

No. 36. CAN BELIEF ALONE SAVE?

WE ask your consideration of a few thoughts suggested by the above query.

It may be that you will not agree with us; that is your privilege; all that we ask is a careful, unbiased perusal prior to the passing of judgment. Compare the statements herein made with the word of God: "To the law and the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."—Isaiah 8: 20.

"A wise man will hear and then judge."—Solomon.

The importance of having an authoritative reply to the question, "Can belief alone save?" is self-evident, for time after time in meetings of a public character it is reiterated that, "We can be saved here and now, only believe in Jesus Christ."

The teaching of those who take this position is represented in the following: "All mankind are hell-deserving sinners, and if we all had our deserts we should be cast into a literal sea of sulphurous fire where throughout the limitless aeons of eternity we should be suffering a hideous torture to satiate the fury of a wrathful, outraged God. This dire calamity is the ultimate of every soul, because we are the posterity of Adam and Eve, who transgressed God's law, away back at the dawn of the world's history; but this terrible eternal catastrophe can be evaded, for God sent his Son Jesus Christ into the world, and by reason of his vicarious sufferings and death, he saves from this infernal holocaust all who believe he is God's Son and that he shed his blood on Calvary's Hill."

In short, because of the sin of our foreparents we were destined to eternal torment, but we can escape this punishment if only we believe in the blood of Christ. If we do not believe this we are damned and irretrievably lost.

For centuries this has been the central thought

with many, the basic principle of religion. Hundreds of thousands have believed and still do believe it; and, strange to relate, extract therefrom a ghastly delight, which, in view of the transcendent virtue of God and Jesus Christ, is altogether anomalous and inexplicable.

If we had no authoritative standard to appeal to (which we have), yet our everyday experience and common sense shows the woeful inability of such teachings to meet the common needs of humanity.

Contemplating for a moment the issues of this question we see clearly it involves the attributes and characteristics of God, and contradicts them in every way. Instead of being a God of Love, Mercy, Compassion, and Justice, he is represented as the very opposite. To illustrate the unsoundness of this teaching we point out that in the country of Great Britain there are many people whose lives are spent in drunkenness and sin of every description, and should we ask them individually if they believed in Jesus Christ, and that he died for the sin of the world, a great majority would reply in the affirmative. Yet to assert that these people are saved would be palpably untrue, notwithstanding the logic of our friends leads us to believe they are saved.

On the scaffold there stands a guilty wretch, who is about to pay the extreme penalty of the law for the crime he has committed, but before he is launched into eternity he is allowed to have the chaplain minister to him, that he may realise, if he can, the awfulness of his crime, and we are informed that if only this sin-condemned man mutters the mystic incantation, "Lord, I believe," that Christ's shed blood has washed away all this criminal's sins, and he stands cleansed and saved, and, when his soul quits his body a moment later, angel hands bear him away to the realms of holiness, purity, and love, to ever bask in the presence of God.

What of the victim who, without a moment's warning, is suddenly and cruelly plunged into eternity, it may be unprepared, possibly an infidel, who, so far as morality, honor, and integrity are concerned, may have been exemplary and sought in every way to love his neighbor as himself? Is he, because he could not honestly say he believed that Christ died for his sins, to be thrust down to the eternal tortures of an ineffable hell? These are not imaginations, but occurrences that are common. Then we are told that God is love, full of grace and mercy, and that he judges with equity. Will any one please tell us where there is love, mercy, or justice in this case?

It is because of such a glaring misrepresentation of God and his truth that infidelity has assumed such proportions in the world and is pitted—no mean force—against the Bible and God. Would that they could realize they are pursuing a ghastly phantom, a nightmare, and that God is indeed our Father who, ever in sympathetic love, is regulating and controlling whenever and wherever man will permit for the common good of all!

This position we are criticising fills heaven with the vilest characters, and consigns to hell some of the noblest characters who have lived and died for the uplifting of their fellow man. Truly, it is not Christ or Christianity our Infidel opponents should blame but—

“Man’s inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn.”

At this juncture we readily grant that many passages can be, and are, produced from the Bible which may appear without due thought to favour the claim made; i. e., “Only believe and you are saved;” but it is easy to observe by a reference to such, and a careful reading of their connections, that this conclusion is woefully strained.

We produce a few of the most popular scriptures which are repeatedly quoted, and ask you, reader, to examine them carefully:

John 3: 16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

John 5: 24: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."

Acts 16: 30, 31: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

1 John 1: 7: "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

These scriptures are quoted in full that the reader may notice where and how our friends make their mistake in applying them to their dogma.

We would have it understood that we earnestly believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God; and, further, have every confidence in the efficiency of his atoning mission and sacrifice, but do not believe in the fallacious presentation of these central truths of religion.

The atonement briefly explained is as follows: Through the transgression of God's commandment by our foreparents, the whole of the human family was estranged from God, because God, being infinitely pure and holy, can have no affinity with sin, therefore, the moment man broke God's law he sinned, and that was a barrier that separated God from man. Isaiah 59: 2: "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you." Therefore, it became necessary that some one who was sinless and could by reason of his sinlessness be in correspondence or communion with God, should also place himself in communion or correspondence with man, and so remove the disability, i. e., the sin, and place us in

communion with God again. This requirement was met by Jesus Christ, who took upon him not the "nature of angels," but "the seed of Abraham" (Hebrew 2:16), combining the two natures, the Divine and the Human, hence the expression, "God manifest in the flesh."

But the removal of that universal barrier which our progenitors had placed there did not take away our will power or agency; we were simply restored to the condition that Adam and Eve had occupied before the fall. We could still choose to serve God or not serve him, and the consequences were of our own seeking, the downfall of Adam and Eve no longer affecting us. "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive," and, so far as Christ's work was concerned, he says, when the tragedy of Calvary closes the scenes of his atoning life, "It is finished." But our part has to be done. We are to coöperate with God. Salvation is not effected for us by Christ, but made possible. We have still the power to accept or reject God's overtures of mercy. Hence Paul says: "By grace are ye saved through faith."—Ephesians 2: 8.

To show that salvation is not effected by the blood of Christ independently of our personal submission and obedience to God, many scriptures can be adduced. One will suffice:

"He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the Sons of God."—John 1: 11, 12.

Jesus did for the human family what we could not do for ourselves, but he did not relieve us of the responsibility of doing what we could. Hence Christ says: "Take heed to yourselves."—Luke 21: 34; Peter says: "Save yourselves."—Acts 2: 40. Hence the propriety and need of the question, "What shall we do?" (Acts 2: 37.) "Sirs, what must I do?" "Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal

life?" The theology to which reference is made says: "Sinner, sinner, nothing do." "Christ has done it all for you." But not so the reply of Christ, of Peter, and of Paul.

"Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12: 13), voices the sentiment of the replies to these momentous questions. Christ came not merely to die, but to show us how to live. "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."—John 14: 6.

Another very serious error our friends make is in holding that "Jesus died to save us from hell," to get us off the punishment sin had justly brought upon us. It is not so! He lived and died and rose again to save us from that which produces hell. Hear the angel Gabriel whom God sent to inform Joseph of Christ's birth: "Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins."—Matthew 1: 21. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!"—John 1: 29.

Paul, in writing to the Church of Jesus Christ in Rome was very anxious and careful to inform them that they were safe just so long as they kept out of sin. It is not hell that produces sin, but sin that produces hell, and until we realize this fact, misery and sorrow and death will continue to cast their baneful shadows across the life of man. If there was no sin there could be no hell, "For the wages of sin is death."—Romans 6: 23. "What shall we say, then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"—Romans 6: 1, 2.

It is necessary, then, that we acquaint ourselves with the nature and component qualities of sin that we can avoid it. What is sin? 1 John 3: 4: "Sin is the transgression of the law."

Chambers' Dictionary thus defines the word *trans-*

gression: "Violation of a law, or command, offence, fault, crime, sin."

It will be clear, then, that to believe in Christ and his atoning sacrifice implies much more than our friends have taught; much more than "Only believe in Jesus now and you can be saved here and now," or, to quote Professor Drummond, We are not to draw out a life assurance policy for eternity on Christ's death. No, to believe in Christ means that I believe his teachings, his word, his testimony, for God gave him to the world as "a Witness, a Leader, and a Commander."—Isaiah 55: 4. Christ says that he was born to be a king, and to "bear witness unto the truth." (John 18: 37.) It is distinctly specified, "He that heareth my word" "and believeth on him that sent me." Why shall we hear his word? Because, says Jesus, "The word which ye hear is not mine, but his that sent me," and unless we believe his word there can not be any salvation, and we are under condemnation. For "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."—John 12: 48.

What does it take to constitute Faith or Belief? Here also is where another huge blunder is made. Faith is not blind credulity nor superstitious assent, but an intelligent confidence in the correctness and efficiency of that in which we profess faith or belief; or, in the language of Paul, "Faith is the substance [assurance] of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."—Hebrews 11: 1.

The Apostle James indorses this, and very clearly shows that faith means much more than that which passes current for faith among the people we refer to. Indeed he is very severe in his denunciation of this "unproductive credulity or superstition."

"Faith, if it hath not works, is death, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have

works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”—James 2: 17, 19, 26.

To read the entire chapter of Hebrews 11 plainly shows that the blessings of God came to the various characters therein mentioned because they did that which they believed. The belief that does not lead men to serve and obey God is just the faith or belief that devils have, and surely we can not claim salvation for them; yet the strict requirements of logic make it imperative we shall, if we accept the position of our friends. If we believe God so loved the world that he sent his Son into the world to teach us God’s will, then it follows we shall believe that will, and in the hearing of it we do it, for we are not to stop at hearing the word. John 1: 7: “If we walk in the light, as he [God] is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanseth us from all sin.” There is not a word that is so conditional as the word *if* and yet it is so repeatedly ignored, oftentimes the scripture split in two, and the conditions upon which the promise of “cleansing from sin,” is predicted, never once mentioned.

The blood of Christ is efficacious “only” when we walk in “the light of God,” in the commands of God; and who shall assume the responsibility of contradicting John, the “Beloved Disciple”?

Further, “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and

continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”—James 1: 22-25.

Jesus himself makes it very plain that our salvation can only be effected when we have “believed” sufficiently to “obey” his commands.

Matthew 7: 24, 27: “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock. . . . And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand.”

Matthew 7: 21: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”

Many scriptures could be adduced to show that God will not be satisfied with less than “the doing of his will.” Not to do his will is “to transgress his law;” to transgress his law is to sin, and we can not be saved “in our sins,” for “the wages of sin is death.” Indeed, when God’s judgment shall sit, it will not be for what we have “believed,” nor what we have “said,” “but every man shall be judged according to his works.”—Ecclesiastes 12: 14; Romans 2: 5-16.

Again, Christ measures our professed love for him by our obedience. “If a man love me, he will keep my words. . . . He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings.”—John 14: 23, 24.

Shall we marvel, then, that Paul so emphatically impresses upon us the truth that Christ became the author of eternal salvation unto all who obey him? (Hebrews 5: 9.) Many of the religious ones tell us that if we “do,” we are damned. Paul says, if we “do Christ’s will we are saved.” Who shall we believe on this matter? It is written, “Let God be true.”

Again, we assert upon divine authority that there is more to be done than merely believe in Christ and his blood. There can be no such thing as instantaneous salvation in this sense. Salvation comes as a result of man yielding obedience to the "will of God," as revealed through our Lord Jesus Christ, which Paul designates "the gospel," "the power of God unto salvation." (Romans 1:16.) That salvation, too, means a salvation from sin, and means, too, if "any man be in Christ he is a new creature." "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

Just why the very enthusiastic preachers of "the Blood only theory" should seek to consign all to hell who preach or teach that a man must do God's will before he can be saved, is passing strange, for Peter, Paul, James, and John are certainly included in their anathema. And what will they do with Christ who says, "If any man will do his [God's] will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself"?—John 7:17.

We invite your attention to the following and ask your careful consideration of the thoughts herein suggested:

We believe in God the Eternal Father, and in his Son Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.

We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression.

We believe that through the atonement of Christ, all men may be saved by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel.

We believe that these ordinances are: First, Faith in God and in the Lord Jesus Christ. Second, Repentance. Third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins. Fourth, Laying on of Hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. Fifth, We believe in the Resurrection of the body; that the dead in Christ will rise first, and the rest of the dead will not live again,

until the thousand years are expired. Sixth, We believe in the doctrine of Eternal Judgment, which provides that men shall be judged, rewarded, or punished, according to the degree of good or evil they shall have done.

We believe that a man must be Called of God, and ordained by the Laying on of Hands of those who are in authority, to entitle him to preach the gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof.

We believe in the same kind of organization that existed in the Primitive Church; viz.: Apostles, Prophets, Pastors, Evangelists, etc.

We believe that in the Bible is contained the word of God, so far as it is translated correctly. We believe that the canon of Scripture is not full, but that God, by his Spirit, will continue to reveal his word to man until the end of time.

We believe in the powers and gifts of the Everlasting Gospel; viz.: The gift of faith, discerning of spirits, prophecy, revelation, healing, visions, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues, wisdom, charity, brotherly love, etc.

We believe that Marriage is ordained of God; and that the law of God provides for but one companion in wedlock, for either man or woman, except in cases where the contract of marriage is broken by death or transgression.

We believe that the doctrines of a plurality and a community of wives are heresies, and are opposed to the law of God.

We believe that the religion of Jesus Christ, as taught in the New Testament Scriptures, will, if its precepts are accepted and obeyed, make men and women better in the domestic circle, and better citizens of town, county, and state; and, consequently, better fitted for the change which cometh at death.

We believe that men should worship God in "Spirit and in truth"; and that such worship does not require a violation of the constitutional law of the land.

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