

CONDEMNATION OR SALVATION

"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." John 3: 17-18.

In the very beginning God placed man in a beautiful garden, with every inducement to right living, with every provision for his needs and with every possible stimulus for his nobler instincts. He warned man of the danger which he should avoid, a danger that would bring defeat and death. God did everything He could, except coerce a free being, to lead man to choose voluntarily the best.

Then, after man had chosen the evil, in open violation of all that God had said and done, and brought upon himself condemnation, God made an effort to reclaim him from his fallen state and to enable him to become the possessor of eternal life. God was concerned about man because He loved him, and that in spite of the fact that man had rebelled against Him and disobeyed His commandment.

God's love for man is universal. He does not love the rich and despise the poor. He does not love the learned and ignore the unlearned. He loves all men. God's love is unchanging. He loves in spite of man's waywardness. God's love is unending. He said, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love." God's love is unfailing. When man stumbles into sin, God's love forgives. When reverses come, God's love strengthens. When sorrow comes, God's love comforts.

God expressed His love in the matchless and most gracious gift that was ever known --- "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." The purpose of this gift of His only begotten Son was "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." We thank Him for this life which is completely satisfying in its quality and endless in its duration.

God sent His only begotten Son into the world, which fact implies the separateness and the subordination of His existence. Before Christ came the world was full of ingratitude, idolatry, corruption and rebellion. Therefore, one might have expected God to send His Son to condemn and to inflict punishment. Moreover, since the world had persecuted and murdered the prophets of God, it would not have been surprising had He sent His Son on an errand of judgment. But the fact remains that God did not send His Son into the world to condemn it. Rather, God sent His Son into the world "that the world through Him might be saved."

Originally man brought upon himself the inevitable consequences of his deeds by choosing that which brought death. The sentence of condemnation was self-imposed. Much confusion has arisen because this truth has not been clearly perceived. Perhaps this misunderstanding has arisen because this truth has not been convincingly presented by Christian witnesses. If one chooses to take poison, medical science is certainly not responsible for the suffering and death which follow; these are simply the natural results of his own personal choice. If a man sets fire to his house, the fire department is not responsible for his home burning to the ground. If a man who cannot swim deliberately jumps from a diving board into deep water, the lifeguard is not responsible if he drowns.

Christ did not come to condemn, but to save those who were already condemned. In salvation, as taught in the Scriptures, there is deliverance from sin. This deliverance includes pardon, forgiveness and cleansing. It includes deliverance from the guilt of sin, the condemnation of sin, the power of sin, the habit of sin

and the effects of sin. The one who is thus saved is made a new creature in Christ. Something is imparted to him in salvation which he did not have before. He is brought by spiritual birth into the family of the redeemed children of God. He becomes a partaker of the divine nature.

How can one get salvation? Can one forgive his own sins? Can he save himself? No! If not, then he must have help from someone outside of self who can secure salvation for him. People are not saved by their own deeds, but by Jesus Christ. "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. For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8-10).

"He that believeth on him is not condemned." What a satisfactory declaration! You know that in our courts of law a verdict of "not guilty" amounts to an acquittal, and the prisoner is discharged immediately. Thus it is in the language of the gospel; a sentence of "not condemned" implies the justification of the sinner. That means the believer in Christ receives now a present justification. Faith does not produce its fruits in the future, but now. The thief on the cross was justified the moment that he turned his eye of faith to Christ, Who was hanging by his side. After all the years of his faithful service, Paul was not any more justified than was the penitent thief without any service at all. Even now our sins are pardoned, and we stand in the sight of God as though we had never been guilty. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). In the moment you and I believed, it was said of us, "He is not condemned." Many days and years have passed since then, but it is as true of us now as it was then. From the moment you believe on Christ, God ceases to look upon you as being guilty, for He never looks upon you apart from Christ.

"He that believeth on him is not condemned." Do you believe that? Do you believe that all responsibility for the sins of the past has been assumed by your great Saviour, and that the record is blotted out, and that you have nothing to fear?

The object of our faith is Christ Jesus. Let your faith behold Christ in His perfect righteousness. See Him keeping the law to perfection, obeying the Father in everything and preserving His integrity without flaw. But, be sure that your faith fixes itself upon Christ dying for your sins. Believe on Him as the Saviour of your soul. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

"He that believeth not is condemned already." Who are they who believe not? Are all of these unbelievers in the underworld or in the congregation of the wicked? Not necessarily so. Some who call themselves Christians are really not believers. What they regard as their religious faith does not have a wholesome effect on their lives. They never consult the Word of God about anything. Many church members are unbelievers. Unbelievers are those in whom there has not been any quickening by the Holy Spirit, or any yielding of the heart and life to Christ. The Lord Jesus has never become a factor in their lives, determining their courses and leading them to say, "I cannot do that; it would be wrong."

If you have not believed on Christ, the verdict is rendered and you are condemned already. The Judge gives the reason for His judgment of the unbeliever, namely, "because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

You do not have a right to take the life of another person. Neither do you have any right to take your own life. To commit suicide is wrong. One who refuses to believe on Christ commits spiritual or soul suicide. The man who hears the gospel and will not believe on Christ is a determined suicide.

There is a ship going down in the ocean. All the passengers aboard get in the lifeboats except one. Those in charge appeal to him to get in the last remaining lifeboat. He replies, "I don't think this ship is going down; you may, but I don't; so, I am going to stay with it." Before long the ship goes under, taking with it the only man who refused to get in the lifeboat. That is just like the person who will not believe on Christ as His Saviour. By his very actions, if not in actual words, he says, "I do not see any necessity of salvation; I am alright, and I am going to stay with the ship."

Outwardly your life may be one of the most highly respected in the community. So far as others know, you may not have broken any human or moral law, but the trouble is you have refused Christ admission into your heart and life. You are condemned already because you have "not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." By your very refusal to accept the salvation which has been offered to you by Christ, upon the condition of repentance and faith, you have simply confirmed yourself in your own prior state of condemnation. If a patient will not take the medicine prescribed by the physician, he thereby yields himself to the disease that has made him ill. If a sinner will not accept the salvation which is offered to him by Christ, he thereby surrenders himself to the condemnation of sin. It is either salvation or condemnation? By believing on Christ the condemned sinner accepts the remedy offered him by the Saviour.

God's Word tells us that "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." The plan then is to believe on Christ Who was forsaken of God in order that He might bring us to God. No man is good enough to be saved, and no man is so bad that he cannot be saved. No work of righteousness can merit salvation if we do not believe. No work of unrighteousness can forfeit salvation if we do believe. Salvation is a free gift. "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). One is not saved by works, but for works. He works from the cross and not to the cross. "Believeth" denies salvation by character, refutes salvation by works, contradicts salvation by culture, disproves salvation by feeling and declares salvation by trust. To reach heaven there is but one place from which to start, and that is Calvary. There is but one way to heaven, and that is Christ. At what time should we believe on the Son of God? The time is now. Nobody is justified in putting off believing on Christ for one minute, one hour or one day. Life is too short for us to be saying, "Tomorrow." "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Believe on Christ now. Say:

"Out of my bondage, sorrow and night,
Jesus, I come! Jesus, I come!
Into Thy freedom, gladness and light,
Jesus, I come to Thee!
Out of my sickness into Thy health,
Out of my want and into Thy wealth,
Out of my sin and into Thyself
Jesus, I come to Thee!"