

PROBATION

By A.P. Adams

This subject is creating a great sensation in the religious world just now. (**See End Note A**). Independent of all creeds and traditions, let us consider what the Bible teaches concerning it. What is Probation? The word probation does not occur in the Bible, nor does the idea that is commonly attached to it. The prevalent theological idea of probation is as follows: It is assumed, to begin with, that **all mankind are under sentence of eternal death**, which according to the orthodox view, means endless life in misery; all are hell deserving and in danger of being lost forever; during this life, judgment is suspended and an opportunity is offered to escape the execution of this impending sentence, by repentance and faith in Christ.

This is man's **probation, a brief chance to escape hell and secure heaven. If he fails to improve this opportunity, and dies impenitent, the sentence is irrevocably executed and the man is eternally lost.** No such teaching as this, either in outline or in detail, can be found in the bible; it is entirely human tradition. In the first place no such thing as "*eternal death*" is ever spoken of in the bible; the phrase, nor the idea, nowhere occurs in the sacred writings. Secondly, the truth is not that man is under the **sentence** of death, and in danger of being lost, but he is **already dead and lost**, and Christ comes to seek and save the lost, and to give life to the (dead) world. (John 6:33). "*If one died for all then were all dead.*" 2nd Cor. 5:14. Mark it well, **dead**, not in **danger** of death, or liable to it, but dead already. See John 6:53; Romans 8:6-7; 1st. John 5:11-12. Thirdly, no such ghastly view of life as this is any where presented in scripture. According to this view, this life, if we make the best use of it possible, is simply a race from hell to heaven; as the hymn put it:

Nothing is worth a thought beneath,

But how I may escape the death

That never, never dies!

My sole concern, my single care,

To watch, and tremble, and prepare

Against that fatal day.

What an **utterly hideous** conception of life! A constant struggle to keep out of perdition, this, the **sole concern**, the single care, and yet very many Christians have no higher conception of the purpose of our present existence, than the above. Their highest idea of salvation is salvation from the consequences of sin, and endless hell. This unworthy view is inculcated and fostered by the practice of the churches in working upon the fears of the impenitent to induce them to make a profession of religion. The great plea always is, shun perdition! prepare to die! Neither of these motives is ever urged in the bible to induce to holy living, and yet these are the main, and oftentimes the sole exhortations to the uncovered.

Now the scriptural view of probation, if I err not, is as follows. Man's probation is the period of his **discipline; training, instruction, development, and perfecting**, perfected through suffering, as was the Lord Jesus Christ (Compare Heb. 2:10 with 1st. Peter 5:10). I have already noticed in previous articles in this paper the **purpose** of God, as set forth in scripture, in the creation of man, that **he is creating a race of beings in his own image and likeness; a work that was begun in Eden, has been finished only in the case of one individual thus far, the Lord Jesus Christ**, and will be completed in the remainder of the race of men in God's **"due time"** (1st. Tim. 2:3-6).

Now with this idea of probation, that it is a period of training and education, we proceed to inquire what proportion of the human race have had such a probation thus far in its history? We are obliged to answer that so far as we know a very small minority. The great mass of mankind have been born, lived, and died in the most absolute and total ignorance of God, and his truth; and such moreover is the condition of the race today. The words of the prophet and of the apostle apply now to the condition of mankind as a whole, as they have always been applicable thus far in the past. **"Darkness covers**

the earth, and gross darkness the people" (Is. 60:2). **"The whole world lieth in wickedness"** (I Jn. 5:19). Now according to the common view that death ends probation, consigning the individual to endless happiness or hopeless despair, all these millions of human beings are now in heaven or hell. Surely they did not die fit for the former place; have they all gone to perdition then? This is the necessary conclusion according to the common view. But how can we accept it? A few hundred thousands perhaps, gone to heaven, while **thousands of millions, and even billions have gone to hell**, there to remain eternally. Just think of it for a moment. How appalling and horrifying is the thought! And yet there is no logical or scriptural escape from it according to the orthodox view. It is a sad and significant fact that most church members are entirely indifferent to these great subjects. **"I don't know what God will do with the great masses of mankind,"** say they (and many, if they told the whole truth would add, I don't care). **"He will do right, I leave it all to him."** And thus with an assumption of pious submission which for the most part is heartless selfishness, they summarily dismiss the whole subject.

But **there are some who feel the burden of this awful doctrine, their souls revolt at the conclusions to which it leads.** Such ones have resorted to various makeshifts to escape these conclusions. I will notice one of these. It is said that although it is true that the great mass of the race have thus far died in sin, yet it does not follow that they have been lost; for if those who are unavoidably ignorant live up to the light they have, they will be saved; and thus many Christians think the majority of the heathen will be saved. To support this view, Romans 2:11-15, is referred to. Now read this passage over and see if there is any such doctrine taught as that heathen who live up to the light they have will be saved. In the first place there is not one word said about **salvation** anyway in the whole passage. Secondly, verse 12 says **"they that have sinned without law shall perish without law."** Thirdly the central idea of verses 13-15, etc., is that some heathen are far more moral and therefore commendable than some who have the light of gospel truth and profess to walk in it; and this thought the apostle goes on to fully amplify and illustrate in the remaining part of the chapter. But there is not the most distant hint that anyone will be saved by living up to the light they have.

Furthermore think of some of the strange conclusions that would follow from this view. If the majority of the heathen world are to be saved by living up to the light they have, it follows that **more** will be saved without the gospel than with it. We know as a matter of fact that in so called Christian lands where the people are gospel enlightened, the majority reject the gospel and must, according to the orthodox view be inevitably lost; whereas in heathen lands it is said the majority will live up to the light they have and be saved. Hence the majority of heathen will be saved, the majority of the gospel enlightened will be damned.

According to this view if you are born in a heathen land the chances are that you will be saved. If you are born in a Christian land, the chances are overwhelmingly against your salvation. Still further according to this view, all missionary work is a stupendous mistake, and on the whole a curse to the heathen world. Leave the heathen alone in their darkness and ignorance and the majority will be saved by living up to the light they have. Send them the gospel and we know from past experience that the majority of them will reject it and be lost forever. These conclusions are inevitable. You cannot escape them while you entertain the idea of the majority of the heathen being saved by living up to the light they have.

But again, suppose this theory were true; even admitting that those who live up to the light they have among the heathen will be saved, very small comfort could be derived therefrom, for it is a notorious and universal fact that no class of human beings have ever lived up to the light they had. Is it not true of all mankind, Jewish, Heathen or Christian, that our practice is far below our knowledge and advantages? Does not all history, ancient and modern, teach us the nations have not increased in virtue and morality as they have advanced in civilization and learning, but on the contrary they have become more and more wicked and depraved, until time and again the most highly cultivated and enlightened nations have perished in their own corruption. Read the first chapter of Romans and see how forcibly Paul confirms this view by clearly setting forth the awful failure of the heathen world, "***the Gentiles,***" to live up to the light they had; and in our own day, in this respect, history is repeating itself. Thus this way of salvation, "***repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ***" (Acts

20: 21). This is the one way for all man kind, "***Jew or Gentile, Barbarian, Sythian, bond or free,***" and so that Apostle teaches, "***The scripture foreseeing that God would justify the heathen by faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed***" (Galatians 3:8).

But now comes a great difficulty. How are the heathen to be justified by faith, since "***faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God?***" (Rom. 10:17). The masses of them never have had any opportunity to hear; they know not God, nor Christ; hence they could not "***believe in him of whom they have not heard***" (Rom. 10:14) they have no faith, without which it is impossible to please God. (Hebrews 11:6). They have lived and died in this condition; the masses of mankind are still in the same state, "***without God and without hope in the world***" (Eph. 2:12). Is this promise of justification of the heathen by faith only for a very few, the rest being hopelessly lost? Does this wretched, short, beast like existence of the masses of the race in the past (and the same condition of things still prevails), determine for each one his eternity? How utterly unreasonable such an idea appears! And yet this is the prevailing belief among Christians.

The common idea is that death seals our eternal destiny; as we are at death so will we be forever and there is no possibility of a change of moral condition after death, but simply an intensifying of the same condition. The saved in heaven eternally growing better, the damned in hell forever growing worse. But what is there in common sense or in scripture to substantiate this view? On what ground of reason can we claim that death is the mordent that eternally fixes the moral color of human character? Is it not more reason able to conclude that, since in this life there is on the whole, so little of development and instruction, the great mass of mankind dying as they live, like "***natural brute beasts.***" 2nd. Peter 2:12; Psalm 49:20, there must be a chance for change and advancement in the future world? That since man has so poor an opportunity here, and the majority no opportunity at all, they must have **some opportunity there?** That since the advantages are meager **now**, and so unequally distributed, and since God is a God of justice and no respecter of persons, there must be a more impartial distribution then? These conclusions I think are reasonable; far more so than to claim that all

whatever be their condition here, will determine their future eternity by this present life.

But reason cannot decide this question for the one who is a Christian. The final appeal must be to the bible. However reasonable the foregoing view may be, we could at best only hold it as a possible explanation of the difficulties of the orthodox position, if it were not plainly in harmony with the Word. But it is in harmony with the Word. The **entire** teaching of the bible, both in its general scope and in its special precepts and declarations, is in **full harmony** with the doctrine of post-humus probation; not a second probation, as some say, but the **only** probation that the great majority of mankind ever have. To the scriptures then we turn for the main argument that establishes this glorious truth of a "*restitution of all things*" Acts 3:21, in the "*ages to come*" Ephesians 2:7.

I would call attention first to the fact that there is absolutely no scripture **against** this view. Let the reader stop and think if he can, of any passage of scripture that teaches that death fixes our eternal destiny. Where is it taught in the bible? Some passages may occur to you that **seem** to teach it; but if you examine carefully and adhere closely to the one point under consideration, you will see that they can teach nothing of the kind. The question is, does physical death end probation? Does it render our moral character changeless? Does it irrevocably fix our eternal destiny? Not one passage can be found answering these questions in the affirmative. If any reader of this paper thinks there are any such, I shall be very glad to have him point them out to me.

Now on the other hand there are many passages that teach, both by positive inference and by direct statement, **that death does not end probation**. I have not space to notice all of these passages but will only cite a few of the plainest of them. We will notice in the first place some of these scriptures that teach a probation after death by positive inference.

Take God's promise and oath to Abraham. "*In thee and thy seed, shall all the families of the earth be blessed.*" This is repeated again and again throughout the bible. See Gen. 12:3; 22:18; 28-14; Gal. 3:8. This promise is confirmed by an oath, "*that by two immutable things* (the promise and the

oath), *in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us*" Heb. 6:18. This promised "*Seed*" in whom "*all the families of the earth*" are to be blessed is (not Isaac, but) Christ. Gal. 3:16. Now how are "*all the families of the earth*" to be blessed in Him? Let Peter answer; see Acts 3:25-26. "*Ye are the children of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed, Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning every one of You from his iniquities.*" Here then is a positive answer to the question, how are "*all the families of the earth*" to be blessed in Christ, the promised Seed? **By being turned, every one of them, from their iniquities.** Now we ask further, has this promise ever been fulfilled in the past? Why, certainly not. Not one in a thousand of the earth's population thus far have even so much as heard of Christ, much less been blessed **in Him** by being turned from their iniquities. **Will** the promise be fulfilled? It would be blasphemous to ever doubt it; for the one thus doubting would thereby "*make God a liar, because he believed not the record that God gave of his Son*" (1st. John 5:10).

But now let any one tell how this promise can be fulfilled **without a probation after death.** The positive, inevitable, unavoidable inference from the foregoing considerations is that there must be a probation after death, or this great promise of all promises cannot be fulfilled. Do you say that the promise will be fulfilled in some future period to "*all the families of the earth*" then living, but that those who have died in the past without such blessing, are not included among those referred to in the promise? That their destiny is sealed for weal or woe without sharing in this universal blessing.

I reply that this promise of God is a **divine affidavit**, doubly immutable, sworn to and signed by the **Lord God Almighty**, who has further declared, "*My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure*" (Is. 46:10). If this promise is uncertain, indefinite, and equivocal, not meaning what it appears to mean but something far inferior to it, then my faith in all God's promises is shaken; I cannot tell what they mean; I do not know how much they are to be discounted, and such "*paper*" would be of but little value. In a human court, if the sworn statement of a person were found to be

no nearer true than the above view would make God's oath, he would be indictable for perjury. I would say again as I have said in a former issue of this paper, that **God's promises are not at a discount, but at a premium.** Any explanation of a scripture that belittles it, that seems to fall short of the language used, so as to make it mean less than is said, may safely be considered incorrect, and rejected at once, for the reality of **God's truth is not below, but far above the power of human expression.**

The conclusion then to which we are inevitably led from all the foregoing, is that this promise and oath of God must be fulfilled after death, to those who die without sharing its benefits in this life. This view is confirmed by other scripture which I will notice very briefly. Passing over many more passages that might be cited from the old testament, I will call your attention to a few from the new.

The angel's song, *"I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people"* Luke 2:10. This plainly implies a probation **after** death, for how else could this good tidings to be to **all** people, since the great mass have died and are still dying without any knowledge of this blessed news, this glorious gospel of the blessed God? 1st. Tim. 1:11. This same may be said of John 1:9; Jesus *"was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."* Very few comparatively have thus far been enlightened by this *"true light."* If every man is to be enlightened it must be in some future age, beyond the grave. Furthermore those passages that speak of Christ as the **Savior of the World** imply the same doctrine. See John 1:29; 3:17, 6:33; 1st. John 2:2; 4:14.

Take these passages in connection with 1st. Timothy 2:3 6. *"God our Savior will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth for there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all to be testified in due time."* Jesus is the Savior of the world; all are to be saved and come to a *"knowledge of the truth."* The great mass have died without such knowledge, but they are all to have it. When? In God's due time. *"He gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified (to all) in due time."* (I Tim. 2:6). Will the great mass of mankind die and be lost, **never** having come to

a **"knowledge of the truth?"** Never having heard about this universal ransom? It must be so, or they must come to this knowledge and hear of this ransom **after death**. Though there are many other passages to this same effect, I must pass them by and close the present article by noticing just **one more passage which directly teaches a probation after death**.

In Ezek. 16:44-53 we have first, a comparison made between the wicked cities of Jerusalem, Samaria and Sodom. The Lord declares that the first was far more wicked than either of the other two. He goes on to tell why He destroyed Sodom, verses 49-50, and then declares in plain and unmistakable language that He purposes at some future time to **restore Sodom** to her former estate, and when He does this, He will restore Jerusalem and Samaria to their former estate. Now it is plain that by Sodom is meant **the people**, the Sodomites, verses 49-50, and it is certain that **if the Sodomites are ever to be restored to their former estate, it must be from the dead, for they were all destroyed without a single exception**; See Luke 17:29. And it is further clear that they are thus to be restored that they may be benefited and blessed. See verses 60-63. I have not time to dwell upon this remarkable passage, nor is there any need of further explanations. It must be plain to all that a probation after death is positively and directly taught here; no other interpretation can be put upon the passage, except it be forced upon it.

And the truth is still further confirmed by the fact that we are taught that our nations are to be restored in the latter days, that is, Moab, Ammon and Elam. See Jeremiah 48:47 and 49:6 and 39. And finally David makes this restoration of the nations universal when he says, **"all nations whom thou hast made, shall come and worship before thee, O Lord, and shall glorify thy name; for thou are great and doest wondrous things: thou art God alone"** (Psalm 86:9-10. See also 22:27-28; 66:4; 72:11, 17; 19; 113:3 and 138:4). Look these scriptures up and see if they do not fully harmonize with the broad and glorious view presented in this article.

Thus does it appear that, though thus far in this world's history evil has seemed to triumph over the vast majority of God's **"offspring"** (Acts 17:29), and they have gone down to the grave in darkness, ignorance and sin, yet it by no means follows that this sad triumph is eternal. For we see a big

hope for the race in the ages to come, when God will show the exceeding riches of his grace, Eph. 2:7. Well may we exclaim in view of such a glorious purpose of the ages as in Eph. 3:11, "***Glorious and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are thy ways, thou King of the ages. Who shall not fear, O Lord, and glorify thy name? For thou only art holy; for all the nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy righteous acts have been made manifest.***" (Revelation 15:3-4 from the new version).

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