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## IS FAITH IN CHRIST ESSENTIAL? – FAITH OR WORKS?

### THE OPINIONS OF EMINENT PRESBYTERIAN AND METHODIST THEOLOGIANS AS TO THE FATE OF THE HEBREW PHILANTHROPIST, SIR MOSES MONTEFIORE, DECEASED.

The death of the eminent Jewish philanthropist has raised a question among some of the religious journals concerning his future. All agree that he was a godly man as well as benevolent. Nor were his kind deeds done solely to his own people. His heart was large enough to sympathize with all classes of his fellow-men in need. And many Christians shared in his bounty. Moreover, he died like a man at peace with God. The *Christian Register* (Unitarian) refers to this case in this way: "Judging the tree by its fruits, how few professed Christians might dare to compare their life with his! Yet, according to the doctrine which still holds the mind of Christendom in bondage and darkness, this great, pure, faithful soul was fatally self-deceived, and has passed to endless sorrow. When will so-called believers dare to interpret all narrower Scriptures in the light of Peter's great discovery – that 'he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him'?" [R800 : page 5]

In the *Independent*, of September 17th, A.A. Hodge, D.D., for the Presbyterian Church, and Daniel Curry, D.D., for the Methodists, endeavor to free their respective systems from the narrow view which would exclude such a man from salvation. Dr. Hodge concedes that while participation in the benefits of Christ's redemption is "generally conditioned upon personal recognition and confession" of Christ, and while this is essential whenever intellectually possible, it "is not absolutely essential, as is proved in the case of infants and of idiots. On like grounds of principle, it might hold true in the case of some exceptionally enlightened heathen. The charitable formula of 'invincible ignorance,' used and greatly abused by Romanists, rests ultimately upon a true principle, and has always been practically, more or less, recognized by orthodox Christians." He then goes on to argue

for a favorable judgment in Sir Moses Montefiore's case because, either through intellectual bias, or through national Jewish prejudice, the true Christ was never apprehended by him, only a distorted image, and therefore never consciously rejected. "Or, very probably, loving and embracing the real Jesus in his heart, his intellectual bias and national and social position may have so modified his expression of Christian faith, as to render it unrecognizable to us."

Dr. Hodge's principles here are wide enough to embrace many other cases than that of this pious Jew. His article is a gratifying instance of a growth of a "wider hope" even among theological circles where it has been put under the severest ban. Certainly there is growth here away from the severe statements of the Westminster Confession, upon which the *Christian Register* seems to have based its cavil. For instance, it affirms (p. 212), "They who have never heard the gospel, know not Jesus Christ, and believe not in him, cannot be saved, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of Nature, or the laws of that religion which they profess; neither is there salvation in any other but in Christ alone, who is the Saviour only of his body, the Church."

It is difficult to make the above concession of Dr. Hodge, in respect to "some exceptionally enlightened heathen," accord with the statement just quoted. This proves that even he is progressing at some points beyond the "Standards." It is certain that, with the large Christian heart we know him to possess, he must seek relief somewhere.

In our view, however, this relief is found in a more consistent way than by a strained interpretation of the standards. It is better to confess that there are some lines of Scripture truth bearing upon this point which they do not include. It would be more consistent for Dr. Hodge to hold that, while the salvation of the elect proceeds within the narrow limits which the Calvinistic system has traced out from Scripture, provision is made for other and wider operations of grace, of which they are the chosen instruments, outside these limits and beyond this

present age. The purpose of the choice of the Church of the first-born is that they may be kings and priests unto God in carrying out his gracious purposes towards the later born. The enigma of the future of pious Jews and heathens would not be so hard to solve on this principle. Better than the opening wide the door into the church, by such accommodating expositions of the terms of admission, is that view which regards it as a body of called and chosen and faithful ones, who enter only by the door and walk in the strait and narrow way of the cross, thus offering themselves in sacrifice, not merely to secure their own salvation, but as a means of blessing for others, – baptized even for the dead. Whatever hope we may have for others, outside the Church, must be sought in the wide promises of God that in this chosen seed all the families of the earth are to be blessed.

There is still another principle bearing upon this subject which has been too much overlooked, and which needs now to be brought out of Scripture with fresh force and urged upon the attention of the Church and of all men. And that is that the one ultimate standard of admission to blessedness in the future, is *character*. The saints of this dispensation will not reach their high station except as they become holy and without blemish before him in love. And our God, who is a consuming fire, must burn against all our evils and faults of character, that we may be found "of him in peace, without spot and blameless." And so also all the Scriptures which refer to the judgments and administrations of the future are most emphatic upon this point of righteous character. On whatever level men may hereafter be brought into the Kingdom of Heaven, whether as princes or subjects, this is the standard. The Old Testament upon every page asserts that only such shall ascend into the hill of the Lord. (Psalms 15,24.) The Lord's judgment of the nations (Matt. 25.) is all upon this principle. The *righteous* go into life eternal. The dead, at the resurrection, are infallibly sorted in the same way. "They that have done good unto the resurrection of life; they that have done evil unto the resurrection of judgment." Now, while it is true that no man can *merit* salvation by good works, and much less a place in the Church of the first-born, it is also true that no man of unrighteous

character can enter into the kingdom of God. And it must, therefore, be true that men of righteous and merciful life, whether Jew or Pagan, must go into the life to come with a character much more nearly approximating to its perfect standard than that of unrighteous men. Cornelius, who feared God and worked righteousness, was accepted before him. He was not fit for the church until Christ had been revealed to and in him. He was not even "saved" (Acts 4:12) until Peter came to tell him the way. But he was in that receptive condition which made Christ welcome to him, when made known, as the flowers welcome the sunshine. And so Sir Moses Montefiore, if ignorant of the true Christ, must come to the same recognition of him in order to be saved. But we are not tied down to any such arbitrary and narrow views of God's dealings as to suppose that such a receptive soul, if blind to the light in this world, could never receive it in the next, or that his future administrations proceed [R801 : page 5] upon such narrow lines as to make no room for such cases, and no account of good character developed under such circumstances. Let the case of Cornelius and the parable of the good Samaritan teach us that the eyes of the Lord are open upon all the ways of the sons of men, beholding the evil and the good, and that, if not in this world, then in the world to come, every one shall receive according to his ways and according to the fruit of his doings. The promised resurrection of the dead, which is the era of judgment, will furnish the amplest scope for all such righteous adjustments as seem to us to be now lacking.

In Dr. Hodge's article, above referred to, there is a distinct assent given to the view that men may be saved who may have accepted that form of truth and goodness of which Christ is the expression, who yet have never heard of the historic Christ. We have already said that he here steps outside of the Westminster standard which distinctly states that men who have never heard the gospel do not know Jesus Christ, and therefore cannot be saved. Upon this point, we must side with the *Andover Review* in affirming that this immediate opening of the door of heaven to devout men of every nation who strive to live up to the light they possess, is more dangerous than the theory which

supposes that by the grace of God such men may be brought to a true knowledge of Christ after death. When Dr. Hodge apologizes for a conscientious Jew that "what he, through national prejudice, may have failed to appreciate was not the real Christ, but a distorted reflection cast by the so-called Christian world of the day," he admits a principle upon which conclusions may be based, which we are sure, he would not accept. There are many others failing to acknowledge Christ who may hope to be excused at last on similar grounds. A distorted image of Christ lies indeed in the minds of all men to whom the Holy Spirit has not revealed him.

Our general objection to all these views which makes the entrance into heaven more wide and easy than the straight and narrow way of the gospel is that, in order to make room for such high-minded souls to escape from everlasting torment, they lower the claims of God's holiness. This is far worse than the view that, after judgment, resurrection will open out to such another door of hope. For this view may be held without any abatement of the testimony of Scripture that without holiness no man shall see the Lord, that our God is a consuming fire, and that there is no other name given under heaven or among men whereby we must be saved.

– *Words of Reconciliation.*

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