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**SAFETY FIRST**  
**Twelve Theological Discussions**  
**By Benjamin Franklin Neely**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Here is another book from the pen of one of our veteran evangelists, Dr. B. F. Neely. The title of this book is the key to its message. Dr. Neely presents twelve elemental, theological

propositions that are at the heart of our Christian faith. He reviews the implications of conflicting and contrary views to each of his propositions and points out that if the Christian view should finally be proved to be a mistake the Christian is only "harmlessly wrong" since he gets as much out of life as the unbeliever. Then, with relentless logic he confronts the reader -- What if these Christian views are right and the contrary views a mistake, what of the outcome? He argues that those who are of the contrary part are not only mistaken but are actually doomed to disappointment and despair. He shows that in most instances the final outcome between the views of the Christian and those of the unbeliever involves destiny, and makes the distance between them a moral one -- heaven and hell.

The author's appeal throughout is -- Here is the intelligent way; follow the Christian view. It is the safe way; you have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Throughout the book I get the feeling that this writer is a man who has spent his lifetime confronting men and women with eternal verities and that he has the unshaken faith that he has found the way of truth and life. I commend it to all who would face up to the implications of what we believe.

-- Samuel Young

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## 01 -- THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

The adoption of "safety first" as a governing factor in all human choices and responsibilities is complimentary to the judgment of any rational being. There is no field where "safety first" can render a greater service than in the field of religion. For the interests of religion begin in this life and extend through all eternity. Therefore the following discussions are not the idle cogitations of a frivolous mind.

In the following discussion we offer no proof to substantiate our positions nor to refute a conflicting theory. We merely state our position as clearly and simply as possible and then state the dissenting position in the same way. We try to discover by comparison which point of view common intelligence must adopt if guided by "safety first." Of course to do this we must point out the danger and absence of danger in both views.

The tenets of the Christian religion begin with God. We believe: That God "is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." In the absence of such a living faith there can be no approach to God nor communion with God.

The tenets of atheism begin with the denial of the existence of God. The atheist says, "There is no God," and as a necessary corollary, there is no existence after death -- no immortality of the soul.

Let us remember that we are to make no effort to prove or disprove either position, but simply try to discover, by contrasting the two positions, which is the stronger limb on the tree of "safety first" on which we are to risk the destiny of our souls now and forever.

If the atheist is correct in his position that there is no God, then the Christian is certainly wrong in his belief that God is. But he is harmlessly wrong, because he gets as much out of the atheist's position as the atheist does. They are both in the same boat, sailing across the sea of human existence, with no God for either one, headed for oblivion.

On the other hand, if the Christian is correct in his belief that God is, then the atheist is wrong in his contrary belief. But he is not harmlessly wrong. He has repudiated the living God, and how much does he get out of the Christian's position? Exactly nothing! Here they are not in the same boat. The Christian has embarked on the old Ship of Zion with her sails unfurled to the heavenly breezes, which are driving her to the port of a "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." The atheist is sailing the same sea, but on a leaky vessel, without a chart or compass, headed for disaster and despair.

So if the atheist is correct in his belief that there is no God, the final outcome for the atheist and the Christian is exactly the same. However, if the Christian is correct in his belief that God is, the difference in the final outcome for both can be measured only by the distance from heaven to hell.

Now read the decree of honest intelligence: Do you see that limb high upon the tree of "safety first" marked, "God is"? Then climb to it and rest on it. For according to the foregoing comparison it is evidently the strongest limb on the tree. Besides that, if it should break because of a flaw in its structure, which you have not discovered, you will catch on that limb below it, marked, "There is no God." But if you rest on the limb which repudiates God and it breaks because of a flaw in its structure, you will fall to your eternal ruin. For there is nothing under it but an awful chasm filled with doubting demons. The best that can come to one who repudiates God is exactly the same as the worst that can come as the result of believing in God.

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## 02 -- A PERSONAL DEVIL

We believe there is a personal devil, and that he is a spirit being, but with a very distorted personality. We believe that God only is greater in wisdom and power than he. We believe that the devil is the source, either directly or indirectly, of all that is bad. We believe the devil, as a spirit being, has power to communicate with other spirit beings.

We also believe that the devil, so far as his activities on this earth are concerned, busies himself continually with the affairs of the human family. His chief objective is to associate man with himself and thereby separate man from God. We believe that the devil, being inferior to God in both wisdom and power, cannot pluck man from the hands of his Creator. To get man under his infernal control he must get the co-operation of the individual, either in the matter of doubting God or in disobedience to Him. For the sin of either doubt or rebellion will separate

one from his Maker. When this is done, the devil has an open road of approach to man in the absence of his Defender. And this constitutes the high-water mark of his diabolical effort on the danger-fraught pathway of humanity.

But there are those who do not believe there is a personal devil. They believe the devil exists only in an imaginary sense. They insist that sin is only a mental error and that the devil is only a hallucination of morbid minds.

If they are right in their disbelief in the existence of a personal devil, we are certainly wrong in our belief to the contrary. But we are harmlessly wrong, because believing there is a devil when there is none could not possibly make one. Therefore we are not exposing ourselves to any possible danger. Also our superstition in this respect will only prompt us to watchfulness in regard to our suspected enemy. Hence if we are altogether wrong at this point, and those who do not believe there is a devil are correct, we are as well off as they. For if there is no devil to deceive and lead them astray, neither are we in danger.

However, if we are right in our belief in the existence of the devil and in his diabolical presence in the spiritual atmosphere, they are wrong -- but not harmlessly so, for they ignore the very existence of a dangerous and most wicked foe. They think, plan, and conduct all the activities of their lives without being mindful of the possibility of an invasion of the Sacred precincts of their habitations. They are oblivious to the possibility of their characters being attacked by his diabolical ingenuity. This gives him full use of all the resources at his infernal command. It gives him the utmost opportunity to train hell's entire artillery on an altogether unsuspecting and unprotected victim.

Therefore we have climbed a limb higher on the tree of "safety first" than they have who do not believe in the existence of a personal devil. Hence if it breaks for lack of supporting truth, we will come to rest on the limb with them. But on the other hand, if the limb on which they are resting breaks for lack of support by the truth, there is nothing on which to catch hold and the devil will be waiting for them at the foot of the tree.

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### 03 -- THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE BIBLE

We believe in the authenticity of the Bible, that it is the Word of God, that it was written by inspiration, that the Holy Spirit illuminated the minds and thus guided the hands of those who gave our sacred Book to the world. We believe that God's will concerning man is thereby revealed to us, and that it is the primary source of information concerning the life to come. We believe one can live happier in this life in harmony with its teachings, and when he comes to death he will have greater peace of mind. We believe that after death those who have lived according to the Bible will have joys that cannot be comprehended in this world.

But there are those who repudiate the claims of the Bible and reject its teachings. Some classify it as Hebrew mythology and place it on a level with the mythology of the Greeks and the

sacred literature of the Arabs and Oriental peoples. Others mutilate it, accepting parts of it as the word of God while rejecting other parts.

Now the structural elements of the Bible are so interwoven in its composition that the destruction of any of its parts would make void the whole. Therefore the Bible as a composite whole is either true or it is not true. If it is true, it is the Word of God, and furnishes the finger posts from this sinning world to heaven. If the Bible is the Word of God, then those who reject it or mutilate it will certainly be the objects of its anathemas and will be forever lost, because believing the Bible and accepting its Christ are stipulated prerequisites of salvation.

If the Bible is finally proved to be other than the Word of God, and its claims of divine inspiration turn out to be utterly false, and those who believe in its plenary inspiration are mistaken, just what will they have lost? It is a generally admitted fact that its system of moral philosophy has no equal in any literature known among men. Therefore it must go without proof that those who govern their lives by the teachings of the Bible are living on the highest plane of human conduct. Hence nothing can be lost by believing the Bible to be the inspired Word of God even if it is not.

On the other hand, if the claims for the inspiration of the sacred Book are true, then those who have rejected it or mutilated it have lost all.

Whosoever climbs to the Bible-inspiration limb on the tree of "safety first" will have reached the highest limb on the tree. If it breaks and he falls, he will catch on the other limb. But if he should risk his all on the non-Bible-inspiration limb and it should break, he is ruined world without end.

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#### 04 -- THE DEITY OF JESUS CHRIST

Originally man was the highest order of God's creatures, for he was made in the image and after the likeness of his Creator. When this masterpiece of His creative effort was brought into existence, God crowned him as the monarch of the world and told him to subdue it and have dominion. The Most High wreathed man's noble brow with the diadem of an independent sovereignty in respect to the power of choice between good and evil. But in the exercise of this power of free choice man yielded to the temptation to doubt God's word and to impugn His motives. This led man into the sin of disobedience. Therefore by this voluntary act he abdicated his throne, lost his crown, and was led captive by the devil, becoming the victim of a degraded servitude. Shorn of his power, man could not free himself from the bondage of his captivity nor relieve himself from the penalty of a violated law, nor could any of God's other creatures effect his redemption. No teacher can take his pupil beyond what he himself knows, and no giant can lift his load higher than he himself can reach. Therefore to lift man from degradation and to bring him back to the level of his created status is more than all angels can do.

Nobody could go deep enough into vicarious suffering to pay the penalty for man's sin without becoming blood kin to fallen man. And that one must make descent with mortal

manhood into the realm of death to meet the demands of divine justice for the violation of a fundamental law. Also nobody could lift man high enough to bring him back to his lost estate but God. Therefore divinity uniting with humanity, and thus becoming Emmanuel ("God with us"), dying for our offenses, and being raised for our justification, furnishes to this sinning world the only solution to the problem of the ages. Therefore we believe in the divine sonship of the Prince of Life. We believe that in the council chambers of eternity the unfathomed mystery was developed by which the Second Person in the Holy Trinity became the incarnate Son of the most high God. In the unfolding of this mysterious plan we believe He was begotten by the Holy Ghost in the womb of a virgin, and that this virgin mother was a descendant of apostate Adam, therefore an heir to all the ruinous effects of the Fall. We believe that, as the Son of God, Christ had all power both in heaven and on earth; and that as the Son of Man, He was both innocent and pure -- His humanity having been redeemed and cleansed by its union with Deity in the Incarnation. For in this Incarnation, He was bringing to perfection the only plan by which humanity could be rescued from the power of sin and the devil.

Also we believe that an individual faith in the blood atonement of Jesus Christ for sinful man is absolutely necessary on the part of human beings, to enable them to become the beneficiaries of His atoning merits.

Now to say nothing of the infidels and skeptics, there are those who stand as preachers of the gospel, professing the Christian religion, who do not believe in the essential deity of Christ. They repudiate His blood atonement and reject His virgin birth. Still they classify Him as the best of men. They propose to establish a system of religion on the basis of good conduct, and proclaim the Christ as the Saviour of men by way of a good example. He lived the exemplary life and we will be saved by Him in this respect.

For the sake of comparison, grant that they are right in their claim, that the Carpenter of Nazareth went no further in making atonement for the sins of men than just to give them the philosophy of acceptable living by His great example. Our belief in His divine sonship, in His vicarious sufferings, in His shed blood, in His conquering of death and hell by His resurrection from the dead, in His now being seated on the mediatorial throne, and in His appearing in the presence of God as our Advocate, would in no way hinder our following His blessed example. For nobody believes more strongly in following the example of His innocent and stainless life than we do. Therefore if we are wrong in our belief in His deity and blood atonement for sin, we will certainly be eligible for all that is to be derived from an honest endeavor to live according to His precepts and example. And if our position is wrong, it is harmlessly wrong since nothing injurious can possibly result from it.

But on the other hand, suppose we are right in our belief that a firm faith and trust in the efficacy of His shed blood is the necessary instrumentality that brings one into vital touch with His saving power. Then those who have no faith in the deity and blood atonement of Jesus are no better off than if they did not believe in Christ at all. Therefore if they are wrong, they are fatally wrong, for their belief in His good character and exemplary life represents only a part of the whole. On the other hand our position represents the whole, and therefore includes every part. In other words, if the position that the example of Christ in moral and social conduct includes the vital germ of spiritual life, and that following Him in this respect makes one a possessor of

spiritual life, then our position, which includes the very strictest following of His example, will certainly be just as potent for us as it is for others. We believe only a firm faith both in the deity of Christ and in His shed blood can bring us into justified relationship with God. If we are right then belief in the other position is fatal. Therefore ours is the highest limb on the tree of "safety first." If it breaks under its load, we will catch on the other limb. But if the other limb breaks for lack of strength, which is derived only from truth, its unhappy occupants will fall to their ruin, for there is nothing under it on which to catch hold.

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## 05 -- THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF MAN

We believe that the existence of man on the earth is the result of an active cause that far transcends the possibility of a happen-so. Man with all his multitudinous complexities could not, from the nature of things, be the result of mere chance. The cause of man's existence is in every way greater than man himself. Therefore we believe that man is of divine origin.

The explanation of the advent of the human family as made by one of the theories of evolution is that the life germ that produced man had its origin in the depth of the sea. According to this theory the fish has been the symbol of this life germ. The story of Jonah and the whale is said to be the story of that germ seed which was for ages in the ocean bed. Finally, by the help of mammals of the sea or otherwise, it reached the shore and became man.

Now following the proposition that no proof be offered on either side (and nobody could be accommodated more by that than is the evolutionist), let us compare the two positions from the standpoint of "safety first."

Let us assume that the materialist is correct in his position, that the existence of mankind is the result of that active force, thought to have been discovered by scientists, which they named evolution. In that case the Christian is wrong in his position that his Creator is the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, personal God. But the Christian cannot possibly lose anything by his error. There being no personality involved, he cannot become the object of the displeasure of his creator. He is merely guilty of a harmless mistake. Therefore the Christian is just as well off as is the evolutionist, if the latter is correct and the former is incorrect.

But on the other hand, if the Christian is correct in his contention that God made us, the evolutionist is fatally wrong in his position to the contrary. For he dishonors his Maker by disbelieving in Him, and consequently ignoring Him, and further by degrading the greatest product of His creative work to the level of a happen-so. His folly will mock him forever.

But let us make one more comparison. In his masterpiece of American literature Hawthorne illustrated the effects of noble contemplation by little Ernest and the Great Stone Face. Nature had placed the rocks on the mountainside in such a manner as to depict a perfect human face, which expressed all the virtues of kindness, benevolence, purity, and love. There was also a legendary prophecy to the effect that there would come one to the valley who would be the exact counterpart of the Great Stone Face. This one would bring great blessings to the

inhabitants of the valley below. From early childhood little Ernest was greatly interested in both the Great Stone Face and the legendary prophecy concerning the coming of the great one. He spent much time in beholding the giant human face, and longed to live to see the coming of the great one of whom the Great Stone Face was the antitype. When Ernest had grown to mature manhood, his fine qualities of character made him to be a leader of the people of the valley, and fulfillment of the legendary prophecy was discovered in Ernest himself.

According to Hawthorne's common sense philosophy, the apprehended characteristics of that which is adored are imbibed into the character of the worshiper, in proportion to the intensity of the worshiper.

Therefore if the true worshipers of God build into their character those wonderful traits that even approximate the similitude of their conceptions of God, who could estimate the wealth that accrues to them in character building?

But on the other hand, what kind of results can the evolutionist expect in return from his devotion to his creator? For if he worships his creator he will be going the other way, since he is worshipping something that is not his present equal. He will, from the very nature of things, be reaping the results of evolution in reverse.

Therefore the conclusion is inevitable: The Christian limb is the highest one on the tree of "safety first." If it breaks for lack of supporting truth, we will catch on the other. For the latter is lower on the tree. But if the evolutionist's limb breaks for lack of supporting truth, he cannot catch on the higher limb, for one cannot fall upward.

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## 06 -- THE PERSONALITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

According to Christian doctrine, the Holy Spirit is the Third Person in the Holy Trinity, and therefore a member of the "eternal Godhead." He possesses all the characteristics of conscious personality. With the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit has all the attributes which characterize either one of these other Members. We believe the Holy Spirit is the active Agent and Representative of both the Father and the Son in the world at this time. He administers a wise and merciful providence in the interest of sinful man. His mission is to convince sinners of their need of salvation and to lead all the willing to repentance.

He performs that act of divine grace by which a repentant sinner is re-created in Christ Jesus, by which he becomes a new creature and a member of the family of God on earth. He leads those who are the children of God to loathe the presence of indwelling sin, and produces a hungering and thirsting after righteousness which is intended to lead one into the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. He bears witness to any definite work of grace wrought in the hearts of men. We believe that without prevenient grace, which the Holy Spirit administers, unconditionally, no one has the ability to repent and turn to God for salvation.



Therefore we believe in the glorious personality and in the imperial administrations of the Holy Spirit.

There are those who do not believe that the Holy Spirit is a conscious Person. They think of Him as an "it," and an antiquated "it" at that. They assert that formerly there was an influence operative among men that was called the Holy Ghost. They insist that such an influence was needed only during the introduction of the New Testament dispensation, but since Pentecost the need ceased to exist. Some make no distinction between the Bible and the Holy Spirit, claiming them to be one and the same.

Now if those who do not believe the Holy Ghost is a Person are correct in their view, we who believe in His divine personality are wrong. But we are harmlessly wrong; for if there is no personality involved in the Third Person of the Trinity, there is no possibility of offending that which is only an influence. Hence our mistake cannot possibly bring harm to us. Since there are only two groups consciously concerned in the controversy, the believer and the unbeliever, and the results from both positions are the same, it is a case where it is just as right to be wrong as it is to be right.

But if we are right in the belief that the Holy Spirit is a Person, then those who repudiate this sacred truth are most dangerously wrong, for then there is the Third Person involved in the controversy. And when this belief has been reduced to its conclusion it becomes another Case of atheism, for those who deny the personality of the Holy Spirit thereby rob Him of His deity. If they are wrong they are fatally wrong, in that they deny the existence of the most important divine Personage now interested in human affairs. Ultimately they will be like the prisoner who was condemned to die. His mother, with many tears and much agony of soul, finally touched a cord of parental tenderness in the state's chief executive. The governor asked the turnkey to show him the young man's cell. When the governor approached, the young man refused to talk to him, saying, "I don't feel like being bothered; please excuse me." The man dressed in the long black coat insisted that he had something of great importance to talk to him about, but the condemned man said, "You will do me a favor if you will not insist. I do not care to talk to you. I am wholly responsible for my condition." He turned away from his distinguished caller. When the turnkey returned he said to the unhappy man, "How did you and the governor make it?" The prisoner said, "Was that the governor? I thought he was a clergyman."

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## 07 -- THE MIRACLE OF REGENERATION

We believe that regeneration is a miracle of grace wrought by divine power in the spiritual nature of a repenting sinner who feels the justness of his condemnation and renounces his sins and confesses his guilt, and by faith accepts the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour.

Therefore this miracle of grace, when taken as a whole, has both a human and a divine aspect. The human aspect includes repentance, confession, and faith. The divine act includes forgiveness, or justification, and regeneration. The divine act is conditional upon the genuineness

and completion of the human requirement. When the divine aspect of this miracle of grace has not been realized, it is the very best evidence that the human side of the arrangement is not complete. For completion of the divine requirements on the part of the human puts one in touch with the life-giving sources, and thus that person is renewed by His Spirit in the inner man.

The position that stands out against the one just set forth is that regeneration is merely a mental change, a reversal of one's attitude toward sin, and that the new birth is merely a change in attitude toward God. It does not include a miraculous, inwrought work that essentially changes the spiritual nature. It does not impart a new spiritual essence which the individual never had before.

In comparing the two positions it is easy to note that insisting on a spiritual birth as a basic principle in a life of righteousness cannot interfere with the essentials of the other position. For our position includes a change of both mind and attitude as a necessary antecedent of the new birth. Then since our position includes all the essentials of the other position and nothing detrimental to it, if the other position is correct we get as much out of it as those who believe it. But on the other hand, since the other position does not include a definite infusion of the divine nature, as our position does -- and this new nature included by our position, and left out by the other, is fundamental to the success of the plan--therefore if we are right he is fatally wrong, while if he is right we are harmlessly wrong.

In other words, our position with reference to the prerequisites of salvation includes the whole and therefore every part, while the other position includes only a part and therefore not the whole. Now if the part is correct, then the whole must be correct, for it includes every part; but if it requires the whole to be correct, then that which is only a part cannot be correct.

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## 08 -- CONDITIONAL SALVATION VS. UNIVERSALISM

From the most authentic accounts man was God's creative masterpiece. One of the chief endowments by which the Creator exalted man above all other animal creation was the bestowing upon him of the power of volition to be exercised in moral choices. By the use of this power man could make his own decisions in every realm where he was operative.

The fact that God made visits with him in his garden home in the cool of the day is sufficient evidence that man's moral and spiritual nature was on a par with that of his Maker. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Therefore a desire for companionship on the part of the Most High must have been one of the motivating factors that resulted in man's creation. And in order for God to fully enjoy companionship and association with the chief product of His creative handiwork, man must maintain his integrity by the choice of his own free will. For if God had made him inalienably good, man would have been robbed of the virtue of being holy by choice. This would have subtracted from the final nobility of his character. For a character established in holiness is the reward of consistently choosing that which is right in preference to that which is wrong. Therefore, in the development and orderly consummation of

the divine plan, it became necessary to establish a probationary period for man in which to exercise the power of his free choices between good and evil.

Man's desire for food was based upon his physical needs, while his desire for wisdom and knowledge was based upon his intellectual needs. Provisions for the former were made by the fruits of his garden home, while provisions were made for the latter by the visits of, and his association with, his Creator.

That man was capable of being influenced in his choices by his natural desires and appetites is self-evident. It was through this avenue that Satan made his infernal approach to imperial man and secured his co-operation which resulted in the "great transgression" and the fall of man from his holy estate, resulting in his separation from his Creator and his being degraded to the servitude of sin. Not only that, but he became a partaker of the nature of his diabolical seducer and was dead to spiritual life -- all as the result of the wrong choice.

But this was no surprise to God. In the council chambers of eternity, where the pattern for man was blueprinted before any of his members were actually made (Psalms 139:14-16), God's foreknowledge comprehended the possibility of the success of His envious enemy in distracting man from the fellowship of his Maker by alienating him from God through the sin of rebellion. Therefore the scheme for the redemption of lost man in the thought of God antedated man's creation (Revelation 13:8). And it culminated in the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross for the potential salvation of Adam and all of his lost sons and daughters.

It was through the exercise of man's free will that the choice of the forbidden fruit was eaten and man's face was turned away from God. Hence, in the very nature of things, provisions for man's return to God must be placed before him for his own choosing. For a scheme of salvation which makes no provision for an independent choice violates the fundamental constitution of man's individual personality.

Therefore we believe that salvation is provided for and made available to all through the merits of the shed blood of Jesus Christ on the Cross. But this is only on the conditions of repentance toward God resulting from a broken and contrite heart, confession of sins committed, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as our only Saviour and Lord.

In opposition to our position the Universalist theory is that Christ's death on the Cross for the sins of the world met every condition requisite for the salvation of all people. Therefore all will be ultimately saved without respect to any conditions whatsoever. Because of this there is no reason for anxiety on the part of anyone of any grade of character about the final outcome of the future.

Now for the comparison. If the Universalist is right in his views, we are certainly wrong in ours. But we are harmlessly wrong; for universal, unconditional salvation -- if true -- will be just as potent for those who do not believe it as it will for those who do believe it. Otherwise it could not be unconditional, and unconditional salvation is germane to the theory of Universalism. Hence if the theory of Universalism is correct, those who believe that salvation is offered only on conditions, as herein set forth, will have lost nothing by being in error. It is a

self-evident fact that believing in and meeting conditions conceived to be necessary cannot interfere with that which is bestowed unconditionally.

But on the other hand, if salvation through Christ is placed before us and the final outcome is determined by our choices in meeting conditions requisite to salvation, then the Universalist is wrong. But he is not harmlessly wrong; for if he does not believe that salvation is conditional, he will not meet conditions. Yet the facts in the case cannot overlook his error. He will have lost everything that meeting the conditions of salvation could bring to him.

Consequently, the best that Universalism has to offer if true is exactly the same as the worst that can result from our position if untrue. On the other hand, if our position is true, the expanse of eternity would be required to measure the advantages it has over Universalism.

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## 09 -- FREE WILL VS. PREDESTINATION

The fatalists, or the old "two seeders," believe that from all eternity the final destiny of every rational being was unconditionally fixed by the sovereign will of the Creator. They insist it was altogether independent of the will or desire, the merits or demerits of the individual. They teach that according to His own will and planning God foreordained, predestinated, and consigned every person to the end that he will come to. They speak of the "unchangeable decrees." This means: if a man is finally damned it is not because he is a wicked man but because it was foreordained from before the foundation of the world that he should come to such a disastrous fate. They who are ultimately saved in heaven are not saved because they have been good or done good, or wanted to be good or to do good, but they are saved because they are of the "elect of God," and that according to His prearranged and unchangeable plan.

In the tender years of the writer's life he had the misfortune to inherit a stepfather (he married my stepmother) who was of this pernicious persuasion. He taught us that there was absolutely no reason for our being alarmed about our eternal fate. That was all fixed by the unchangeable decrees of God. If we were of the elect, no crime we could commit could in any way alter the certainty of our being saved in the end. But on the other hand, if we were "vessels of wrath," there was nothing that we could do that would in any way change our consignment to eternal misery and woe.

We believe that man was created in the image and after the likeness of his Creator. He was holy and good, and the make-up of man included the power of free choice between good and evil. No other power could force a decision from man contrary to his own free will, for man was a sovereign in respect to the exercise of his choices.

But Adam, our federal head, yielded to the solicitation of a deluded companion and his natural desires for food, wisdom, and knowledge and sinned against his Maker. In this wrong choice he became a slave to sin and lost his moral sovereignty.

But his Creator, being the Originator and Source of all genuine love, still loved the masterpiece of His creative work. Therefore He arbitrarily paid the price for the sinner's redemption. In His mercy He has sent the Holy Spirit into the world to contact all rational beings and to restore to them the power of choice between Christ and His service and the devil and his service. In resisting the devil, we renounce sin. In choosing Christ by faith, we choose the good. Thus all that bid for the service and companionship of man must wait for his own free will to choose whom he will serve.

Now for the final comparison. If the predestinarian is correct in his interpretation of the status of man, we are wrong in our belief to the contrary. But we are harmlessly wrong. If he is right, we cannot lose anything by opposing the doctrine of an arbitrarily fixed fate. For if it is right, the one who does not believe it will get just the same out of it as the one who does believe it. But if it is wrong, it may damn you to believe it. For if you believe that God will draw the elect unconditionally by irresistible force, you may wait thus to be overcome and may fail to make the good choice, and be lost as a result. For according to the predestinarian, this all-powerful drawing is the only sure sign of election.

The unavoidable conclusion is that if the predestinarian view is true the best that can come from it is exactly the same as the worst that can come from our view if it is false. But if ours is true the difference is as far apart as the east and the west. Therefore make the right choice and climb to the top limb; if it breaks you will catch on the predestination limb.

Who could love such a God as the predestinarian presents? Who could have a Christian heart and be willing to be one of the "elect," when other creatures just as good, and many of them better, have been sent off to hell? And how could the presence of such a wicked God keep the heaven where He abides from being a hell? Finally, if like begets like, how could such a God create a heaven of happiness? How could He be happy himself after such a monstrous act of injustice and respect of persons? He is not the God I love and serve!

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## 10 -- THE POSSIBILITY OF APOSTASY VS. UNCONDITIONAL SECURITY

Eternal security teaches that when one becomes a born-again child of God he is unconditionally a child of God forever. There is nothing he can do or leave undone that will in any way affect his relation to God as his Father. Eternal security admits that one thus born of the Spirit can become a renegade in conduct and character, but that affects only his state, and not his relation to his Saviour. He may backslide and even become more wicked than he was before his conversion, and lose the joy of Christianity, his fellowship with his Saviour, and his influence with people; but his relation to the family of God remains unimpaired. His works will be burned up, but he himself will be saved, so as by fire.

Also a close companion to the doctrine of eternal security is the doctrine that teaches the impossibility of being saved from all sin. All must sin in word, thought, and deed as long as mortal life shall last and that regardless of any state of grace that one may be in.

But we believe that God through Jesus Christ has provided salvation from all sin for all men here and now. In connection with the work of regeneration the power of canceled sin is broken. The soul is freed from the dominion of sin and Satan, and consequently the born-again child of God is free to make his choices between good and evil. Since willful conduct is the result of his choices he is responsible for such conduct. He has become a child of God by choice, and he remains a child of God only if he continues to choose in harmony with the decision he made when he became a child of God. One cannot become a traitor in conduct and an infidel in attitude without forfeiting his relation to the God of his salvation. One can become a spiritual bankrupt and finally land in hell.

Suppose the doctrine of unconditional eternal security is the truth -- that after regeneration one cannot be lost because of evil conduct or infidelity. In that case we are certainly wrong in our position to the contrary. But if we are wrong, we are harmlessly wrong, for we are just as certainly and unconditionally saved as those who believe in eternal security. For that which is unconditional cannot be affected by either belief or unbelief. For eternal security to be inoperative for the one who does not believe in it would prove that it was neither unconditional nor eternal. That would make it self-destructive, like the snake that swallowed its tail and thereby effected its own annihilation. Therefore, if the doctrine of eternal security works at all, it must work automatically. It must serve those who believe in it and those who do not believe in it exactly alike.

Now on the other hand, if the position is correct that salvation is not only received by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but it is retained also by faith in and obedience to Him, and that to become a traitor to our Lord by infidelity will land one in perdition, then the eternal security position is wrong. But it is not harmlessly wrong; for if one believes he cannot fall from grace, when the facts are that he can, he is not as safe as he would be if he were aware of his danger. Believing there is no possibility of danger tends to carelessness, and carelessness in a field of great danger is a peril to one's safety. Hence the unavoidable conclusion must be: If unconditional eternal security is correct in its position that evil conduct and traitorous infidelity cannot result in one's being lost after he has once been born again, it cannot harm one to repudiate it. But on the other hand, if it is a monstrous error, it could cause the damnation of one who believes it. If the doctrine of the dangerous possibility of apostasy is the truth, those who repudiate it rob themselves of whatever protection there is to be had as a result of being forewarned when exposed to great danger.

Therefore, in view of the foregoing comparison, the court of honest intelligence must conclude: First, that the only way the doctrine of unconditional eternal security can harm one is by believing it. Second, the only way the doctrine of the dangerous possibility of apostasy can harm one is by disbelieving it.

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## 11 -- THE SECOND BLESSING VS. ALL OTHERS

That the Bible teaches entire sanctification no student of the Scriptures will deny. However, as to when and how it is obtained there are wide differences of opinion. The general

consensus, however, is that only one position can be right, and of course the question is-What is that position?

The Wesleyan view, to which we subscribe, is that entire sanctification is a work of divine grace which takes place subsequent to regeneration. It is wrought instantaneously by the baptism with the Holy Spirit in response to simple faith of a fully consecrated heart. So for the sake of brevity we will call it the "faith theory."

One popular opposing position is that sanctification is included in regeneration. Also it is contended that all who are born again are sanctified wholly in connection with conversion. For the sake of brevity, we will call it the "conversion theory."

In comparing the two positions let us say the conversion theory is correct. In that case the faith theory is certainly incorrect. But we who believe in the faith theory have nothing to lose. We believe strongly in regeneration and insist upon it as a necessary antecedent to entire sanctification. So if regeneration includes entire sanctification, we too are sanctified. Therefore we get as much ultimate good out of the conversion theory as those do who believe in it and depend upon it for their sanctification. If the faith theory is wrong it is harmlessly wrong, since it includes regeneration and therefore every benefit that could be derived from the conversion theory.

On the other hand, let us say the faith theory is right. In that case the conversion theory is certainly wrong. And it cannot be said to be harmlessly wrong. For the Christian who believes in the conversion theory believes that he is already sanctified wholly and thus, believing he is already sanctified, he cannot exercise faith to be cleansed when he thinks he is already pure. Because faith for present cleansing presupposes the recognized presence of impurity, therefore those who depend on the conversion theory cannot possibly receive any benefit from the faith theory. Whatsoever is to be obtained by faith is impossible to the one who cannot have faith. Consequently, if we can be sanctified only by faith after regeneration, those who continue to stick to the conversion theory cannot get sanctified wholly at all.

The following deductions then are unavoidable. If the conversion theory is correct, that men are sanctified wholly in conversion, then the faith-theory man was sanctified when he was converted, along with his wiser brother. He got more in connection with his conversion than he thought he did.

But if the faith-theory man is correct in his view of the subject that men are sanctified in response to the faith of one who is wholly abandoned to the will of God after regeneration, then the conversion-theory man did not get sanctified wholly when he thought he did. Hence he got less in conversion than he thought he did.

So the ultimate outcome is this -- if the conversion theory is upheld by truth, then the faith-theory man and the conversion-theory man share in its benefits exactly alike.

However, if the faith theory is upheld by truth, only the faith-theory man receives the benefits to be derived from it. Hence the faith-theory limb is the highest and safest one; for if it

breaks under its load, those who are resting on it will catch on the conversion limb, for it is just below.

Again there is another theory of entire sanctification which stands in opposition to the faith theory and, for the sake of brevity, we will call it the "growth theory." It postulates entire sanctification as the result of growth in grace. Its proponents say that the child of God is like a newborn babe growing from the time of its birth until it reaches the status of manhood. He begins to grow in grace when he is born of the Spirit, and continues till he finally reaches the state of Christian purity. They seem to see no difference between purity and maturity. Healthy growth in grace is a process that is gradually bringing the Christian ever nearer and nearer to maturity. Growth in grace is supported by spiritual nutrition and spiritual exercise. But entire "sanctification is the act of God's grace by which the affections of men are purified, and alienated from sin and the world, and exalted to a supreme love to God" (Webster).

For the sake of comparison, let us say the growth theory is right. In that case the faith theory is certainly wrong. Again it is harmlessly wrong, for nobody believes in growing in grace more than do the faith-theory people. So if we are mistaken about getting sanctified wholly when we made that deep and limitless consecration and trusted God to cleanse us from all sin, we certainly could lose nothing by such a consecration. If anything that one could do would promote growth in grace, such a consecration to the whole will of God would certainly do so. So if growth in grace will sanctify those who believe in it, we will come in for everything that is to be derived from that process.

On the other hand, let us say for the sake of comparison that the faith theory is the correct one; Then the growth theory is certainly wrong. But it is not harmlessly wrong, for those who depend on the growth theory have no confidence in the faith theory. Therefore there can be no faith where there is no confidence. Hence the growth-theory man gets absolutely nothing out of the faith theory. Consequently if the faith theory is correct, the growth theory is fatally incorrect and therefore dangerous. But if the growth theory is correct, the faith theory is harmlessly incorrect. Hence the faith-theory limb is still the highest one and if it breaks we will catch on the growth-theory limb. But if the growth-theory limb breaks for lack of supporting truth, those who depend on it cannot catch on the faith limb.

Then there is the "death theory," which repudiates the faith theory, the conversion theory, and the growth theory. We have never seen an acceptable specimen of the product of either one of the foregoing theories. Along with the general opinion that we must be pure to inhabit the blissful clime of heaven, the death-theory people believe that only the pure in heart will finally see God, but they believe that purity cannot be reached in this life. Therefore they believe that they will be sanctified in death.

Now this is the most dangerous of any position mentioned so far. It is possible that the conversion-theory man might become convinced that he was wrong in his belief that he was sanctified when he was converted and turn to the faith theory and get the blessing. Also the growth-theory man may become convinced that growth in grace is not bringing him any nearer purity than when he first began to depend on it. In fact he could become convinced that indwelling sin was so hampering him in his efforts that growth in grace was being retarded. He



could possibly renounce the growth theory and accept the faith theory and get the blessing. But the one who depends on the death theory will have no chance to reconsider after demonstration has proved the fallacy of his position.

Now if the death theory of entire sanctification is right, the faith theory is wrong. But it is harmlessly wrong, for the faith-theory believer will get just as much out of the death theory as the one who believes in and depends on it for purity, for death is an appointment that none will miss.

However, if the faith theory is the correct one, then the death theory is a monstrous falsehood, promulgated by the father of lies.

Also the same comparison of the faith theory that has been made with the death theory can be made with the "purgatory theory" with the same unavoidable conclusions.

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## 12 -- FREEDOM FROM SIN VS. SINNING AS A NECESSITY

There are two well-defined, though contradictory, opinions concerning the overt act of sin. One is that every rational being is compelled to sin as long as mortal life shall last. The other is that any rational being can be saved from willful and conscious sin here and now, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. We subscribe to the latter position.

Let us be reminded that we are to make no effort to prove our position nor to disprove its opposite. We merely seek to contrast the two in an effort to discover the potential danger in case a position is not true, as compared to the opposite in case the opposite is not true.

Then suppose the one who pleads for the irresistibility of sin is right in his contention that one cannot be saved from sinning while living in this fallen world. In that event we are certainly wrong in our contention to the contrary. But we are harmlessly wrong, for our position involves us in no danger whatsoever even if it is wrong and the other is right. If it were a sin to believe that you can be saved from sinning, that would only be doing what the other position contends that you must do. Therefore we would be living by the same standard. Consequently we would get the same results as the one who pleads that one must sin.

On the other hand, if we are right in our position that by the mercy and grace of God He saves His children from the dominion and power of sin, the other position is woefully wrong. For if one is convinced that he cannot be saved from sinning, he certainly cannot have faith to be saved from sin; and if he cannot thus have faith, how can he be saved from sin at all? Disbelief in the possibility of being saved from sin in this life would shut him up and seal him to a life of sinning. It is self-evident that none will live better than he believes he can. Faith is the medium that puts one in touch with the life-giving power of salvation. Just across from the line of faith is the borderland of doubt, which is the gateway to sin and which opens into the domain of the archfiend of eternal night.

So the unerring conclusions of the logic of these comparisons are:

Believing one can be saved from all sin in this life, and professing thus to be saved when in fact he is mistaken and must continue in sin, cannot from the nature of things harm one. In making his erroneous claims he could not be doing worse than just sinning, and that cannot be prevented anyway. Therefore his error costs him nothing.

If one believes that he cannot be saved from sinning, when the facts are he can and should be saved from its power and dominion, he midst lose everything that salvation from sin would bring to him. He cannot receive anything beyond what he believes to be possible in a realm where faith is a condition of receiving that which is to be bestowed.

Therefore it must be a poor comment on the wisdom and judgment of one who accepts and risks his eternal welfare on a course of life which, if true, is no better than its opposite if the opposite is untrue especially when the opposite is harmless if untrue, and if true constitutes the only way to safety.

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THE END