

(2.) So far as those are concerned who lived before the Christian dispensation, but who enjoyed the dawning light of the patriarchal or of the Mosaic economy, and thus had the opportunity of exercising faith in a redemption to come, the orthodox doctrine teaches that their specific probation consisted in their personal use or misuse of the means of salvation divinely afforded them,—that the promises of grace furnished substantially the same test of character, and consequently of desert, which is presented in the historic Christ,—and that all those who believed in Him, so far as He was known to them, are saved through Him as really as those who trusted in Him as their incarnate God, while those who refused thus to believe are condemned on the ground of such unbelief. Here, again, wide differences in knowledge, in opportunity and privilege, in responsibility and guiltiness, must be recognized. The antediluvians, the patriarchs and their descendants, the Hebrews of the earlier and of the later ages in that introductory dispensation, are variously tested, and must be variously judged. But the main elements in the case remain the same : probation is in substance one, under both dispensations.

(3.) So far as the heathen, and also all who, though dwelling in Christian lands, have never truly heard the Gospel, are concerned, the evangelical doctrine affirms simply their guiltiness under the light of nature and of conscience : it holds that, living without the law and the Gospel, they are judged without law and apart from the Gospel, under the moral administration of a just and holy as well as a benevolent God : it maintains that their condition beyond the grave is therefore one of real, though mitigated, condemnation, and that, so far as the Scripture sheds any light on the question, this condemnation must be viewed as everlasting : it believes that the Gospel plan of restoration, being limited in its range to the present life, can be of no avail hereafter, either in removing such condemnation or in bringing them into a condition of holiness, or of blessedness such as holiness carries in its train. It is true that most of the creeds of the Reformation, for reasons which are obvious to the historical student, refer but incidentally, if at all, to the case of the heathen and of others who have never known the Gospel. It is true that, among evangelical believers of later times, large varieties of judgment appear as to the measure of culpability attaching to such persons, to the principles involved in the divine judgment respecting them, and to the real nature of the eternal state on which they enter at death,—whether it be one of positive punishment, or simply one of relative privation and inferiority, such as their defective spiritual condition might require as its proper counterpart. What is affirmed universally, and on strictly Scriptural grounds, is their guiltiness in view of opportunities given, their just condemnation on the ground of such guiltiness, and their judicial assignment to such a sphere of existence, such a future estate