

## Conditional Immortality

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### Conditional Immortality

“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” –1 Thess. 5:21

We have here a grand text and a glorious theme, appealing to every unprejudiced mind. Moreover it is a subject that more and more is being impressed upon the minds of thinking people in all walks of life. Mr. G. W. E. Russell, describing his last conversation with Mr. Gladstone, says: “Never shall I forget the hour when I sat with Mr. Gladstone in the park at Hawarden, while a thunderstorm was gathering over our heads, and he, all unheeding, poured forth in those organ-tones of profound conviction, his belief that the human soul is not necessarily immortal, but that immortality is the gift of God in Christ to the believer. The impression of that discourse will not be effaced until the tablets of memory are finally blotted out” (Review of Reviews, June 1898).

“Conditional Immortality is the great theme of God’s Book.” To this we heartily agree. C. P. Kittredge, writing on the subject “How I became a Conditionalist,” makes the following statements as recorded in “Prophetic and Mission Record:” “Behind every gospel message ever preached there is a framework of doctrinal belief, which may have been gained by intuition, by study or by guesswork; and though the message may be colored so as to appear beautiful, the system is strong or weak in that proportion as it conforms to the framework of the true workmanship of God. Of whatever our theological framework consists, one thing is certain—the doctrine of immortality forms the base of our structure. Our *conception of immortality colors all our message*” (emphasis mine). The more carefully we study the theme, the more we see the truth of this statement.

In order to have a proper understanding of the important subject before us, let us first grasp the meaning of the terms employed. Immortality signified: “(1) The quality or state of being immortal; exemption from death or annihilation; unending existence. (2) Exemption from oblivion.” An immortal being therefore is one that is “Not mortal; not liable to death; endowed with a life that will never end; ever-living, undying, eternal” (Enc. Dict.). It is affirmed by many theologians that every person is just such a being. This, believers in Conditional Immortality deny. Conditional immortality is the doctrine that only those who meet certain requirements and conditions will be made immortal. Is this reasonable? Is it Scriptural?

We maintain that it is both. Conditionalism is the key to the Scriptures (not Mrs. Eddy’s nonsense), the solver of hard puzzles, the absolute silencer of the horrible doctrine of eternal torment on the one hand, and the delusive will-o-the-wisp, universalism, equally unscriptural on the other. It is the harmonizer of Holy Writ, justifying God in his dealings with men and satisfying man’s

### *Innate Sense of Right and Justice*

Inasmuch as the Bible is absolutely silent as to any natural or inherent immortality as regards man, but on the contrary expressly designates him as a mortal being, dying, perishing, it is evident that if any of mankind live forever it can only be because of the impartation of that right and power by some one who has the right and power to bestow it. This is exactly what the Bible declares. We read: “Then said Jesus unto them again, ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door of the sheep; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, [have life] and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill and to destroy; I am come that they might *have life* and that they might have it more abundantly... My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them *eternal life*; and they shall never perish [lose life] neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:7-10, 27, 28).

This passage absolutely teaches that immortality is conditional. No man can live forever unless he either is or is made immortal—undying. This no one will ever be who does not belong to the class here called the Lord's sheep. The leader of the "goats"—the devil—has no power of unending life himself. Therefore he cannot give any such right or power to those who follow him, hence the "goats" must *perish*, or lose life, or there is no force in the Saviour's statements in this passage. Please notice the little, yet mighty, "ifs" in this passage. They mean something. There are about seventy-five of these "ifs" scattered through the sacred volume and they all mean something. They teach that some things in this world, and the world to come are *conditional*. Here is a sample of some of these "ifs":

"And Moses went up to God [in the mount], and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying, 'Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagle's wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, *if ye will obey* my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people; for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel'" (Ex. 19:3-6). Here is a *conditional promise* fairly made.

How was it kept? See Isaiah 1:2—"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord hath spoken; 'I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.' Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they have gone away backward... *If* ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land; but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Here we find the *condition ignored*.

Next follows the result. "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, *if* thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. And they also, *if* they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again" (Rom. 11:22, 23). God dealt graciously with this people, but they rebelled, until he chose a new people composed of all believers—Jew and Gentile—and broke down the wall of partition, making the Gentiles fellow-heirs of eternal life. See 1 Peter 1:1-10.

Let us look at one more quotation from God's Word. Paul and Barnabas had been preaching the gospel to the Jews, and finally had almost all Antioch for an audience. We read of the results: "But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God [the gospel of life] should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves *unworthy of everlasting life*, lo, we turn to the Gentiles, for so hath the Lord commanded us" (Acts 13:45-47). This is the principle which God has declared. It governs all his dealings with man in regard to salvation.

### ***God Will Never Force Salvation Upon Any One***

There must be voluntary obedience to his wishes. We have already noticed that popular theology is fully committed to the theory of natural or inherent immortality. It is the basis of nearly all appeals made to the world by so-called orthodox preaches, and professional evangelists. But there are not a few strong testimonies from the other side.

Herman Olshausen, the noted German commentator, says: "The doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and the name, are alike unknown to the Bible."

J. H. Pettingill, an eminent Baptist minister, says: "The word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, is utterly silent on the natural immortality of man; and the silence of the Scriptures corresponds to the silence of nature on this point... Natural immortality is the foundation stone of the modern theological structure. Remove this, and the whole building will crumble to ruin; there is no place for endless misery or universal restorationism. Put Jesus Christ, the Life-Giver, in the foundation, and the 'whole building fitly

joined together growth into a holy temple,' symmetrical and beautiful. It solves those terrible problems that have tormented men day and night, from the days of Augustine till now."

Chambers' Encyclopedia says: "The Egyptian nation appears to have been the first to declare that the soul was immortal." Dr. Nathaniel West declares: "The immortality of the soul cannot be proved from the Bible." Jamieson, Faussett and Brown's Commentary says: "Nowhere is the immortality of the soul distinct from the body taught; a notion which many erroneously have derived from heathen philosophers." Bishop Hampton says: "The notion of the separate existence of the soul has so incorporated itself with Christian theology, that we are apt at this day to regard a belief in it as essential to orthodox doctrine. I cannot, however, help viewing this popular belief as a remnant of scholasticism." Canon Farrar declares: "This belief [Conditional Immortality] has been held by many eminent thinkers, and is now maintained by many thousands of Christians." In our day many who reject the Bible are ready to accept almost any statement made by scientific men; let us then

### ***Listen to Science a Moment***

Says Joseph Leidy, M.D. LL.D., Professor of Anatomy and Zoology, University of Penn.: "Personal consciousness is observed as a condition of each and every living animal, varying from microscopic forms to man. The condition is observed to cease with death; and I know of no facts of modern science which make it otherwise than difficult to believe in the persistence of that condition, that is, 'the immortality of the personal existence.' Science has learned no more than is expressed in Eccl. 3:19—'For that which befallerth the sons of men befallerth beasts; even one thing befallerth them; as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that man hath no pre-eminence above a beast.'"

For these valuable quotations the writers is indebted to that able work: "Positive Theology," by Miles Grant, a work that ought to be in the library of every thinking man and woman.

The Bible makes the fact of an endless life possible only on certain conditions. Universalism is as certainly denied by the Bible as is the doctrine of eternal torment. It is expressly denied by our Lord himself in his last great commission. Also in the parable of the wheat and tares. Likewise in the parable of the net and fishes. The statements of both the Old and New Testaments are opposed to it. Christ, in all his teaching makes the obtaining of eternal life dependent upon certain conditions. We cannot afford to be misled here. Let us therefore briefly notice what the conditions are. "The Lord preserveth all them that love him; but all the wicked will he destroy" (Ps. 145:20). "Incline you ear and come unto me; hear and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David" (Isa. 55:3). "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near; Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:6, 7).

"When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die. If thou dost speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou want the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. When I say to the righteous, that he shall surely live: if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousness shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it. Again, when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die: if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right; if the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins that he committed shall be mentioned unto him: he hath done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live" (Ezek. 33:8, 9, 13-16).

"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 3:16). "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). "I am the living bread which came down from heave: If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever" (John 6:51). Surely these and many other passages present *conditions* to be observed by those who wish to *live forever*.

It is absolutely certain that God will not so exercise his sovereign power as to force his salvation upon us, and thus rob us of our freedom of will and choice; and if he did, what value could such a salvation have for us, seeing it was forced upon us? Would we live forever? Then let us obey the conditions, repent, believe, be baptized, endure to the end and we shall be saved—have life, *endless life*. Just a few thoughts regarding those who do not believe.

### ***What Shall Be the End of Them That Believe Not?***

They shall “Be punished with everlasting destruction [the opposite of preservation] from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe... in that day” (2 Thess. 1:9, 10). In view of these facts, how forceful the words of the apostle in Romans, 2nd chapter:

“Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judges; for wherein thou judges another, thou condemns thyself; for thou that judges does the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinks thou this, O man, that judges them which do such things, and does the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despises thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leads thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasures up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds; To them who by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory and honor and *immortality, eternal life*: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace to every man that works good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile; for there is no respect of persons with God. For as many as have sinned without law [shall be saved because they did not have the law? No, but] shall also perish without the law; and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law... in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel” (Rom. 2:1-16).

Surely there is neither future probation, national Jewish restoration, eternal torment nor Universalism in these solemn words of truth. *Conditional immortality, or endless life* upon simple and plain conditions, is fully declared in these and numerous other passages of Holy Writ in the plainest possible manner. Dare we wrest the Scriptures to our own and others’ destruction? Will we be heedless of our danger and the conditions involved in our safety, and take our chances? Shall we not rather conform to these conditions, repent of our sins, believe on and obey the Lord Jesus Christ, and so be *saved*, not and hereafter?

“I’ve a message from the Lord, Hallelujah!  
The message unto you I give;  
'Tis recorded in His Word, Hallelujah!  
It is only that you look and live.  
Look and live, my brother, live!  
Look to Jesus now and live,  
'Tis recorded in His Word, Hallelujah!  
It is only that you look and live.”

“Life is offered unto thee, Hallelujah!  
Eternal life you then shall have,  
If you’ll only look to Him, Hallelujah!  
Look to Jesus who alone can save. Look and live, my brother, live!  
Look to Jesus now and live,  
'Tis recorded in His Word, Hallelujah! It is only that you look and live.” -*Monticello, Wis.*