

*The Salvation
of the Unbeliever
and
God All in All*

The Salvation of the Unbeliever

AS GOD is the Saviour of all mankind, especially of those who believe (1 Tim.4:10), we may confidently rest on one grand and glorious foundation truth—that *all salvation is of God, and neither believer nor unbeliever has any part in it*. On the one hand this assures us of the possibility of saving all men, for God alone is able, and, on the other, it bars out all human schemes for their restoration, whether by works, or suffering, by giving them a second chance, or by any cause whatever which originates in man. Those who believe are saved by His grace (Rom.4:16), those who do not believe are saved through His judgments, but in both it is He alone Who is Saviour.

Faith is but the channel of grace; it does not produce salvation. Judgment is but a means He uses, a process which leads to the opening of the unbeliever's eyes. It does not remove his guilt or cleanse a single sin. *That is done wholly and solely by the blood of Christ*. Every effort to bring about the ultimate salvation of all through the purgatorial or penitential sufferings of the sinner is a denial of this great truth. Judgments do not save, but the God Who judges is also the Saviour, and all His dealings with mankind are governed by the grand goal which He has set before Him—to become All in *all* His creatures.

In setting forth the process by means of which God brings the unbeliever back to Himself we must remember that few believers are able to analyze the method used in their own salvation. Now, if we are not able to explain our own experience, how shall we understand His method

with others? Yet, strange as it may seem, God's dealings with the unbeliever are much more easily apprehended than His way with us. The very simplicity of faith baffles us. Most theological systems seek to base belief on evidence, and speak of "Christian evidences" as the foundation of the believer's salvation. This is, rather, the method He uses in the deliverance of the unbeliever.

FAITH AND EVIDENCES

The case of Thomas is an example of the overpowering force of evidence where faith is wanting (John 20:26-29). No man can long withstand the testimony of his senses, even when (unlike Thomas) his interests may be opposed.

The tangible proofs given to support the proclamation of the kingdom affords a rich field for the study of the effect of evidence on the human heart. The unbeliever will be saved by sight. He will yield to the force of facts. He will be convinced by logic. What evidence is most suited for this purpose? In our Lord's ministry we can see both the helps and the hindrances offered by the senses. The consideration of a few cases will reveal what most moves men and what makes them obstinate.

The rich young man was hindered by his possessions. The Samaritans were helped by the Lord's words. The resurrection of Lazarus led many Jews to rely on His acts. These illustrate God's method in the judgment of the unbeliever. He removes hindrances—no earthly acquisitions interfere with the decisions of the heart, for both heaven and earth flee from the face of Him Who sits on the throne. He works the greatest possible miracle, by raising them from the dead. He reads the inmost secret of their hearts. He appears in their very presence in soul-dismaying splendor. They *cannot* doubt His power or His perfections, and no motive remains to lead them to deceive themselves.

The judgment of unbelievers takes place in the inter-

val between the passing of this present earth and the creation of the new. Every tie which bound them to the earth has been burned up. They are the subjects of the most astounding miracle ever wrought, having been raised from the dead. They are in the presence of the Divine Majesty. Their secrets are bared to His awful gaze. The character of their judgment, being adjusted to their acts, not simply as to severity but so as to correct them, will reveal God's purpose to save and reconcile them to Himself. This, followed by their death in the lake of fire and subsequent vivification at the consummation, is the basis of their reconciliation through the blood of the cross (Col.1:20).

The excuses offered by those who were bidden to the great supper (Luke 14:18) are all removed before the great white throne. No fields or oxen or wives will intrude between the spirit and the great Judge.

In the judgment day God will judge the hidden things of humanity (Rom.2:16). We are prone to consider this a mere exhibition of His omniscience, to facilitate the trial of the sinner and to insure his condemnation. But more than this, it cannot but have a most powerful effect on the unbeliever's attitude toward Christ. What was it that impressed the woman of Samaria (John 4:19,29)? It was His knowledge of her hidden secrets. As a result we read that many of the Samaritans of that city believe in Him because of the woman's word that He told her all that she had done (John 4:39).

The blessed results achieved by His exposure of the woman at Sychar's spring will be multiplied by many millions at the great white throne. There is nothing hidden that shall not be manifested (Matt.10:26). As in Corinth, the hidden things of the unbeliever's heart become apparent, and, falling on his face, he will worship God (1 Cor.14:25).

Perhaps no miracle wrought by our Lord and His apostles created a stronger conviction than that of raising the

dead. When Lazarus was raised many of the rulers believed, and the chief priests were concerned lest all should believe on Him because of this sign (John 11:45,48). When Peter raised Dorcas it also was used to convince many who believed on the Lord. Can we imagine what conviction it must have brought to Lazarus and to Dorcas themselves, if they should have had the slightest tendency to doubt? Could there have been any stronger proof of divine power than that their very life had come back to them at the bidding of One Who is stronger than death? In the process of winning the unbeliever we judge their resurrection and final vivification to be ample to account for salvation and reconciliation entering their lives.

SAUL OF TARSUS

The apostle Paul's case is of surpassing significance in its bearing on the salvation of unbelievers. He was the foremost of sinners, and it cannot be denied that, among men, there was no case quite as desperate as his. All question as to God's ability to save vanishes in the light of his call on the Damascus road. The miraculous means employed in his case surely would suffice for everyone of God's enemies. And who will deny, on sober reflection, that the appalling power and glory of the august judgment session into which the unbeliever is ushered by his resurrection will be unutterably more impressive?

The apostle's vision passed. He came back to a scene where all was as before. He alone had changed. But the unbeliever sees the power and presence of God not only in his own deliverance from death, but in all around him. The vision does not vanish. The divine presence abides.

GOD AS JUDGE

The change which eventuates in the ultimate salvation of the unbeliever is wrought, not only by his resurrection,

but by the august judgment session, when he stands in the presence of Christ, with all his unbelief swept away by the awful realization of His power and the justice of His throne. We are asked, Is it possible for them to repent? Rather, we would like to know, Is it possible for them *not* to repent, or change their minds? We cannot conceive an unrepentant sinner before the great white throne.

God's thoughts and man's imaginations are nowhere more at variance than on the subject of judgment, or punishment. God is love; man is hate. David was wise when he was given the choice of fleeing before his enemies or falling into the hand of Yahweh. He uttered a great truth when he exclaimed "Let us fall, I pray, into the hand of Yahweh, for His compassions are abundant; but let me not fall into the hand of humanity." And surely his choice was vindicated, for when the messenger was stretching out his hand in destruction toward Jerusalem, Yahweh showed Himself merciful, and said, "Enough, now hold back your hand" (2 Sam.24:10-16).

NINEVEH

Jonah went through the streets of Nineveh, crying: "Forty days more and Nineveh shall be overturned!" (Jonah 3:4). But God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and He regretted the evil He said He would do unto them. "And He did it not" (Jonah 3:10). And what did Jonah do? Was he not pleased at the success of his mission? Did he not glory in the character of His God? Alas! he was like the many today. Like Jonah, they imagine that God has a streak of hate in His character and that He wanted to destroy Nineveh to give it exercise. But He had an object in threatening its destruction. Now that they repented and the object was attained, why should He belie His character and destroy them from sheer vindictiveness? Jonah's God was a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and

of much benignity, and regretting of the evil which He had threatened (Jonah 4:2).

DESTRUCTION

The thought that the resurrection and judgment of the unbeliever is only a prelude to his final "destruction" in the lake of fire must be judged by its moral effect, for it has no support whatever in the Scriptures. In the first place "destruction" (by which annihilation or extinction of being is intended), is *never used of the lake of fire or of the second death*. It is always used of the sinner before his resurrection at the great white throne. Those who are "destroyed" in Gehenna will be there. Those who "perished" in the wilderness and at the flood will be raised. "Destruction" is never annihilation. It never precludes resurrection and salvation. Indeed, *it is a necessary precursor of salvation*. The Lord came to seek and to save the "destroyed" (lost). So that, even if there were a single passage telling us that the unbeliever is "destroyed" in the second death (which there is not) we would still have every reason to believe God when He assured us that all who are dying in Adam shall be made alive in Christ (1 Cor.15:22).

Let no one suppose that we plead for the repeal of God's word regarding the doom of the unbeliever. Far from it. But we do plead for the removal of those harsh, human perversions of His word, which seek to make Him a man like ourselves, hateful and hating one another, vindictive and vicious in our views of the so-called "penalties" of sin. We plead for a revision of our vocabulary on this important theme.

The terms *destroy* and *destruction* are so often used of irrecoverable ruin that a few examples will be given to show how far this is from the truth. The rendering "lost" is always the translation of the word for destroy. It would be the utmost folly for the Son of Mankind to seek, much

less to save those who are annihilated. The lost sheep and the lost coin and the lost prodigal all had been destroyed, yet all were found and saved. Were the whole world lost or destroyed in the lake of fire, that would be no hindrance to salvation. Rather, it would be the very sphere in which alone salvation can operate. Christ cannot save anyone unless first he is destroyed, or lost.

GOD IS THE SAVIOUR

Such is the salvation of the unbeliever. It is not only in absolute accord with every passage in the word of God, but in utmost harmony with the God Who is revealed through that word. How can anyone who truly loves Him rest satisfied with less than this, the only true, the only scriptural solution?

Let those who are fond of reasoning about the destiny of the universe accept their own premises and follow them out logically and the inevitable conclusion will be a universal reconciliation. Try it and see. All will acknowledge these premises:

God is love

God is omnipotent

therefore?

God is not love if He will not do all He can for His creatures, neither is He omnipotent if He is unable to save them. Both revelation and reason are arrayed against the false delusion of unending torment for the unbeliever. It degrades the sacrifice of Christ to a mere attempt to remedy an evil which it cannot cure. O, my brethren, why do you limit His love, why do you paralyze His power? Is the Christ Who saved *you* capable of completing His work by saving all like you? Or, if He *can*, why *will* He not?

Confess that this terrible doctrine cannot but lead you to doubt His perfections. It brings you up to a blank wall,

to a pit of dense darkness. But the blessed truth opens up a glorious vista flooded with the love light of God.

THE JUST JUDGMENT OF GOD

But, we are told, God's justice demands judgment. There is truth in this. But if God's justice must be displayed at the expense of His love, the extinction of the unbeliever in the lake of fire, far from forever removing an eyesore from the universe, places a blot upon His character which eternity itself can never erase. If we do not doubt His willingness to save them, then we must acknowledge His inability. If we cannot question His power, then we must limit His love, and then we endanger the very foundation on which all eternal bliss must be established.

But we do not need to rest on reason. At best, it is usually the refuge of unbelief. God has spoken, and real reason rests on His revelation. He is the Saviour of all mankind, especially of those who believe. God give us grace to glory in such a God!

In the opening chapters of Romans Paul lays the foundation on which God's just judgment is based. He closes his indictment of mankind with these words: "... the just statute of God, that those committing such things are *deserving of death* . . ." (Rom.1:32). As the first death cannot be the effect of any judicial procedure on God's part, it is evident that the death penalty awaits all who come into the judgment. Whatever may be the variety and degree of the tribulation and anguish meted out to each, one common end awaits them all—the second death.

VIVIFIED IN CHRIST

But, some will ask, if they were condemned to death, how can they be raised again? What right have they to the grace and life that will be their portion? We answer, *none*. They will have no more claim on the ecstatic bliss

of that unending day than I or you, or any believer! What right have we? None at all. But *in Christ* we have a perfect title to every favor. So it will be with the unbeliever. It is not written that "Even as, in Adam, all are dying, thus also shall all be vivified," but "thus also, *in Christ*, shall *all* be vivified" (1 Cor.15:22). Adam's death involves all, irrespective of their deserts. Christ's life extends to all, apart from their personal merits.

And here is where the unbeliever learns to love God. The judgment has exposed his own unworthiness. The grace of vivification will illumine his heart with the love of God in Christ. Then shall be fulfilled God's universal goal:

"... to Me will bow every knee,
And every tongue will be
acclaiming God."

This is the method He will use to bend the stubborn knees. He will not use physical force but moral suasion. Neither will He wring out a *confession of sin* from every tongue. The Greek word as here used means *acclaim*, which involves a complete acknowledgment and acquiescence in the divine will.

The crowning and conclusive exhibition of God's power and love toward the unbeliever awaits the consummation. The eons are past. All sin is banished. Evil is no more. The Son of God has nearly completed His mediatorial work. All the living are in perfect accord with God. Nothing remains but the conquest of death and the reconciliation of its denizens. It is the only enemy left in all God's universe. Then, and not till then will the vast concourse of mankind emerge from the domain of death never to enter it again. Then death will be despoiled, the last enemy laid low. Then shall all awake to live in the light and love of Him who will have become the Saviour of all mankind.

A. E. Knoch

GOD ALL IN ALL

DO YOU BELIEVE ALL of God's Word? When I first came to know God I went to the meetings of the "Plymouth Brethren" and learned many a precious truth from them which, at that time, was almost unknown in the nominal churches. The Lord's coming, the need of "rightly dividing," a little as to the body of Christ, the difference between the church and the kingdom—these all found a place in my heart and mind at the very beginning of my life of faith. But I also received warnings against "non-eternity," and "soul-sleep," and "universalism," etc., to which I gave due heed.

At that early date my life course was determined by the acquisition of Wigram's Concordances. Next to the Scriptures, they have been of the greatest value in my spiritual development.

These give a list of each word in Greek or Hebrew and all of its occurrences in English. This has been my lexicon, for the usage of a word is the only safe index of its meaning. These also showed how discordant our English translation is and led me to go back to the original.

The Brethren claimed to be unsectarian, but when I persisted in having fellowship with all of good conduct in the body of Christ they put me out, though this was the original basis on which their movement was founded. This proved a great blessing, for I was now free to believe what is in God's Word apart from all religious restraint.

I had two objects before me: to believe *all* of God's Word, and to suffer the persecution which must necessarily follow. I was conscious that there were quite a few

texts in the Word which made me uncomfortable. I knew the so-called "explanations," but they appeared to be only a form of unbelief.

The salvation of all troubled me from the very first. The Brethren changed God *wills* all men to be saved, to God *wishes*, but my concordance showed me that it was the Brethren who wished it so, not God. He works all things according to the counsel of His will. They also altered "the *Saviour* of all" to "the *Preserver* of all." Since it was necessary for them to corrupt God's Word on this theme it was clear that they did not have the truth. Romans five and First Corinthians fifteen and Colossians one contained statements which I could not believe because they contradicted many other passages dealing with the fate of unbelievers. It was only after the truth as to the eonian times was opened up to me that I was able to exult in their glorious unfoldings.

I now found myself able to accept and approve of those statements in the Bible which stumble so many saints, and cause so much unbelief, which may be concentrated in the one case of Pharaoh. God hardened his heart, and will judge him for doing that which he was forced to do. Is this right?

Not only that, but God was greatly glorified by Pharaoh's opposition. How then can He judge him? A believer in eternal torment finds it impossible to charge God with such an atrocity, and refuses to believe it, or "explains" it away. But once we see God's ultimate and that judgment, in God's Word, sets matters right, all is clear and acceptable. God's glory demands expression. Pharaoh, earth's highest, is the best means. He is too soft, so he must be hardened. Eventually, at the consummation, he will be reconciled. But that is not possible until he has realized the enormity of his sins, and suffered their just penalty, set by God Who is *just*, not vindictive.

But even then I was not satisfied. There were still passages in God's Word which did not receive my hearty acquiescence. I had a horror of implicating God in sin, so how could I echo the apostle's words "all is out of Him" (Rom. 11:36)? *All* out of Him—the evil, the misery, the opposition to His will? Yet the passage itself insists that He locks up all in stubbornness (Rom. 11:32). Other passages, such as the sixth of Isaiah, boldly tell us that He blinds men's eyes so that they cannot see. Pharaoh's is no isolated case. It is very evident that God uses these things in order that His glory may be manifested. Is it then God's will that men should sin? That cannot be. What is sin?

Once I found out that sin is failure, I saw that I had been making God the greatest of all sinners, so long as I believed that He could not save all, or that He had not been able to keep sin out of the universe, or that it was contrary to His purpose. Failure is sin, and if we imagine that God has failed in any particular we make Him the Sinner of sinners. God will not fail, and has not failed.

The first thought which came to me then was, "shall we, then, do evil that good may come?" Never! But immediately I was reminded that this is the very charge that was hurled at Paul! Could there be any better proof that I was on the right track? *God* does evil that good may come, for He is wise and powerful and loving. But men are foolish and weak and hateful, so cannot use evil, except in the most limited degree. A father may be trusted to put his child's finger near enough to the hot stove so as to teach it to fear the fire, for he loves the child. Otherwise it is a most dangerous and erroneous doctrine. But God is not a man. That is the trouble with theology. It is always deifying man and humanizing God.

So it was that I arrived at my goal: to believe all of God's Word and to suffer persecution like Paul. He was falsely charged with teaching men to do evil (Rom. 3:5-8), and he

was reproached for saying that God is the Saviour of all mankind (1 Tim.4:10).

But, above all, I now have a *real God*, Whom I can worship and adore without the least reservation. He harms, but He heals, and both together, the harming as well as the healing, is a blessing to His creatures as well as a glory to Himself.

It is our object to lead our readers to this same goal, where they can accept *all* of God's words and give Him *all* the adoration of their hearts.

THE PROCESS AND THE GOAL

GOD HAS A GOAL. He intends to become All in all His creatures (1 Cor.15:28). He will accomplish this by way of reconciling all His enemies by the blood of Christ's cross, by justifying, vivifying, and saving all mankind at the consummation (Col.1:20; Rom.5:18; 1 Cor.15:22; 1 Tim.2:4; 4:10). But before this there is a long and painful preparatory process, a weary way which leads His creatures to this consummation, much of which seems as dark and distressing as the goal is bright and filled with blessing.

Almost all of us are short-sighted. We see a part of the way but we do not see the end. We confuse the going with the goal. Our Bible translations are partly to blame, for they fail to clearly mark the fleeting nature of the process, as it is in the original languages. And if an honest attempt is made to carry this across in a concordant version, it clashes with our conventions and our hard hearts. God grant that we may faithfully witness, in our renderings, when God reveals an absolute fact concerning God and His *purpose*, and when it is only a temporary *process*, for this He has clearly indicated in the ancient manuscripts.

Judgment is God's strange work. He uses it on the way.

Men make it the end. No matter how an unbeliever is dealt with, whether he dies as a result of sin, or by the direct intervention of God, whether he be cast into outer darkness or into Gehenna, *this is not his end*. All who do not belong to Christ will be roused from the dead and judged before the great white throne. There they are not forgiven, or saved, but judged. *But this is not their end*. All these will be cast into the lake of fire, to suffer the second death. *Even this is not their end*. God does not reach His goal in any of His disciplinary measures. These only prepare His creatures for it. Let us not confuse the going with the goal.

Very little is said to us about God's goal until Paul completes the orbit of God's Word with his later revelations. Hints there have always been by which hearts in tune with God have been filled with high hopes. But it is not until the meridian sun of God's grace has come from behind the clouds of sin and law, to reveal the deepest recesses of God's immanent love to the most undeserving of the race, it is not until the truth for the present was made known that God tore aside the veil of the future completely, and gave us an unclouded view of His ultimate. Once we revel in this we will never go back to previous revelation on this theme, for like the curtain of the tabernacle, it seems to hide, rather than reveal the full blaze of the Shekinah glory.

The usual way is to view the goal in the darkness of the way. We go back to passages which deal with judgments and allow them to throw their dark shadows across the consummation. We should *believe* that *God will justify all* mankind (Rom.5:18), and view the previous judgments in the light of this final achievement. We bring up passages which tell of death, to darken God's declaration that it will be abolished. We should *believe* that *God will* make death inoperative at the *last*, and view the previous passages in this glorious light. We turn to tests which prove that unbelievers will be lost or destroyed, and, with these

passages, dim the great declaration that God wills the salvation of all. We should illumine them with the later and higher revelation. We find God's enemies in the fiery lake at what seems to be the close of revelation, and misuse this fact to deny God's declaration that all will be reconciled (Col.1:20). We should not take one to destroy the other, but believe *both*, for reconciliation *follows* estrangement, and it alone accords with God's final goal.

How perverse and blind have we often been! When God says *all*, we have said *some*. When God speaks of a very small fraction of mankind, such as the living nations who stand before Christ to be judged according to their treatment of Israel (*cf* Matt.25:31-46)—a mere handful as compared with all mankind—then we make their sentence hopeless and extend it to *all*! Faith has almost fled from the earth. What calls itself faith is mostly a masquerade, for it refuses God's Word for the traditions of men, yet insists that it is genuine.

Let us allow the light of the latest revelation to illumine the earlier, partial unfolding, and let us not use the earlier to eclipse the latest, the highest, and the only complete unveiling of God's mind and heart.

Why should we be Jonahs, sitting under our withered gourd, furious because God does not fulfill the word which we have proclaimed. What about the truthfulness of God's Word? Must it not be upheld? Would it not make God a liar if He repented and did not overturn Nineveh in forty days? The idea that God has a heart as well as a mouth, and had compassion on the creatures He has made was heresy in Jonah's eyes. Are we not far worse than Jonah? He actually had to take back God's express declaration. We need only retract our own false inferences from it, dictated by the heart altogether out of harmony with His loving goal, which our dim eyes have failed to discern, even though it is written in letters of gold across the horizon of the far off

future, and is clearly visible to every heart which has been humbled by His grace, and which beats in unison with His love. God grant that we are no Jonahs!

GOD ALL IN US

Most delightful is it to contemplate that distant day when God will be All in *all*. Because of the unbelief of Christendom we are prone to emphasize the second *all*, and rightly insist that it admits of no exceptions. *Every* creature of His hand will then be close to His heart. Yet we should not confine our contemplations to the number alone, but also maintain the full meaning of the first *All*. God will not occupy a small fraction of our lives, nor even half or three-fourths. He will be *everything* to us. There will be nothing in our experience that will not be divine. Every occurrence, each incident, large or small, important or trivial, will come to us consciously as a gratuity given by God, and it will bring a constant response of adoring worship.

GOD SOMETHING IN ALL

Perhaps it would not be too much to say that God is *something* in everyone in this life. Even the unbeliever and the atheist, especially in their earlier years, have at least a tinge of God-consciousness, especially when overwhelmed with sudden terror or dismay. But it is not until He reveals Himself to His chosen, that they begin to *realize* the part He plays in their lives, and that He becomes the focus of their consciousness. At first this may be very weak, but, as they become mature, He takes a larger and larger place in their experience. The heathen have idols made by human hands. Let us beware lest we also worship a deity who is not and will not be our all, made by human heads.

GOD ALL IN SALVATION

In these days the standard question which is pressed upon the unbeliever is, "What must I *do* to be saved?" This leaves the impression that the sinner must have a hand in his salvation. He must repent, or reform, or join the church. Even Paul's reply to the Philippian warden, "*Believe* on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved . . ." (Acts 16:31) is distorted, as though it were a meritorious deed, when, in fact, it is of *faith* that it may accord with *grace*, not with works (Rom.4:16). And the faith is that of God's chosen (Titus 1:1). Salvation is all of God. It begins with His choice before the disruption (Eph.1:4), which eventuates in His call and justification and glorification (Rom.8:30). Nothing is left to us. He alone gave His Son, the sacrifice that saves. May we add nothing to it!

GOD ALL IN LIFE

But the *believer* need not wait until that day. As he matures he will gradually realize that God is All to him now. At first he seeks to inject himself and his will, and the unknown god of chance into the affairs of life. Then he begins to see that God is in all the great crises, the important decisions. But finally he wakes to the fact that everything, no matter what its size or duration, is under God's control. All space and that which fills it is subject to the Great Disposer. All time and every event that occurs in it is planned and put in its appearance when God wills. God is our all, in things great and small! So we anticipate the glorious goal to which He is guiding His universe. May this be the precious portion of all who have partaken of His peace!

A. E. Knoch

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