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The salvability of the pagans

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The Salvability of the Pagans.

On account of the fact that the great proportion of the human race have lived and died without a knowledge of the historic Christ, and that millions more are still living in total ignorance of the fact that He lived and died for them, many theories have been formulated concerning the possibility, and where this is admitted, the manner of the salvation of this great mass of humanity which we designate as Pagan or Heathen.

And to a man who is filled with a holy aspiration for the uplifting of humanity, who devotes his whole life to the winning of men for the kingdom of God, and especially to one

who has heard the cry from Macedonia and has felt that it came from those who need a savior's love, to such, this question is of most vital and practical importance. For, says the unthinking man, don't you believe that the heathen can be saved without a knowledge of Christ? And if you answer, yes; then he says, 'tis better that they never hear of him for they may reject him. If you say, no, to his question, then he will perhaps refer to the millions who have lived and died without a knowledge of the gospel, and show you that you are without right and without evidence, except your own formulated theory, passing condemnatory judgment upon those who

even as yourself were created
in the image of God and for
the purpose of his glory.

Hence it behooves every herald of
the gospel of Christ to examine
the ground whereon he stands,
to give a reason for the faith
that is within him and to
define the aim and scope of
his work.

Those whom God calls he en-
lightens, at least, he enlightens
them sufficiently for the work
they are called to do, and man
has no right to exclude
others from the dominion of
God's love and mercy, nor to
question the measure and ex-
tent of that love outside the
realm of his own experience,
and neither has he any right
to limit God's methods of

dealing with men to the small circled of personal experience. "For the love of God is broader than the measure of man's mind, and the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind."

The author of Genesis tells us that after God had completed the work of creation, he saw everything that he had made and behold it was very good, He was pleased with the life of man for it was in harmony with His laws: but our first parents sinned, and the whole history of the Bible as well as human experience teaches the universality of sin, that sin and sin only was the cause of God's displeasure and man's estrangement; But God, out of his love for humanity

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thus fallen and deposed, provided a remedy for their recovery.

And why some few sinners, who have come into this new relation with God, should be so narrow and selfish as to believe that God does not care for all his offspring as much as he cares for them is a mystery which is not easy to comprehend.

But that such a theory has held quite a large place in the Christian church is evident from a study of the Westminster's confession of faith, which teaches that the heathen are hopelessly lost because they have no knowledge of the historic Christ, although they have light enough to condemn them. The whole theory is founded and built up on

language which is capable of various interpretations, and the poor Heathen are not even given the advantage of this fact of doubtful interpretation, and neither can the theory be established by other facts, for neither nature, conscience, nor the Bible teaches that God is pleased with sin or delights in the sufferings of men, or that he has not a good and holy purpose for every created thing in the universe. Indeed we do not think of God as punishing the lower forms of creation and why should we think that he would delight to see the highest holiest and most loving of all created forms suffer eternal misery? Indeed we may well ask what the Heathen have done that such

an irrevocable sentence should be passed upon them. Are they condemned for idolatry? For this wrong view of theology? For their treatment of Christians? For their wickedness? How then shall the Christian church escape who "not only do the same, but also consent with them that practice them." Look at her history; the idolatrous practices of the Israelites; the awful persecutions practiced by the church; the decay which still sometimes shows itself; the immoral lives of the clergy as well as of the laity; the many, many practices indulged in by the church in all ages and which today are pronounced unchristian; and finally consider how far short of the ideal the church stands

today and then let him that
is perfect, him that is without
sin, cast the first stone.

But that we may not unduly
misrepresent the formentioned
theory we will examine more
carefully the Westminster Confes-
sion of faith. Sections three and
four of chapter three of said
Confession read as follows:-

By the decree of God, for the
manifestation of his glory, some
men and angels are predestinat-
ed unto everlasting life and
others forordained unto ever-
lasting death. These angels and
men thus predestinated and
forordained are particularly
and unchangeably designed; and
their number is so certain and
definite that it cannot be ei-
ther increased or diminished.

Men are thus divided into two diverse classes and section five tells us that God thus divides them without any foresight of faith or good works or perseverance in either of them or anything else in the creature as conditions or causes moving them therunto; and all this for the praise of his glorious justice.

Then section eleven confines the number saved to the class styled the elect and reads:-
"Therefore, they who are elected are redeemed by Christ; are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his spirit working in due season; are justified, sanctified, and kept by his power through faith unto salvation. Neither are any

other redeemed by Christ, effectively called, justified and adopted, sanctified and saved, but the elect only. The rest of mankind God was pleased to pass by and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice. Section 1 of Chapter I tells us that "all those whom God hath predestinated unto life and those only, he is pleased effectually to call to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ. and 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 quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit he is thereby enabled to answer this call." Sections 3 and 4 read: - Elect infants

dying in infancy and all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the word, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit. Others not elected although they may be called by the ministry of the word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet they never truly come to Christ and therefore cannot be saved, much less can men not professing the Christian religion be saved in any other way whatsoever, be they ever so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature and the law of that religion they do profess, and to assert and maintain that they may is very pernicious and to be detested.

Thus according to this chapter the class termed the elect is found only among the professors of the Christian religion. and Chapter ~~XXV~~ makes a similar limitation by declaring that the visible church consists of all those throughout the world who profess the true religion and out of this visible church there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.

Some may try to explain this by making the use of the term "ordinary" imply that some may belong to the invisible church (which consists of the whole number of the elect) who do not belong to the visible church; those professing the true religion.

But such an interpretation would contradict Chapter ~~I~~ which declares that men can be saved

in no other way whatsoever, but by coming to Christ, and they don't come to Christ because they are not effectually called, and they are not effectually called because "it pleased God to pass them by and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath to the praise of his glorious justice"

And so excepting some of the saints of the old dispensation to whom God gave direct revelations, we conclude that these divines limited salvation to those who live in the world since the time of Christ, and of these, only the very few who have the gospel preached to them and accept it, and of these professing Christians only those who are "effectually called" or the "elect." And even these are saved

not by anything done on their part
not by accepting the gospel, not
by faith or works or holy living
or anything else that they may do,
they are altogether passive as the
confession declares and so have
nothing whatever to do with their
salvation; but they are saved
simply because it pleased God
to save those certain persons
and to punish all others.

Judging from this confession
of faith, these divines must have
had very peculiar ideas of God's
character. They certainly could
not have regarded him as a God
of love; but rather, we should say
as an unfeeling, unmerciful,
inevitable, unjust, cruel, hard
hearted, arbitrary tyrant, who cre-
ates countless millions of human
beings for no other purpose.

than to have them everlastingly tormented in hell fire. It matters not how good a man may be, how pure and upright his life may be, how much he may have helped his fellow men or how true he was to God: if it happened that he was not born in a christian land or had not the good fortune to be one of the elect, he is condemned without a hearing, and must go without a murmur into his abode in the torments of hell, simply because "it pleased God".

Indeed if this theory be true we see little need of preaching the gospel, it is offered in vain to the great mass of humanity, and there is and never can be any hope or help for the poor miserable sinful souls who

are longing for better lives and are truly seeking the Lord "if haply they might feel after him and find him". For the confession declares explicitly that none but the elect can be saved and they are saved because it was God's eternal and immutable decree that they would be saved whether men did anything or not and all that all men together could do could not change in the least the destiny of one man.

But the theory of the Roman Catholics also, so far as we are able to judge, virtually debaro the Heathen from participating in the joys of heaven because they do not receive the sacraments. And even unbaptized infants are consigned to the region of limbo where they ^{enjoy} "but a negative

kind of happiness.

And so if the heathen depended upon either of these theories for their joy in the world to come, there could be little hope for them.

But thanks be to God for the word which tells us that God is no respecter of persons "But in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted of him. And that God sent his Son into the world that the world through him might be saved.

Another theory, known as the Andover theory is that men can be saved only through a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ. He will be the judge in the last day and will judge men by their relations to Him. and those who do not know of God's love in Christ while they are

in the body will have knowledge of Christ after death, but before the final judgment, and the final word will not be pronounced for any man until God has revealed himself in all his intended manifestations of righteousness and love. The case of Abraham and his descendants is exceptional for their knowledge of God was in many respects the knowledge given afterwards more fully by Christ. And as for David and Lazarus, they had Moses and the prophets and so were not heathen.

But it seems to us that these exceptions alone are enough to break down this theory: for if these persons could be saved without a knowledge of Christ why could not others?

And then it is not knowledge.

that saves men. If it were, there would be much difficulty in determining the amount & degree of knowledge necessary to salvation, for the most Christlike man on earth has but an imperfect knowledge of his redeemer and to know Him in his fulness will require eternity.

To us it seems reasonable to believe that the old covenant foreshadowed the new; that men under the old dispensation were saved not by slain beasts and birds; these sacrifices but indicated the state of the heart of the man; they suggested something of the seriousness and solemnity of the occasion of this return from sin to God. There were no saving virtues in the blood of these sacrifices. Men were saved through Christ then as

well as now, but the fulness of time had not yet come for his manifestation. And so it is, we think, in heathen lands today, as well as in all other lands, men are not saved by any works or any sacrifice they can make other than self. The ultimate object in all God's efforts to save men is to win them to the right and normal relations with himself, to bring them into loving submission to his will. And if men live in accordance with God's will in whatever form they receive it, God will forgive them for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ. "For not all the hearers of the law are just before God but the doers of the law shall be justified." a man is saved only by what he is.

Still another theory, and

one which is adequately presented by Fletcher of Madelay, is that the Heathen are saved in this world without Christ, if they live up to the light they have.

Fletcher speaks of three dispensations; that of the Father, that of the Son and that of the Holy Spirit. And all men are classified as under one or the other of these dispensations, and they are saved according as they are obedient to the revelation they receive from God. Under the dispensation of the Father the promise related to the external manifestation of the Son; and under the dispensation of the Son the promise related to the Holy Spirit, and under the dispensation of the Spirit the promise relates to the return of our Lord.

The Pagans are regarded as belonging to the dispensation of the Father, a dispensation in which men have no experimental knowledge of the Son or of the Holy Spirit.

They have some mode of worship, and we may say, the generality of persons who are in this dispensation are looking, expecting and in many cases longing for a fuller revelation of the Father's nature and will, and an experimental knowledge of the Son satisfies this want of their nature. Meanwhile they are groping about in the dim light which they have and doubtless many of them are more true and more acceptable to the Father of mercies than many of us who have the full light of the gospel of Christ. Not all men are permitted to

enjoy all the truths successively revealed to men. "But every man has received sufficient light to discover as well as sufficient power to perform what God has been pleased to require at his hands."

This theory certainly seems more tenable than either of the others for it is in harmony with the idea that God is love, and it does not fail to take into account the fact that this world is the testing place for human beings, that life here determines future destiny. When all men know Christ there will be a more general agreement as to the possibility of this being so: but for the present it seems wise for us to suppose that all men

can be saved in this life; and further that this life is the only probation: the test here is sufficient in every case to determine future destiny.

This seems in accordance with Paul's view, for he says, there is no respect of persons with God, and that God is not the God of the Jews only but also of the Gentiles. Peter also, declares that in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.

Many of the prophets of the old Testament, as Isaiah, Micah, Jephaniah, Jeremiah, and Zachariah, express the hope that the heathen nations in general will be converted and become worshippers of Jehovah.

Jesus Christ made no distinction

but showed by his life that he came to save sinners.

And the hope of a future salvation seems to be a part of every human being and the great bar against the realization of this hope is in the power of each to overcome.

Paul assumes that all men feel after God, that all men have a revelation of Him in some form. And man's attitude towards the revelation received, towards the truth he knows ^{decides} whether he would accept Christ if he were presented, and gives a test for the fixing of character.

Dr. Sheldon says that where the spirit of faith and purpose of righteousness exist that the man is saved through the atonement and accepted of God.

That all men can be saved in this life is assumed in all missionary work. Christ said, "Go and teach all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."

Paul's great missionary work is further testimony.

And but of all the transformed lives of once heathen people, the christianized communities and the civilized nations, show not only the possibility but the reality of the salvation of those who once sat in darkness.

And the belief that the present life furnishes an ethical test for every man under whatsoever peculiar circumstances he may find himself placed precludes the necessity of believing in a future probation.

Should one ask what the need is of sending the gospel to the Heathen when they can be saved without it, the answer would be that it is for the same purpose for which it is preached in Christian lands, to persuade men to forsake sin and yield themselves to God, which is but to obey the voice of conscience.

All men know the right, at least to some extent, but the difficulty is in doing the right. Few men do as well as they know how the good that they would they do not; but the evil which they would not that they do. And it is that men may overcome the evil and have power to do the good, that they may be helped toward the attainment of

their own ideals, and that they may be able to grow more and more into the likeness of Christ, that the gospel is given to them. For the gospel is something more than a theory, it is a living power. And if this life were not the only probation for men or if the destinies of men were forever settled regardless of the way they may live here, neither life nor death would have any serious significance or purpose.

But regarding the few years spent here as the determining period of existence, life takes on a most profound and serious aspect. It not only urges man to greater effort for his own sake but it leads him to help others by pointing

out the best way to the best
life. And best of all it prompts
him to go to those who are
most hopeless, who are looking
in the wrong direction for
the help they most need, that
he may point them to "the Lamb
of God, which taketh away the
sins of the world."