

## The Ignorant Slave—Slavery Until Second Advent

### Charge Number 1

Mrs. White, writing in 1858, declared that the slaves were kept in such ignorance that they could not discern between right and wrong. Therefore God could not take them to heaven, but in mercy will simply not resurrect them. He will simply let them be as though they had not been. This is contrary to facts and Scripture. "In truth slaves were often more godly than their masters and perhaps this visionist [Mrs. White] didn't know that the slaves had their own separate places in churches in those days." Mrs. White's statement is "contrary to the Word of God," which declares that "all that are in their graves" will come forth. See John 5:28, 29.

This charge is based on the following statement by Mrs. White in 1858, in *Spiritual Gifts*, volume 1, page 193:

"I saw that the slave-master would have to answer for the soul of his slave whom he has kept in ignorance; and all the sins of the slave will be visited upon the master. God cannot take the slave to heaven, who has been kept in ignorance and degradation, knowing nothing of God, or the Bible, fearing nothing but his master's lash, and not holding so elevated a position as his master's brute beasts. But he does the best thing for him that a compassionate God can do. He lets him be as though he had not been." (See also *Early Writings*, p. 276.)

Let us examine in order the two parts of this charge:

#### First Part of Charge Number 1

1. That slaves were spiritually ignorant, when "in truth slaves were often more godly than their masters." But Mrs. White did not say that all slaves were spiritually ignorant. In fact, she declared as emphatically as do the critics that "slaves were often more godly than their masters." Only a few pages beyond this passage (page 193) now under discussion is her statement: "I saw the pious slave rise in triumph and victory" (*Spiritual Gifts*, p.

206). Only two paragraphs before the disputed paragraph on page 193 she speaks of "the tears of the pious bond-men and bond-women" (page 191). In the same connection she hurls anathemas at the cruel masters. We do not know how she could have more clearly taught that "in truth slaves were often more godly than their masters."

The language of the whole chapter from which the brief passage in debate is quoted, makes clear that Mrs. White is speaking of two classes of slaves: (1) the "pious" slave, who evidently has a knowledge of God, knows right from wrong, and acts in harmony with that knowledge. All that is implicit in the word "pious." (2) The slave "kept in ignorance," who knows "nothing of God, or the Bible," who fears "nothing but his master's lash," and who does not hold "so elevated a position as his master's brute beasts." In making this distinction Mrs. White conforms to history. All slaves were not treated alike. Some slave owners were much more considerate than others, and some did provide for their slaves certain opportunities for religious instruction.

Mrs. White, looking forward to the great day of God, "saw the pious slave rise in triumph and victory." She saw the slave that had been kept in complete ignorance allowed to sleep on in the grave and "be as though he had not been."

#### Second Part of Charge Number 1

2. That brings us to the second point of the charge; namely, that Mrs. White says that some will not rise in the resurrection, when the Bible says that "all" will rise. But the Bible writers sometimes use all-inclusive words like "all" and "every" with definitely implied restrictions. Let us illustrate:

Christ said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." John 12:32. Universalists, who teach that all men will be saved, use this text with great persuasiveness. Does not the text say "all"? But orthodox Christendom has ever denounced Universalism as heresy.

As to this particular statement by Christ, there have been various interpretations. We think it is simply an illustration of

the fact that Scriptural writers and speakers often make general statements, which, taken apart from their other statements, might seem to be too all-inclusive. But these writers presume that their hearers will interpret a particular statement by all the other statements they have made. When we do this with Christ's words in John 12:32 we soon find ourselves understanding the "all" as meaning all who are willing to respond to His drawing influence.

John the revelator foretells the second coming of Christ and declares that "every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." Rev. 6:15, 16. Note that he says "every bondman, and every free man." Yet Isaiah says that in the last great day there will be a company who will look up and rejoice. (See Isa. 25:9.) Shall we then conclude that John contradicts Isaiah? All Bible students understand that when John says "every" he means only every one of the wicked hosts in the world.

It is no more unreasonable to believe that there may be limitations to the "all" in the phrase, "All that are in the graves shall hear his voice," than in the "all" of John 12:32, or the "every" of Revelation 6:15. Christ divides the resurrected into two groups: (1) "they that have done good," and (2) "they that have done evil." We think that everyone will admit that there are some who have lived and died who have done neither good nor evil. For example, Moses wrote of the "little ones" and "children" of the rebellious Israelites, that they "had no knowledge between good and evil." Deut. 1:39. Then there are those who are mentally defective. To the list of those who have "no knowledge between good and evil" Mrs. White simply adds the slave who has been "kept in ignorance."

When the question is raised, What will God do finally with all those who have had no knowledge between good and evil? we are immediately plunged into deep theological discussion. Even the wisest of men have no clear answer on this question, which is a most difficult one. Most theologians are content to answer it by voicing the question asked in the Scriptures: "Shall

not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Mrs. White's statement is simply a commentary on that ancient question, a commentary which does not run contrary to Scripture.

### Charge Number 2

A second, and closely related charge, may be stated thus:

**Mrs. White did not expect that slavery would be abolished, for she declared that the slave masters would suffer the seven last plagues. "The slave-holders are all dead. Will they be resurrected to pass through the seven last plagues?" Quite evidently she could not see a little time ahead to the day when slavery would be abolished in the United States and in all the world.**

This charge is based on the words of Mrs. White that follow immediately the passage already quoted, as will be evident:

"He [God] lets him [the ignorant slave] be as though he had not been; while the master has to suffer the seven last plagues, and then come up in the second resurrection, and suffer the second, most awful death. Then the wrath of God will be appeased."

A further statement by Mrs. White, which was made in 1847, may possibly also serve as a basis for this charge:

"Then commenced the jubilee, when the land should rest. I saw the pious slave rise in triumph and victory, and shake off the chains that bound him, while his wicked master was in confusion, and knew not what to do."—Broadside, *A Vision*, Topsham, Maine, April 7, 1847.\*

The Bible prophets provide us with many illustrations of scenes, separated by greater or less periods of time, which seem to be merged together so that we need to read additional statements in the Bible in order to separate the two or more parts. Isaiah prophesied of the work that Christ would do at His first advent. Christ read from the prophecy in Isaiah 61 and added: "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." Luke 4:21. But He stopped short in the middle of what appears in Isaiah to be a continuing passage. Isaiah 61:2 reads: "To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn." Why did He stop before the phrase: "and the

\* See also *A Word to the "Little Flock,"* p. 20; *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 1, p. 206; *Early Writings*, p. 35.