

# God's Salvation of All Unbelievers

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 interval 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 every one 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, therefore

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: "...God's just statute, that such as are committing them 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." (Phil 2:9-11)

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.

By A. E. Knoch

1Corinthians 4:12-16 ... Being reviled, we are blessing; being persecuted, we are bearing with it; (13) being calumniated, we are entreating. As the offscourings of the world we became, the scum of all things, hitherto. (14) Not to be abashing you am I writing these things, but as my children beloved am I admonishing you. (15) For if you should be having ten thousand escorts in Christ, but nevertheless not many fathers, for in Christ Jesus, through the evangel, I' beget you. (16) I' am entreating you, then, become imitators of me.

These verses are from Paul and **he speaks only to us in the books of Romans through Philemon, plus a small amount of Hebrews**. This is where we, the gentiles (the nations), are to obtain our instructions as to how to imitate Paul. **This is what we should be attending to, and practicing. These are our commands through Paul, from our Lord God.** All other books are for our learning about God and His ways, only! **This division of the scriptures is called "Correctly cutting the word of truth."** 2Timothy 2:15.(see also: Galatians 2:6-9)

Blessed be the Lord God and Father of our Lord, Christ Jesus.