

IS THERE A SELF-PROPAGATING GOSPEL?

By Paul Penno Jr.

February 1, 2012

- We work hard, energetically to proclaim the gospel.
- But is there a yet-untried method of soul-winning?
- Not merely by pushing electronic buttons, but that has such a built-in power pack that common people who believe the message can watch conversions take place?

If you attend church, you've heard the pleas: "Do more, work harder, win souls! Look how the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons go door to door; why don't we do more?"

In one large Conference in North America, the cost of each baptism in Net-96 was estimated at \$10,000. Of course, the eternal salvation of one soul cannot be computed in dollars. But is this what Jesus had in mind when He said, "Go ye . . ." Is there a more effective way to finish the "great gospel commission"?

Who doesn't long to see far greater efficiency in soul-winning?

When one reads the letters of the apostles in the New Testament, there seems to be little pressure put upon the, early Christians. Paul commends rather than prods the Thessalonian Christians: "Not only did the message about the Lord go out from you throughout Macedonia and Achaia, but the news about your faith in God has gone everywhere. *There is nothing, then, that we need to say*" (1

Thess. 1:8, GNB). An evangelist's or church administrator's dream! No need for high-pressure promotion.

Was the Gospel of the Thessalonians Self-propagating?

It seems that it did have its own built-in power pack. It motivated people even to the point of being thought extravagantly zealous: "If we are out of our mind . . . [or] in our right mind, . . . Christ's love [*agape*] compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves" (2 Cor. 5:13-15, NIV).

In other words, they sensed a motivation fueled by something special they saw in the sacrifice of Christ. Once you grasped what had happened, you just couldn't sit still. The tongue-tied had to talk, and the timid grew bold (Isa. 32:4; Zech. 12:8). You saw the Messiah to be the second Adam; He died "for all." That meant—if He had not died, *you would be dead*. Since He became corporately one with the human race, "all died" in Him; from now on nobody *could* go on "living for themselves." You could no longer think that you belonged to yourself, or that anything you possessed was yours. With one divine sword-stroke, the Gordian knot of human self-centered concern was cut. The cross did it.

A new purpose for living took over: if you believed this self-propagating gospel, you just *had* to live "for Him who died" for you, and it wasn't fear or hope-of-reward that moved you. Materialism, sensuality, all self-centered motivations, were transcended by this phenomenal new reason for living. You saw

yourself eternally in debt to the Son of God. And the idea caught on, because there were honest hearts everywhere. Jews and Gentiles came out of nowhere, ready to respond.

This understanding of what the cross meant first burst on people's minds at Pentecost. "You denied the Holy One and the just," cried Peter." "You . . . killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. . . . Repent therefore and be converted" (Acts 3:14, 15). And they *did* repent, and they were converted. "The truth in *agape*" compelled multitudes to respond—3000 in one day.

This was "the former rain." Today we await "the latter rain." That self-propagating gospel at Pentecost accompanied Christ's beginning work in heaven as High Priest. Now His closing work in the cosmic Day of Atonement will be accompanied by a fully developed "everlasting gospel" that will "lighten the earth with glory." The same cross-exalting motivation will fuel that final burst of soul-winning.

Says John in Revelation: "I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, 'Babylon the great is fallen.' . . . And I heard another voice from heaven saying, 'Come out of her, my people . . .'" (18:1-4). The call will be accompanied by a second-time-in-history power—the first, at Pentecost.

Ellen White in vision witnessed what will happen this second time around: "The light that was shed upon the waiting ones penetrated everywhere, and those in the churches who had any light . . . obeyed

the call. . . . A *compelling* power moved the honest [compare that with the word "compels" above in 2 Corinthians 5:14]. . . .

"Servants of God, endowed with power from on high, with their faces lighted up, and shining with holy consecration, went forth to proclaim the message from heaven. Souls that were scattered all through the religious bodies answered to the call, and the precious were hurried out of the doomed churches, as Lot was hurried out of Sodom before her destruction."¹

In 1888 the Lord "sent" us "the beginning" of that message. Ellen White called it "the light which will lighten the earth with its glory?" Had it been accepted, "then the strong, clear light of that other angel who comes down from heaven having great power, *would* have filled the earth with his glory . . . Heavenly messengers have grieved, impatient at the delay. . . . Angels of heaven were seeking to communicate through human agencies justification by faith, the righteousness of Christ." "The loud cry of the third angel has already begun in the revelation of the righteousness of Christ."²

Shall the Seventh-day Adventist Church disregard the authenticated "beginning" of that final message, which was "in a great degree" rejected and "kept away from the world"?³

¹ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, pp. 278, 279, emphasis added.

² *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, pp. 673, 1070-1073, emphasis supplied.

³ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 234, 235

That same writer tells how the first Pentecost relates to the future second one: “A work is to be accomplished in the earth similar to that which took place at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the days of the early disciples, when they preached Jesus and Him crucified. Many will be converted in a day; for the message will go with power. . . . The theme that attracts the heart of the sinner is Christ, and Him crucified. On the cross of Calvary, Jesus stands revealed to the world in unparalleled love [agape]. Present Him thus to the hungry multitudes, and the light of His love will win men from darkness to light, from transgression to obedience and true holiness. Beholding Jesus upon the cross of Calvary arouses the conscience to the heinous character of sin as nothing else can do.”⁴

**What Feature of the Message
Constitutes its Self-propagating,
“Compelling” Power?**

It meets exactly the heart-longing of every honest-hearted soul in “Babylon” (and there are many!), so that “the truth is seen in its clearness, and the honest children of God sever the bands which have held them. Family connections, church relations, are powerless to stay them now. Truth is more precious than all besides. Notwithstanding the agencies combined against the truth, a large number [will] take their stand upon the Lord’s side.”⁵

Several outstanding truths will be featured in that final message:

⁴ *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, pp. 1073, 1074

⁵ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 612

(1) A clearer view of what happened on the cross. This is reasonable, for if the sacrifice of the cross was the heart of “the former rain” message of Pentecost, it must also be the heart of “the latter rain” message when it finally comes. It will not be “doctrine #29” but an illumination that will permeate or vitalize all “28” present doctrines.

The central theme of the Book of Revelation (emphasized twenty-five times) is Christ’s role as “the Lamb.” While a healthy fear will of course be a part of the final message, its *real* motivation that will grip people’s hearts and “compel” them to action will be “the unparalleled love of Christ.” “Those who eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of God will bring from the books of Daniel and Revelation truth that is inspired by the Holy Spirit. They will start into action forces that *cannot be repressed*.”⁶

Only a self-propagating message of Good News can overcome all those “forces” that now “repress” honest-hearted souls “bound” in Babylon. Laity and youth will join heart-to-heart with professionals (whose “bright lights” have not gone out) in communicating the explosive, liberating Good News. Their zeal will not be pressured by high-tech promotion, but by that heart-melting appreciation of what it cost “the Lamb” to save sinners such as we.

(2) The phrase “the unparalleled love of Christ” suggests how “the Lamb” will be the central feature of the prophecies. The extent of Christ’s sacrifice will be shown in the kind of death He died—the equivalent of the second death, the

⁶ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 116.

ultimate one of all lost mankind. But all who believe the natural immortality of the soul are fog bound, unable to grasp this unique idea of love (*agape*). It's virtually absent from Roman Catholic and popular Protestant (even Evangelical) thought. The idea finds some expression in Ellen White's writings, but has never been featured generally in our ministry to the public. The Bible evidence suggests:

(a) The Father "laid on [Christ] the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6). The implications are staggering: the "all" is the human race. Therefore, He does not lay that iniquity upon *them*.

(b) Instead of imputing the "trespasses" of the human race onto themselves, He imputed those onto Christ: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them" (2 Cor. 5:19). Thus He treats "all men" with unmerited kindness, with grace as though they had never sinned (Titus 2:11). If this were not true, not one could exist.

(c) The reason for this grace is that Christ "tasted death [the second] for everyone" (Heb. 2:9). Scripture cannot be broken: *the full debt was paid for every sinner who has ever lived*. Therefore the only reason any one can be lost at last is his/her unbelief. The rejecter has taken that debt back upon himself. "He that believeth not is condemned. . . . This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light" (John 3:18, 19). God does not put sinners in double jeopardy. They do it to themselves.

(d) "Through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life"

(Rom. 5:18). Some versions render it, "a judicial verdict . . . of acquittal . . . for all men."

(e) This "gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ abounded to [the] many," the Greek expression that means "to everyone" (vs. 15).

(f) Not only did Christ's "grace . . . much more abound" than the sin of the entire human race, it brought with it a "gift" so that there are two entities: "grace" and its "gift" that it gives (vss. 20, 15, 16; the word "offers" is not there).

(g) That "gift" is justification which "came upon all men," like "the grace that encircles the world with an atmosphere as real as the air which circulates around the globe"⁷ (vs. 18). The miracle is not magic; the truth penetrates the heart. The sinner grasps the horror of the hell from which he has been delivered, so that he senses how he is "alive from the dead," a death that would be eternal (Rom. 6:13). No joy can be deep and lasting which has not been built upon that foundation of joyous contrition. "If one died for all, then all died." *You die*, so that now you say, "I am crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20). The identity is real, not theoretical. You sense that every breath you draw, every meal you eat, is the purchase of His blood. All sadness at the thought of sacrifice for Him is forgotten; you are like a dungeon-bound, death-row prisoner set free into the sunshine. You know what Paul meant, "God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14).

⁷ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 68

(h) Thus what Christ accomplished was the reversal of the judicial “condemnation” that the first Adam brought on the entire human race. It is a “judicial . . . verdict . . . of acquittal” on the same human race (vs. 16, NEB). “He who comes down from heaven . . . gives life *unto the world*. . . . The bread that I will give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life *of the world*” (John 6:33, 51).

(i) That “life” is more than the physical existence which the animals have. “I am come that they may have life, . . . more abundantly” (John 10:10). What happiness believers or unbelievers have ever enjoyed is the result of His sacrifice: “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows . . . The chastisement of our peace was upon Him” (Isa. 53:4, 5). Think of what “grief,” “sorrow,” and “chastisement” you have been spared! No one will then have to pressure you into giving yourself to Jesus, or sacrificing for His sake.

(j) The message of Pentecost declared forgiveness for the entire human race, particularly for the involvement of “all” in the murder of the Son of God. “All” are “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:6). When the Father declared at the baptism of Christ, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,” He was embracing the entire human race “in Him” (Matt. 3:17).⁸

⁸ “And the word that was spoken to Jesus at the Jordan, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,’ embraces humanity. God spoke to Jesus as our representative. With all our sins and weaknesses, we are not cast aside as worthless. ‘He hath made us accepted in

(3) The same joy that flooded the hearts of Thessalonian lay members will flood hearts again. The Father Himself has welcomed you in the person of His Son! No one can hold you back from telling someone else. As with Paul, “the *agape* of Christ compels” you.

(4) But not all Christians have as yet seen this light. Christ’s “yoke” still seems hard, and His “burden” heavy. They cannot grasp what happened on the cross. Two principal theories that confuse the message are very popular:

Strict Calvinism declares that Christ purchased salvation only for a certain group of people, “the elect,” but that no atonement has been made for any others. It insists that Christ’s death is efficacious (which is true), but that His grace is “irresistible” (which is not true). Being half true and half false, double-predestination Calvinism is a pathetically distorted teaching which makes personal faith unnecessary.

“Calvinism” holds that if all for whom Christ died are not eternally saved, then God is defeated and His sovereignty is denied.⁹ Again, Charles

the Beloved.’ Eph. 1:6.” Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 113.

⁹ “Christ’s redeeming work was intended to save the elect only and actually secured salvation for them” (David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, *The Five Points of Calvinism Defined, Defended, Documented* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1963, p. 17).

“Calvinism insists that the atonement saves all whom it was intended to save” [that is, only the elect] (R. B. Kuiper, *For Whom Did Christ Die?* Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959, p. 73).

Spurgeon is half right and half wrong: “If Christ has died for you, you can never be lost. God will not punish twice for one thing. If God punished Christ for your sins, He will not punish you.”¹⁰ But Spurgeon was blinded to the full truth of righteousness by faith. On the next page, Boettner mistakenly insists, “Universal redemption means universal salvation.” This doctrine does not recognize the possibility that the sinner is free to refuse what has already been given him “in Christ.”

“The righteousness of Christ did not make the salvation of men merely possible, it secured the actual [eternal] salvation of those for whom He wrought [that is, whether they believe or not]” (Charles Hodge, in Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, p. 155), “Surely those who are not saved are not those for whom [Christ) died” (*The Atonement*, Eerdmans, 1953, p. 408).

“God is good and benevolent to all the children of men, but . . . He loves only the elect” (Kuiper, p. 68).

“To tell the Christ-rejecter that God loves him is to cauterize his conscience, as well as to afford him a sense of security in his sins. The fact is that the love of God is a truth for the saints only, and to present it to the enemies of God is to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs” (Arthur W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, Cleveland: Cleveland Bible Truth Depot, 1930, p. 246. References quoted in *The Death Christ Died*, by Robert P. Lightner, Kregel, 1998).

Calvinism is wrong in that it fails to recognize that God has given man the power of choice to reject what Christ has accomplished. The logical conclusion of this failure is to force themselves to say that God does not love sinners! Calvinism needs the “most precious message” that the Lord “sent” to Seventh-day Adventists in the 1888 era.

¹⁰ Cited by Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, p. 155).

Calvinism provoked a rebuttal known as Arminianism. It teaches that Christ died for all men, but His death does no one any good until or unless he believes, accepts Christ, or in some way takes the initiative for his own personal salvation. This doctrine appears on the surface to have solved the problem posed by Calvinism, but it also falls short of the full truth that Scripture teaches. Its logical import is that the believer's salvation is due to his own initiative, which carries the idea of merit gained by his own sanctified good works of obedience. The doctrine is plausible and is very popular, but it subtly supports the lukewarmness of Laodicea: By insisting that the sacrifice of Christ does no one any good unless he believes, it undercuts the appeal of the gospel by representing the sacrifice of Christ as ineffective for the great majority of earth's inhabitants. Salvation is presented to the sinner not as a *gift* (which Scripture teaches it is), but as only an *offer* (Scripture says it's more than that).

The Seventh-day Adventist idea of the cleansing of the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement made it possible for Jones and Waggoner to see that Christ's sacrifice did accomplish the salvation of the world for whom He died, but also made clear the reason why Universalism is false:

“The faith of Christ must bring the righteousness of God, because the possession of that faith is the possession of the Lord himself. This faith is dealt to every man, even as Christ gave himself to every man. Do you ask what then can prevent every man from being saved? The answer is, Nothing, except the fact that all men will not keep the faith. If all

would keep all that God gives them, all would be saved.”¹¹

“Not only is everything that is lost in Adam restored in Christ, but ‘much more.’ . . . The life of which we are made partakers in Christ is much stronger for righteousness than the life which we received from Adam is for unrighteousness. God does not do things by halves. He gives ‘abundance of grace.’”¹²

“There is no exception here [Rom. 5:16-18]. As the condemnation [the second death] came upon all, so the justification comes upon all. Christ has tasted death [obviously, the second] for every man, He has given himself for all. Nay, he has given himself to every man. The free gift has come upon all. The fact that it is a free gift is evidence that there is no exception. If it came upon only those who have some special qualification, then it would not be a free gift.

“It is a fact, therefore, plainly stated in the Bible, that the gift of righteousness and life in Christ has come to every man on earth. There is not the slightest reason why every man that has ever lived should not be saved unto eternal life, except that they would not have it. So many spurn the gift offered so freely . . . Death has passed upon all men, because all have sinned, and the gift of righteousness has come to all men in the life of Christ.”¹³

¹¹ *Waggoner on Romans*, p. 69.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 100.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 101, 102.

“God has wrought out salvation for every man, and has given it to him, but the majority spurn it and throw it away. The judgment will reveal the fact that full salvation was given [not merely offered] to every man and that the lost have deliberately thrown away their birthright possession.”¹⁴

Waggoner then expresses the evangelism potential in this message: “Thousands will rejoice at the news.”¹⁵

Try giving it to someone!

Does Your Switch Turn The Lights On, Or Off?

Perhaps you think that the switch in your house turns the electricity on. Wrong! Your electricity is turned on at the power house, and it is flooding your house, wires running all over, ready to run your stove, lights, vacuum cleaner, whatever, 24 hours a day. Your switch turns it off, otherwise your lights would be on all the time!

Likewise, your decision to follow Christ is not what turns His salvation on; He has already given you the gift of His salvation. That’s what John 3:16 is saying; it is your unbelief that turns the gift off. The message that was “sent” to us in 1888 is better Good News than we have been in the habit of thinking. Our salvation is 100% due to God’s initiative, not to our own in any way. But we let Him save us; by repentance, we stop turning the switch off! “The blessings of salvation are for every soul. Nothing but his own choice can prevent any man

¹⁴ E. J. Waggoner, *The Glad Tidings*, pp. 13, 14.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

from becoming a partaker of the promise in Christ
by the gospel.”¹⁶

¹⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 403.