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A SERMON

ON

The Plan of Salvation.



BY

ISAAC ERRETT.

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THE PLAN OF SALVATION.*

ISAAC ERRETT.

"For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, erring, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the goodness and love [*philanthropia*, love of God to man as man] of God our Saviour appeared, not on account of works of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, his mercy he saved us, by the washing [laver] of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying, and this I will that thou affirm constantly [strongly] that [in order that] they who have believed in God may be careful to maintain good works (Tit. iii. 3-9).

Just now, when an unusual religious interest pervades the community, and hundreds are inquiring the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward, it is important to furnish clear and ample instruction to inquirers, such as may lead them into an acquaintance with "the whole counsel of God." Then their faith will stand, "not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God,"

* This Sermon was delivered Dec. 19, 1869, in the Christian Chapel, corner of Eighth and Walnut Streets, Cincinnati, O., in view of an unusual religious interest prevailing at the time in the city. This will explain one or two local allusions in the discourse.

and they will receive the message of salvation "not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh in believers."

We design, therefore, to present, as fully as it can be done within the limits of a sermon of reasonable length, an outline of the plan of salvation. In order to do this, let us consider: I. What God Has Done to Save Sinners; II. What Men May Do for their Fellows in the Matter of Salvation; III. What Every Sinner is Required to Do for Himself, in Order to Be Saved; IV. What God Proposes Yet to Do, in Us and for Us. We assume, in these inquiries, that man is sinful, and needs salvation; that his spiritual nature is lost, and needs recovery; that the soul is inharmonious in its relations to the spiritual universe, and must be reconciled to its eternal and immutable order. We attempt not to prove this. We speak, to-day, for such as know it and feel it. We merely remark, in passing, that the religious history of our race groans under the weight of evidence that man is, and ever has been, bewildered in strange labyrinths, and sighs with great and eloquent anguish, and almost despair, over his great guilt, confusion and helplessness. The first verse of our text presents a moral portrait with which the experience of the present generation so entirely accords, that the verisimilitude will be acknowledged by general consent. We accept the sad, stern facts, and desire to turn our eyes to the "everlasting hills, whence cometh all our help," for succor and deliverance.

I. WHAT HAS GOD DONE TO SAVE SINNERS?

Our text assures us that no works of ours can procure salvation, but points us to the "kindness," "philanthropy" and "mercy" of God, as the fountain of salvation: "goodness"—that goodness which "openeth its hand and satisfieth the desire of every living thing"—gives us some ground to hope that the soul's desires will not be disregarded by Him who hears the young ravens when they cry; but the "philanthropy"—the love of God to man *because he is man*—which the gospel reveals, is a sweeter, richer, brighter light; while the "mercy" whose unsearchable riches are offered in the gospel, carries us beyond all doubt, and lifts us to a rapturous view of the saving grace of God. We are saved, then, if saved at all, by grace—because God is good, and compassionates us in our sin and wretchedness, and out of his own infinite delight in goodness has given us "the knowledge of salvation in the remission of sins," "that we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve him, without fear, in righteousness and holiness before him, all the days of our life."

Were we indulging in a minute view of the details of this plan of salvation, we should traverse the Old Testament history, and show how an Invisible Hand guided all the events of the ages, for four thousand years, to a grand consummation in the advent of the Messiah; how heaven and earth—men and angels—were laid under tribute to forward this divine scheme, and how the very sins and apostasies of our race were

made subservient to the gracious purposes of divine philanthropy. But, passing this, we observe:

1. *That the grace of God was revealed in giving his son—IMMANUEL; GOD WITH US—to develop this salvation to us.*

“God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have eternal life.” The sighs of the ages were answered in an incarnation of Deity that brings to man, on the plane of his own weak and sorrowful existence, the knowledge, the mercy and the strength which he needs. “God is in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.” It is the culmination of God’s gracious purposes—the grandest climax of divine philanthropy—the exhaustion of heaven’s munificence; so that, when the work of the Son of God is done, the sublime utterance of his breaking heart on the cross—“*It is finished*”—announces that the dying sufferer has gained the deepest depth of woe, and the highest summit of goodness, that can ever illustrate the power of God to save.

2. *The life, death and resurrection of Jesus render this grace of God accessible to us.*

It is not the grace of God, hidden in the depth of his eternal counsels, that saves us; nor yet a grace secretly distilling its power on the human heart, in ways inscrutable. It is the grace of God “*appearing to all men*”—*grace revealed in the life, teachings, conflicts, sorrows, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.* “Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” We learn

from his lips what we need to know about sin and redemption; about life, death and resurrection; about the feelings of God toward his sinful creatures, and his designs in their behalf; about the connection between character and destiny; about the terms on which God will receive us, and the kind of life we must live so as to please him: all these things, in reference to which we were groping in thick darkness, he has made plain to us, so that "the common people" may "hear him gladly," and learn the way of life. Moreover, his own life, under the heaviest pressure of human woe, was so perfect and triumphant an exemplification of obedience to the will of God, that the helpless soul, touched by it, springs into new life, and learns how, by God's help, to overcome the world.

But not only is there light in the darkness, but a rock in the waves. The things most desired, but most uncertain, are *demonstrated* in this wonderful mission of Jesus. He did not theorize—he demonstrated. He did not speculate on the possibility of God's love—he *loved*; he wrought out the most amazing mercy for men, before their eyes. He unfolded no psychological theory as to the capacity of the soul for virtue and truth—he took our weak and weary nature into the thickest of the fight with powers of darkness, and led it, over perilous paths, along the brink of fearful precipices, and through the heat of bitterest contests, to perfect victory, and taught men that human nature could be made triumphant over hell. He gave no philosophy of atonement; but, taking our guilt-

laden and shame-burdened nature, he hesitated not to bear it to God, though on the way he met the angel of Justice, with flaming sword, and it cost him bloody sweat, and awful agony, and bitter cries, and untold shame, and ignominious death, to maintain this fellowship with our dishonored race, and bear his plea for their restoration to completion; and he came out from the toils and sufferings of this ministry, covered with scars, with pierced hands and feet and side, a "man of sorrows" as none had ever been before; but he came out with a shout of triumph on his lips—still holding our imperiled nature in his covenant grasp, with its chains broken, its guilt expiated, its curse removed. He "bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sin, might live unto righteousness." He broached no doctrine of immortality; but he died and went down to the grave, and fought his last battle in the depths of that fearful empire, and broke the power of death, and led captive captivity, and *demonstrated* his power to redeem from death. He told but little of the world beyond, but he took our ransomed nature into the chariot of God, and ascended with it "far above all might and dominion and principalities and powers," and placed it on the mediatorial throne, in immortal partnership with Deity. In his ascension he completed the line of communication between the stormy Atlantic of human sin and strife, and the Pacific Ocean of God's redeeming love; and when he lifted the silver hammer, and drove the golden spike that fastened the last rail in this

grand highway, the bells rang around all worlds, and the universe thrilled with unusual joy.

It is said that on one occasion a gentleman came to London to obtain a loan. He was a stranger; and, although offering ample securities, he could not succeed. In his despair, he called on one of the Rothschilds, and laid his case before him. "I am not in that line of business," said Mr. R., "or I would accommodate you. But, come, I will walk down street with you." They went arm in arm along the great thoroughfares, and when it was known that Rothschild was his friend, the loan was instantly secured. And when God and man go arm in arm along the highways of the universe, every angel-crown is lifted to do honor to the friend of God, and our bankrupt nature steps at once into wealth and grandeur. So we build on a rock. No mere dreams or wishes or fancies beguile us; nor does and deceitful philosophy bewilder us. We build on *facts*, we walk by *faith*, we find peace in resting on a perfected work of redemption. Through this blessed ministry of Jesus, God takes us by the hand and leads us out of ignorance and wickedness and doubt and despair into a delightful knowledge of his goodness, holiness and mercy, into blessed forgiveness of sin, into firm reliance on his love, and a cheerful hope of eternal life; and all the way, as he leads us, he looks on us through human eyes, distills his compassion on us in human tears, fights our battles in a human form, speaks to us in a human voice, and shows us the imprint of human foot-

steps in all the strange pathway from our lowest weakness to heaven's highest glory. Well may we say, in depositing our destiny in the hands of this Saviour, "I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep what I have committed to him against the last day."

I am aware that to many thoughtful minds many troublesome questions arise as to this mission. They are dazzled by its brightness. They find it difficult to believe that God so loves this sinful race inhabiting this insignificant world; and they can not understand why Jesus should have to go down to death, nor how his death can be an atonement for sin. No doubt there are perplexities here, as everywhere. There are unsolved mysteries in our own being, and in the conditions of our existence; and in any path of psychological investigation we can push our inquiries into the unknown, until our *whys* echo through the darkness and bring back the reply. We can not, of course, discuss such questions now. We only suggest briefly a few reflections for this class.

(1) Spirit is infinitely more valuable than matter; and the value of souls is not to be counterpoised by the weight of material worlds. Otherwise a pound of pig-metal would outweigh the genius of Shakespeare, and a block of marble or a roll of canvas have more value than the immortal forms which the genius of an Angelo, a Canova or a Rubens has wrought on them.

(2) All worlds and universes may be learning lessons from God's dealings with our race. This world of ours may be only

a blackboard in God's great schoolhouse, and through the problems wrought on it of human nature, good and evil, life and death, may be made known "to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places the manifold wisdom of God."

(3) Love, in its essential nature, prompts to vicarious suffering. It can not exist in behalf of suffering objects, and not seek to assume their suffering and carry their woe. Nothing so glorifies human nature as unselfish suffering for others. It is utterly incredible that God could love us and not seek to descend into the depth of our sorrow and helplessness in just that way that would bring him home to our hearts most tenderly and undemonstratively. Say what we will in the way of theoretical justice, Love, intuitively grasping the extent and depth of our calamity, silences all our syllogisms, overrides all our narrow reasonings, and puts to shame all our heartless speculations, by a heroic self-sacrifice which gains the end, and is its own best vindication. Melted hearts, quickened souls, ransomed natures, transformed lives, are the unanswerable vindication of the doctrine of the cross.

3. The Holy Spirit carries forward this work of grace.

It was expedient that the personal Saviour should be withdrawn from human sight, and carry on this mediatorial work away from human gaze. It was needful, therefore, that another divine agency should be employed to make this salvation available to man. "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I

depart, I will send him unto you; and when he is come, he will convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment" (John xvi. 7, 8).

The Holy Spirit is the great Revealer—putting into words all that is needful to be known of the redemption work of Christ, and confirming it by miraculous attestations.

As this is to be a salvation for all nations and all ages, this Spirit has a perpetual mission; *and is in the word and in the church*, a living, enlightening, quickening, regenerating potency; so that we are saved by "the renewing of the Holy Spirit."

We, have, then,

(1) The grace of God.

(2) The redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

(3) The renewing of the Holy Spirit.

Such is a brief, but we trust definite, view of what God has done to save us. We inquire:

II. WHAT MAY MAN DO FOR HIS FELLOWS IN THIS MATTER OF SALVATION?

This may seem to some a strange inquiry, since they have been accustomed to regard man as entirely passive in regeneration. But it is worthy of note that *this grace of God flows through human channels, or it flows not at all.*

When God came to save man, he came in the form of a man, and put forth his grace through a human organism.

When the Holy Spirit came to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment, he came *to the apostles*, and put

forth his converting power through their ministry. "I will send him *unto you*; and when he is come *to you*, he will convince *the world*," etc. (John xvi. 7, 8).

When the Spirit would instruct the Ethiopian eunuch, he said *unto Philip*, "Go and join thyself to this chariot." And Philip converted him (Acts viii. 29-40).

When the angel came to Cornelius, he would not tell him of the salvation of God, but said, "Send for Peter; he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do" (Acts x. 5, 6); and Peter taught him the way of life.

When our Lord appeared to Saul of Tarsus, he would not reveal to him the way of salvation, but told him to go to Damascus, and there it should be made known to him. Ananias was sent to acquaint him with the will of God (Acts xxii. 10-16).

It is not the grace of God in *His* heart, but in the *sinner's* heart, that saves. It is not the love of God in the suffering Jesus at Calvary that subdues the heart; but that love and that suffering understood and appreciated by the sinner. It is not the Holy Spirit, invisible, inaudible and intangible, that regenerates; but the truth which that Spirit reveals; so that we are "born again by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever."

Now between that heart of God—that cross of Christ—that invisible Spirit and our alienated hearts, some *ministry* must come in to carry to us the knowledge and the grace, and to plead with us to be reconciled to God. *That ministry is always a human ministry.* So entirely true is this, that where there is no human ministry, as

in heathen lands, there is no knowledge of Jesus, the cross has no power and the Holy Spirit accomplishes no mission of conviction.

Here, then, is what a man may do for his fellows. He may

“Tell to dying sinners round
What a blest Saviour he has found.”

He may instruct, persuade, entreat, until he prevails in writing on their hearts the covenant of God's love. It may be the ministry of the parent, the Sunday-school teacher, the preacher, the friend, the neighbor, the citizen; it may be performed by reading by conversation, indorsed by deeds of kindness and a holy life, or by public preaching; but through whatever direct or indirect means, it is the duty of every Christian to perform this ministry to the full extent of his or her ability, and bring the ignorant and sinful and careless into contact with the truth and grace of God. Hence, while conversion is a divine work, it is also (instrumentally) a human work (Jas. v. 19, 20; Acts xxvi. 16-18; I. Cor. iv. 15).

While, therefore, we *pray* for all men, we must also *work* to bring them to Christ. We inquire:

III. WHAT MUST THE SINNER DO TO BE SAVED?

I am aware of a prevalent impression that salvation is something wrought in us—that we are passive recipients of converting grace—that we can only watch and wait for the tokens of God's presence and power,

and the inner revelation of his forgiving mercy. Let me quote from the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter x.

All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, *and those only*, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, *effectually to call* by his word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by his almighty power determining them to that which is good, and *effectually drawing* them to Jesus Christ; yet so as they come more freely, being made willing by his grace.

This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man; *who is altogether passive therein*, until, being renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.

And in *Fisher's Catechism* (Part II., pp. 141-2), under Question 89 of the Shorter Catechism, we have the following statement of doctrine:

Ques. 40.—Is there any difference between conversion and regeneration?

Ans.—They are as inseparably conjoined as the effect is to its cause. Regeneration, or the formation of the new creature (in which we are wholly passive), is the cause; and conversion, or the motion of the soul to God, is the effect which infallibly follows.

Q. 41.—Can not man be the author of his own conversion?

A.—No: *he can neither prepare himself for it, nor co-operate with God in it.*

Q. 42.—Why can he not prepare himself for it?

A.—Because "the carnal mind is enmity against God," and remains so until regenerating grace takes place in the soul.

Q. 43.—Why can not man co-operate with God in this work?

A.—Because there can be no acting without a principle of action. Regeneration being the infusing of spiritual life into the soul, it is impossible the creature can co-operate or concur with God in it, *any more than Lazarus in his grace could concur in his own resurrection*, till the powerful voice of Christ infused life and strength into him.

This is the stumbling-block in the path of thousands of honest inquirers. If they are literally *dead*, and as passive and helpless as Lazarus in the grave, what can they do? And what is the use of preaching or exhortation? Preach to Lazarus in the sepulchre! Call on him to awake and arise! Threaten him with eternal ruin if he does not arise! Hold protracted meetings to advance his resurrection! The absurdity of this is at once apparent.

Let me say, that a man may be dead in one sense and alive in another. "Let the dead bury their dead." The dead first mentioned were in that sense alive that they could bury their dead. "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth." A man "dead in trespasses and sins" is in this sense alive, *that he can sin*; and in sinning *he exercises the very same faculties and powers that are exercised in spiritual life*; only it is a perverted exercise of these powers. Death, then, is used figuratively, to describe the alienation of the soul from God—its separation from the true joys of divine fellowship. But, though dead in sin, man has a brain, a heart, a conscience, a will, loves and hates, hopes and fears; only they are perverted. He is able to see,

hear, understand, believe, feel and act; and *it is through the natural channels to the soul that God proposes to convey his regenerating grace.* Thus said Jesus: "This people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them" (Matt. xiii. 15). Do you say it is a divine work to open their eyes and ears? I answer, it is a *human* work likewise. "I send thee to the Gentiles," said the Lord to Saul, "*to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God*" (Acts xxvi. 17, 18). It is, therefore, an unauthorized straining of a figure of speech, for the sake of logical consistency in a theological system, that leads to this false and most mischievous conclusion.

There is a passive form given, in our Common Version, to an active verb, which seems to strengthen this error. We read *be converted* where we ought to read *convert* or *turn*. For instance, in a text already quoted (Matt. xiii. 15), "Lest they should understand with their heart and *be converted,*" ought to read *and turn*. And in Acts iii. 19, "Repent ye, therefore, and *be converted,* that your sins may be blotted out, *when* the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord," ought to read: "Repent, therefore, *and turn,* that your sins may be blotted out, and *that times of refreshing may come* from the presence of the Lord." As I am stating what is now universally conceded by all

competent scholars, it is not necessary to go into an argument to prove it. The difference between the readings is apparent at a glance. According to one, sinners are exhorted to passive submission in order to conversion *when* it shall please God to visit them. According to the other, they are commanded at once to turn to God, that the promised blessing may be theirs. One represents God's delay as the cause of the delay of the sinner's conversion; the other represents the sinner's delay in turning as the cause of the delay of God's blessing. The latter is, beyond all controversy, the true idea.

But, without entering into any elaborate argument on this point, I remark (1), that sinners are commanded *to save themselves* (Acts ii. 40); and (2), that when sinners cried out to know what they must *do* to be saved, they were always told of something to be done on their part, and were never encouraged to think that they could wait in passivity for the salvation of God. God deals with us in harmony with the laws of our rational nature. He respects the constitutional guarantees of that nature. He stands at the door and knocks (Rev. iii. 20). He will not go in another way, nor will he break open the door. "If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in." That God deals with us in accordance with the faculties and rights of our rational nature, throws on us the responsibility of acting a part worthy of that nature. If God speaks, we are under obligations to hear; if he testifies, we must attend to the testimony submitted; if he shows to us

great mercy, it is ours to receive it into our hearts; if he commands, it belongs to us to obey. What, then, we ask, does God command the sinner to do?

1. *He must hear.* "Incline your ear and come unto me; *hear, and your soul shall live.*" "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." We must give attention—honest attention—to God's message. Unless we consent to bring an honest heart to the consideration of God's truth, not one step can be taken toward conversion; and we dare to say, that no grace of God or power of his Spirit will ever visit a heart that abandons itself to dishonest motives. "How can you believe who receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?" It is in the power of every man to shut out God from his soul forever. It is also in the power of every man, to whom the gospel comes, to receive God, in saving power, into his soul, and share the blessedness of divine life. Grace may provide food for a starving man, but *he* must eat or starve. It is not vengeance that warns him: "He that eateth not shall die." Nor is it vengeance that says: "He that believeth not shall be damned." It is not too much to ask that, in order to be saved, the sinner shall give honest and earnest heed to the message of salvation, and even part with all else, that he may secure this "pearl of great price."

2. *He must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.* "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." This is the first answer to a sinner who has as yet taken no step toward conversion, other than to be

alarmed at his condition. As the diseased man, ignorant and helpless, puts his life into the hands of a physician, and trusts it there, ready to hear his counsels, and do his bidding, so the diseased soul is required to trust the Great Physician, acknowledging his power to save, and ready to obey his voice.

Here, again, we are met with a serious difficulty. Faith, we are told, is the gift of God—a special product of the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart; and can not, therefore, be a *duty* on the part of the sinner, since he is entirely incapable of believing. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (chapter xiv.) says:

The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word; by which, also, and by the administration of the sacraments and prayer, it is increased and strengthened.

Fisher's Catechism (Part II., p. 125) says:

Q. 10.—Why is this faith, described in the answer, called a grace?

A.—Because it is the gift of God, freely bestowed upon the sinner (Eph. ii. 8), who has no antecedent worth, value, or good qualification, of which he can boast (I. Cor. iv. 7).

If this be taken as true doctrine, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that no man can believe until it pleases God to make him believe; and the responsibility of the sinner for continuing in a state of unbelief can not be fairly charged to his account. Who can defend, in this view, the

justice of the declaration, "He that believeth not, shall be damned"? Let us look carefully at the passage referred to:

For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast (Eph. ii. 8, 9).

Does Paul refer to *faith*, or to *salvation*, as the gift of God? We can scarcely suspect him to be guilty of so idle an utterance as that *faith* is "not of works"; but he loses none of his gravity or his dignity in affirming that *salvation* is not of works, but of faith. Now, whatever it is that is not of works, that is "the gift of God." The grammatical construction of the sentence forbids us to understand *touto* (that) as standing for *pistis* (faith), since *touto* is in the neuter gender, and *pistis* is feminine. The relative, as Chandler observes, has the whole sentence that goes before it for its antecedent. The meaning, therefore, is clear: this salvation by grace is the gift of God, and is realized through faith, and not through works, so that there is no occasion of boasting.

The other text referred to in the quotation we have given, is still less satisfactory:

For who maketh thee to differ? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it? (I. Cor. iv. 7).

Paul, in speaking of the apostles as *stewards*, intrusted with the treasures of heavenly wisdom for the benefit of others, argues that men in such *stewardship* have no right to aspire to *leadership*, forgetting

their subordinate position and perverting their trust into an occasion of gratifying ambition. But what has this to do with the faith which the sinner is required to exercise?

The apostle says, indeed, to the Philippians, "To you it is given, in behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer in his name" (i. 29); but surely no one will contend that sufferings were the direct gift of God. The opportunity to believe, and the opportunity to suffer, were given to the Philippians.

But, apart from the criticism of particular texts, let us look at the general teaching of the Scriptures as to the means by which sinners were led to believe.

Of John the Baptist it is said: "The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, *that all men through him might believe*" (John i. 7). Here faith was to be produced by the testimony of John, heard, understood and accepted.

In the case of the Samaritan woman, who brought her neighbors to Christ, we read: "And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, who testified, He told me all that ever I did. So when the Samaritans were come to him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days. And many more believed because of his own word; and said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world" (John iv. 39-42).

Here it is evident that faith was created by the evidence presented.

“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written, *that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name*” (John xx. 30, 31). It is vain to submit these evidences, if there is no capacity on the part of the sinner to believe the testimony when it is furnished.

Of the Bereans it is said: “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so. *Therefore many of them believed*” (Acts xvii. 11). “Many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptized” (Acts xviii. 8). “For whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? *and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?* and how shall they hear without a preacher? . . . But they have not obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah saith, Lord, who hath *believed our report?* So then, *faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*” (Rom. x. 13-17).

Faith, then, can not be the gift of God in any sense that can justify the sinner in waiting, in mere passivity, for a divine work to be wrought in his soul by a special visitation of the Holy Spirit. If faith comes by hearing, by searching the Scriptures, by an honest examination of the

claims of Jesus, then this attentive hearing must be given. Let us not be understood as affirming that a mere intellectual assent to the teachings of the Bible is to be accepted as faith. Faith in the Lord Jesus is not like faith in a mere historical statement concerning Hannibal or Napoleon, or an assent to a fact of ordinary occurrence. The difference, however, is not in the method of believing, but in the nature of the things believed. Faith in a historical statement that does not personally concern us, is merely a question of evidence; and the moral nature has nothing, perhaps, to do with it. But faith in Jesus involves grave moral consequences. It involves a disruption of the ties that bind us to evil; a renunciation of the sins that have enslaved us; a crucifixion of the flesh with its desires and lusts; a forsaking of all other lordships, for the lordship over conscience and life of this Son of God. An unwillingness to accept these legitimate results of faith in the Christ may lead us to deal dishonestly with the evidence he brings us, to refuse attention to his claims, to quench our best convictions of truth. It is a moral struggle. He who believes in Jesus, therefore, believes *with the heart*; accepts, in his moral nature, the honest results of the truth concerning the Saviour. His deliberate acceptance of the truth concerning the Christ is a triumph over the evil that is in him; a subjugation of his rebellious nature to the power of the truth of God. It is in view of this *moral* aspect of faith that it is said, "He that believeth not shall be damned."

There is no more conscious act of self-nood, therefore, than this of believing on the Lord Jesus, as the result of honest attention to the truth of the gospel. In the very nature of things it is essential to the enjoyment of the blessings of salvation, not only because it alone can connect us with the unseen, and enable us to realize the power of an invisible Saviour, but because, until we come into such an honest fellowship with truth as to accept all the consequences of faith in Christ, it is impossible that the soul can be prepared to accept the spiritual treasures of the grace of God. Hence, "without faith it is impossible to please God."

3. *He must repent.* "God now commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent" (Acts xvii. 30). "Repent, and turn, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts iii. 19). Sin must be put away. Wrongs must be righted. The affections and sympathies must be withdrawn from all that is evil. We must deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. The will must own the sovereignty of the will of God. It is no difference what it costs. We must pluck out the right eye, if need be, or cut off the right hand, and enter into life halt and maimed, rather than, having two eyes and two hands, to be cast into hell fire. The puling, cowardly soul, that will not wrestle with its sins, and uncoil the serpents of evil that are crushing out its life, can not be saved. The demand of the gospel is uncompromising.

4. *He must confess Christ before men.* "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thy heart that

God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved; for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. x. 9, 10). In the mighty controversy going on between heaven and hell, we are not allowed to proclaim neutrality, nor to withhold our suffrages from Him to whom we look for redemption.

5. *He must be baptized, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins.* "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins" (Acts ii. 38). "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts xxii. 16). "Go, teach all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. xxviii. 19). We are saved, according to our text, "by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Spirit." "Baptism doth now save us," says Peter, "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ;" and this salvation he declares to be "the answer of a good conscience toward God" (I. Pet. iii. 21). As we have *bodies* as well as *spirits*, we must have *ordinances* as well as *principles*. As the body is to share in the service and in the salvation, so it must share in the consecration. And as, in the consecration, the *whole spiritual nature* is given up to be immersed in the love of God, so the *whole physical man* is given up to be immersed in water, that thus, through faith, repentance and baptism, the whole internal and external man may be made over to God in an everlasting covenant.

To guard against erroneous representations on this point, it may be well to say that the Scriptures attach no miraculous, regenerating efficacy to the waters of baptism. No one has a right to come to baptism who is not already a believer and a penitent. It has no value, except as an act of faith, and derives its efficacy from the faith of the subject in the promises of God, and the honesty of his purpose to forsake sin and walk in obedience to the Lord. It does not *procure* pardon. Our reliance for pardon is in "the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world"; in his death for our sins, and his resurrection for our justification. There is, there can be, no merit either in the faith or the obedience which we render. But it has pleased our gracious God to appoint *conditions* of salvation, by accepting which we may *personally appropriate* the blessings which the mercy of God offers to all. These conditions are wisely and mercifully adapted to our nature and our condition. Faith and repentance subdue the spirit to the will of God; baptism is adapted to our material nature, and enables us, in a sensible and evident submission to divine authority, to testify to others our conversion, and to appropriate to ourselves the promises which have been connected with "the obedience of faith." Read again the passages which we have quoted concerning baptism, and you will see how, as we come step by step, to accept the gospel conditions of faith, repentance, confession, baptism, we are permitted to take the promises which are coupled with these conditions and call them ours. Thus our assurance of pardon

and adoption rests on no mere emotion, or dream, or imagination which, departing, leaves us again in darkness, but on the unchanging promise of God, and our consciousness of having complied with the conditions to which the promise is annexed. The obedient subject of the gospel says, I have believed; I have repented; I have confessed the Lord Jesus; I have been buried with him by immersion into death, and have risen with him to a new life: his promise is mine. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."

6. *He must continue to walk in the commandments of Jesus.* As our inquiries to-day relate mainly to a present salvation from sin, we can say but little on this last point, important as it is. But we are careful to say, that, however complete our present salvation, it must yield fruit in a persevering obedience to the will of God—in a new life of righteousness and holiness—or we fail of the grace of God, and, like the Israelites, though saved out of Egypt, reach not the promised land. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

IV. WHAT DOES GOD PROPOSE TO DO, IN US AND FOR US?

1. "I will be merciful to your unrighteousness, and your sins and iniquities I will remember no more" (Heb. viii. 12).

2. "I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people" (Heb. viii. 10). "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (1 Cor. vii. 18).

3. "You shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts ii. 38). "Because you are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. iv. 6). "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God" (Rom. viii. 16). "Strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. iii. 16). "It is God that worketh in you to will and to do of his own good pleasure" (Phil. ii. 13).

4. "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. viii. 17). So says our text: "That being justified freely by his grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." "He that keepeth my sayings shall never see death."

Do you still tremble in doubt? Then remember *that this is the only sure refuge*. Should atheism prove true, the Christian is not the loser. He goes by the pleasantest route to the land of darkness, and sinks in the abyss of nothingness without knowing it. Should deism prove true, and all men reach immortality through the operation of natural laws, he is saved with the rest. Universalism does not imperil his hopes. Spiritualism will admit him, as a true Christian, to the highest sphere of light. Calvinism will not shut out any man of pure heart and holy life. If "faith alone" justifies, surely *faith and its fruits* will not condemn. Why, then, risk the soul on uncertainties, which, at best, bring no gain, which, at worst, involve eternal loss? Why seek to cross the fearful chasm on a single rope, even with the best balance-pole that

any system can furnish, and take one chance in a thousand for safety, when there is in reach a suspension bridge—a highway of faith and holiness—over which you may certainly pass to the land of eternal blessedness? “Our rock is not as their rock, our enemies themselves being judges.”

Can heaven grant more? Pardon, peace, sonship, divine guidance and strength, victory over the world, victory over death, immortality, eternal riches and honors, sweet peace and rest, and boundless love and joy—the loftiest dignities and delights to which created intelligences can aspire! How poor is earth! How fleeting its joys and its honors! What baubles are its greatest treasures! What conflict and pain and grief and anguish are here! How earth’s beauty fades and its pleasures vanish, and its loves and hopes perish! “What shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue!”

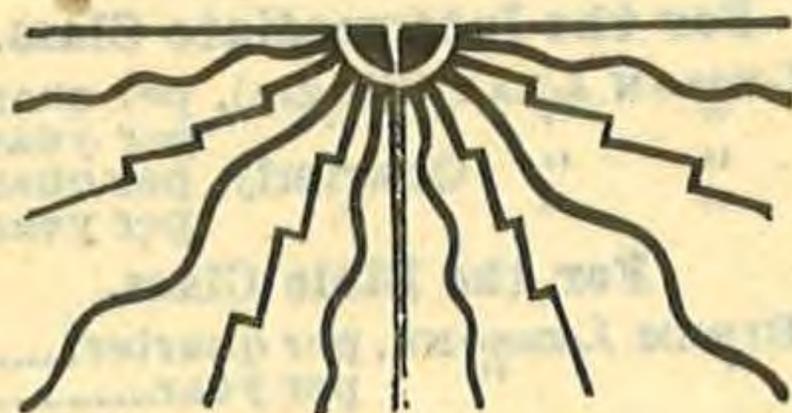
“Born living, dying,

Leaving the still shore for the troubled wave;
Battling with storm-clouds, over shipwrecks fly-
ing,

And casting anchor in the silent grave.”

But there is an endless life; and there is a path that leads to it, and a hand to guide us in the way, and a fountain of mercy at its entrance, where every sin-sick soul may wash and be cleansed in the blood of the Lamb, and be robed in a clean, white pilgrim-robe for the journey; and a covenant-keeping God to protect and to strengthen us on the way; and a divine light—a pillar of cloud and fire—to go before us; and waters in the desert; and man-

na from heaven; and, now and then, bunches of grapes from the land of promise; and a high priest at Jordan to divide the waters; and bright throngs of ransomed ones waiting for us over the river. Will you go? "Whosoever will, let him come."



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