

## John 3:18

- I. Those who affirm that the sinner's faith is an indispensable requirement and condition for *acquiring* eternal life commonly suppose **JOH 3:18** supports their case.
  - A. It is assumed that the sinner's faith *causes* one to be delivered from eternal condemnation and conversely that unbelief *causes* eternal condemnation.
  - B. Other scriptures demand that the foregoing explanation cannot be the correct interpretation of the passage.
    1. Remember that all Scripture is to be considered. **2TI 3:16**.
    2. Remember that there are no contradictions in Scripture. **2PE 1:20-21**.
    3. Scripture is to be compared, not clashed. **1CO 2:13**.
    4. It is necessary to reason from the Scripture. **ACT 17:2**.
  
- II. If a sinner's belief in the name of the Son of God is an indispensable requirement for deliverance from eternal condemnation (let us refer to them as “decisionalists”), consider:
  - A. All classes of all men are by nature condemned from Adam. **ROM 5:12; EPH 2:3**.
  - B. Therefore, all members of the following classes of unbelieving sinners must be eternally condemned:
    1. Perished infants.
    2. The severely mentally handicapped.
    3. All who never had a chance to hear the gospel of the Son of God.
  - C. The implications of the foregoing are so unpalatable that decisionalists tend to default to one of two positions:
    1. *Not all individuals of all classes of all men are by nature condemned.* This is plainly not true.
    2. *God out of mercy would not universally condemn those who were unable to believe.*
      - a. If this be true, then faith is NOT an indispensable requirement for deliverance from eternal condemnation.
      - b. If this be true, then God wills to save some unconverted persons from eternal condemnation.
      - c. Here the decisionalist is flirting with the truth about saving grace.
  - D. There are classes of men throughout history who never heard about Jesus Christ and thus could not believe (**ROM 10:14**), yet they are represented in God's redemption in glory. **REV 5:9; 7:9-10**.
  - E. But how do we reconcile the fact that **JOH 3:18** says that an unbeliever “...is condemned already BECAUSE he hath not believed...”?
  
- III. A distinction must be made between primary and secondary causes, and between *productive* and *evidential* causal relationships.
  - A. All humanity are indeed under condemnation. **ROM 3:9, 23; 5:18**.
    1. The primary, productive cause of condemnation is Adam's sin.
    2. The sons of Adam are conceived in sin (**PSA 51:5**), born to sin (**PSA 58:3; PRO 22:15**) and so sin. By this they only prove that they were *by nature the children of wrath*. **EPH 2:3**.
    3. Esau was a condemned human while yet in the womb, not having done good or evil. **ROM 9:11-13**.
  - B. Sometimes the word *because* is not meant to be understood in the sense of “as a result of”

(productive) but rather, “as evidenced by” (evidential).

1. Example: A prosecutor sums up the evidence which points to the guilt of an accused murderer.
  - a. He says, “Johnny is a murderer because of the eyewitness testimonies of his malicious intents and actions, the powder burns on his hands, his fingerprints on the weapon, the ballistic match of the bullet to the weapon and the angle of the entry wound.”
  - b. These evidences did not MAKE him a murderer; they were proof that he WAS *a murderer already*. The evidences in this sense condemned him.
  - c. The same reasoning applies in **JOH 3:18**. The sinner's unbelief is not the productive cause of his condemnation but rather the evidence of an *existing state of condemnation*: “...he that believeth not is condemned already.”
2. In **MAT 25:31-40**, Jesus describes the saints' access to the eternal kingdom.
  - a. He gives them the kingdom and everlasting life, saying, “FOR I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat...” (v. **35**).
  - b. If this is understood as a *productive* causal relationship, then Jesus was teaching a scheme of *works salvation* for acquiring everlasting life, which would flatly contradict other scriptures which plainly deny such a doctrine. **ROM 3:20; TIT 3:5**.
  - c. The good works of the saved are actually being presented as evidences of saving *grace* (unmerited favor).
    - (1) God's grace chose them and created them unto good works. **EPH 1:4; 2:10**.
    - (2) God's grace thus renewed them “...to will and to do of His good pleasure” (**PHIL 2:13**).
    - (3) Similarly, if one believes on the Son of God, it is because God's grace FIRST renewed him and enabled him to believe. **JOH 5:24; 1CO 1:18; 12:3**.
  - d. Conversely, the wicked lacked such evidences and stood condemned in **MAT 25:41-46**.
    - (1) The *productive* cause of their condemnation was Adam's sin.
    - (2) Their indifference to the needy was the *evidence* that they were *condemned already*.

- IV. (**JOH 3:36**) He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.
- A. Decisionalists commonly also resort to this text to build a case for their soteriology.
  - B. The text does NOT say, “He that believes THEREBY ACQUIRES everlasting life, and he that believes not MAY ACQUIRE everlasting life by DECIDING TO BELIEVE.”
    1. Believers HAVE everlasting life; they don't THEREBY ACQUIRE it. **JOH 6:47**.
    2. They ACQUIRED everlasting life before they believed so that they might believe. **JOH 5:24; 17:2-3**.
  - C. If **JOH 3:36** is interpreted by the decisionalist's scheme, it actually leaves no hope for the unbeliever.
    1. It says, “...he that believeth not the Son SHALL NOT see life...”
    2. “Shall not” is a sure thing, as in **JOH 5:24**.
    3. Thus, it would have to be concluded that if anyone was ever in a state of unbelief, God's immutable decree is, “he SHALL NOT SEE LIFE.”

- V. The underlying error of the decisionalist is that God's mercy is only for those who believe (unless they happen to be in one of the “special” categories whom God saves in spite of unbelief).
- A. Paul obtained mercy because of unbelief! **1TI 1:13.**
  - B. Paul describes his conversion, not his inward change of regeneration.
  - C. When Christ arrested Paul on the road to Damascus, Christ was already indwelling him. **GAL 1:15-16.**
  - D. Paul was an elect child of God kicking against the inward pricks of the Spirit. **ACT 9:5.**
  - E. Saving grace, mercy and regeneration preceded Paul's belief!
- VI. Compare **JOH 3:18** with texts that set forth sins which bar a person from eternal glory.
- A. (**REV 21:27**) And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.
    1. Does this teach that anyone who ever lied is absolutely barred from heaven?
    2. Applying the decisionalist's reasoning from **JOH 3:18**, one must conclude that the means by which one gains heaven is ceasing lying and telling the truth instead.
    3. So which is the means: believing on the Son of God, or telling truth? Or both?
  - B. (**REV 22:15**) For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.
    1. Does this teach that nobody who was ever into the occult or was an idolater could ever enter heaven?
    2. Ephesian saints had been into the occult. **ACT 19:18-19.**
    3. Many Gentile saints had been idolaters. **1CO 12:2.**
    4. Such are not barred from heaven where grace saves.
    5. However, if one applies the decisionalist's reasoning from **JOH 3:18**, it would have to be concluded that former occultists and idolaters were eternally saved because of their good works, like repentance. **MAT 12:41 c/w JON 3:10.**
  - C. Whatever applies to **JOH 3:18** must also apply to **REV 21:27; 22:15.**
  - D. What *productively causes* a happy final state in a sinner is NOT his choices, but God's.
    1. Sinners are not eternally saved *because* (productively) of their moral corrections or their personal belief.
    2. Sinners are eternally saved *because* (productively) God elected them to the Lamb's book of life from the foundation of the world, per **REV 21:27**, and therefore in time had His Son take away their sins by His blood, and regenerate them inwardly so that they might believe and do good works.
    3. The unbelief of the elect does not undo God's faith to His elect to save them. **2TI 2:13.**
  - E. There is not evidence or assurance of everlasting life in sin and unbelief but there certainly is such evidence in faith and good works. **1TH 1:4-10.**
- VII. In **JOH 3:18**, Jesus is setting forth two classes: believers and unbelievers. Only believers here have evidence of not being condemned.
- A. The same could be said of other texts which set forth the condemned and the saved. **JOH 5:28-29; MAT 7:21-27; ROM 2:6-11.**
  - B. None of these texts can be teaching that one ACQUIRES eternal life by works. This would utterly deny grace. **ROM 11:6.**
  - C. The same reasoning applies to **JOH 3:18.**