

The Apostle Paul has demonstrated for all time the insufficiency of a legal system for human recovery. He discusses it on the side of motive. It increases sin instead of diminishing and overcoming it. Some knowledge of God's willingness to forgive, some encouragement and aid from Him in the task of conquering evil, experience shows to be indispensable even to the maintenance of any due conception of sin. The supposition, therefore, that the system of probation under which men are now placed is legal, is equivalent to saying that heaven has abandoned them. On such terms we should have no basis for the discussion of a future probation; we should have no evidence of any hopeful or real one for men anywhere.

A gracious probation involves gracious motives; a probation under redemption implies that God proves men by bestowing upon them the means and influences by which they may, if they will, obtain deliverance from the guilt and dominion of sin. Any other testing of character in the case of men under the disabilities of the fall would be no probation at all, but simply a revelation and augmentation of human wickedness. The Gospel means an effort on God's part to recover men. A Christian probation implies that He grants the opportunity and reveals the motives for recovery.

The question as to a future probation resolves itself, therefore, into these two inquiries:

*First*—Whether there is reason to suppose that God means to offer to all men a probation on the basis and under the motives of redemption; and, *second*—Whether, if such is His purpose, there is not required for its execution opportunities beyond what are afforded in the present life. Or, to put the matter more concretely: (1) Are there any members of our race who do not have opportunity to act as moral agents in this life under the motives of redemption? (2) If there are, may we not expect that such an opportunity of grace will be given them in the future life?

I. That the first of these two questions must be answered affirmatively will appear from the consideration of two classes of human beings.

Nearly a moiety of the race die in infancy, or before reaching what is commonly accepted as the stage of moral responsibility. In such cases regeneration may have taken place in this life, meaning by this a correction of native depravity, or the communication by the Holy Spirit of a basis of action, or an influence which will certainly insure holy character. But the character itself as personal, as intelligent and free in a holy choice of God, is unformed. Its development belongs wholly to the future life. The only opportunity for its formation as an ethical acquisition, as personal, is there. Uncounted millions of our race have thus their first and only opportunity of moral action, on the basis of redemption and under its motives, in the other world.