first* is the Fathers and the Theology of the East use a more positive approach, *i.e.* Theosis as the approach to moral questions. It is better to choose the good, rather than do the good out of fear of damnation. For example, every parent wants their child to be sorry when they apologize because it shows a realization that they know right from wrong. Every parent also knows that on occasion children apologize because they fear punishment. This may be good in maintaining the peace but not in changing of one’s heart to righteousness. The *second* is that they agreed on its reality but had other questions, which dealt with more fundamental issues. The Big question addressed was punishment eternal? Some fathers like Origen (who didn’t become a saint

possibly because of this issue) saw it as a time of purgation and that sooner or later the person’s heart would be converted and they would go to heaven. This idea was not scriptural or rational. Revelation 14:11: “The smoke of the fire that torments them will rise forever and ever, and there will be no relief day or night for those who worship the beast or its image or accept the mark of its name.” Our Lord says in Matthew 25 about those who fail to take care of the least ones they “will go off to eternal punishment.” It also failed logically because in our creation, we were given free will. It would be unfair and unjust for God to say that a person who wants to refuse to accept God for all eternity is not allowed to do so.

Highway to Heaven: the Paths can be taken to get there.

Our Lord in Matthew 12 states: “Therefore, I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.” St John Chrysostom explains this: “Because this is known to you; and the truths are notorious which you harden yourselves against. For though you say that you do not know me; yet of this surely you are not ignorant, that to cast out devils, and to do cures, is a work of the Holy Spirit. It is not then I only Whom you are insulting, but the Holy Spirit also. Wherefore your punishment can be averted by no prayers, neither

here nor there. (*Homily on Matthew 41*). When a person is baptized they receive the Holy Spirit, so the Holy Spirit is known to the person. The Holy Spirit works within the person and one of those works is prayer. A person who chooses to deny the Holy Spirit prayer, denying prayers for the person’s salvation. The way a person gets into heaven is not because of their goodness but because of God’s mercy. A person who denies the Holy Spirit to pray for them to have mercy cannot have mercy and therefore cannot get into heaven.

Some have said that telling a person to “go to Hell” is part of this blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Since only God has the power to give someone eternal damnation, the first sin is that of pride taking divine authority upon one’s self. This is compounded by the fact that the person is involving the Holy Spirit present in the person in the act of damnation.

St John Chrysostom also points out in the same homily: “Just as God must appoint some fixed term for the time of trial, after which the just will enter into the secure possession of a happiness that can never again be lost in all eternity, so it is likewise appropriate that after the expiration of that term the wicked will be cut off from all hope of conversion and happiness. For the malice of men cannot compel God to prolong the appointed time of probation and to grant them again and again, without end, the power of deciding their lot for eternity.” Life is not like a baseball game where time can go on forever but rather like a basketball game, where there is a set time. In the

time allotted to us we become a virtuous person or an evil person. Some can go from one to the other. As the prophet Ezekiel (18) points out, “If the wicked man turns away from all the sins he committed, if he keeps all my statutes and does what is right and just, he shall surely live, he shall not die.” The reverse is also true that a person can lose salvation: “if the virtuous man turns from the path of virtue to do evil, the same kind of abominable things that the wicked man does, can he do this and still live? None of his virtuous deeds shall be remembered, because he has broken faith and committed sin; because of this, he shall die.” There are some who would call this unfair. To them Ezekiel says, “You say, “The LORD’s way is not fair!” Hear now, house of Israel: Is it my way that is unfair, or rather, are not your ways unfair? When someone virtuous turns away from virtue to commit iniquity, and dies, it is because of the iniquity he committed that he must die. But if the wicked, turning from the wickedness he has committed, does what is right and just, he shall preserve his life; since he has turned away from all the sins that he committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die.” Our Lord expresses the same idea in Matthew 20 (14-15) where He says, “What if I wish to give this last one the same as you? [Or] am I not free to do as I wish with my own money? Are you envious because I am generous?” God can be generous to those who have a metanoia (change of heart) even after a life of sin, but this does not

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mean that He has to be generous of those whose change is to evil.

Since all have fallen short, sinned, we are all dependent upon the mercy of God for an eternal reward. Christ our God in the Beatitudes said, “Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.” Every act of mercy we do is asking God to grant us

mercy. This is also found in the Lord’s Prayer, “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” This is our prayer that God will forgive us as much as we forgive others. So to avoid eternal death, we pray that our being merciful and forgiving will open to us God’s mercy.

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