

THE PLAN OF SALVATION

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THE law of love is the foundation of God's government, and the service of love the only service acceptable to Heaven. God has granted freedom of will to all, endowed men with capacity to appreciate His character, and therefore with ability to love Him, and to choose His service. So long as all created beings worshipped God, there was harmony throughout the universe. While love to God was supreme, love to others abounded. There was no transgression of the law, which is the transcript of God's character, and no note of discord jarred the celestial harmonies.

But known unto God are all his works, and from eternal ages the covenant of grace (unmerited favor) existed in the mind of God. It is called the everlasting covenant; for the plan of salvation was not conceived after the fall of man, but it was that which was "kept in silence through times eternal, but now is manifested and by the Scriptures of the prophets according to the commandment of the eternal God, is made known unto all the nations unto obedience of faith."

The purpose and plan of grace existed from all eternity. Before the foundation of the world, it was according to the determinate counsel of God that man should be created and endowed with power to do the Divine will. The defection of man, with all its consequences, was not hidden from the Omnipotent. Redemption was not an after-thought,

a plan formulated after the fall of Adam, but an eternal purpose, suffered to be wrought out for the blessing, not only of this atom of a world, but for the good of all the worlds that God had created.

Before Him who ruleth in the heavens the mysteries of the past and future are alike outspread, and God sees, beyond the woe and darkness and ruin that sin has wrought, the outworking of His purpose of love and blessing. Though clouds and darkness are round about Him, righteousness and judgment are the foundation of His throne.

Through creation and redemption, through nature and through Christ, the glories of the Divine character are revealed. By the marvellous display of His love in giving "His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life," the character of God is revealed to the intelligences of the universe. Through Christ, our Heavenly Father is made known as the God of love.

When man sinned, all Heaven was filled with sorrow; for through yielding to temptation, man became the enemy of God, a partaker of the Satanic nature. The image of God in which he had been created was marred and distorted. The character of man was out of harmony with the character of God; for through sin man became carnal, and "the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." To the angels there seemed to be no way of escape for the transgressor. They ceased their songs of praise, and throughout the heavenly courts

there was mourning for the ruin that sin had wrought. Out of harmony with the nature of God, unyielding to the claims of His law, naught but destruction was before the human race. Since the Divine law is as changeless as the character of God, there could be no hope for man unless some way could be devised whereby his transgression might be pardoned, his nature renewed, and his spirit restored to reflect the image of God. Divine love had conceived such a plan. It was through Satan's misrepresentation of God's character that man was led to doubt the reality of His {330} love, and came to look upon God as his enemy. As Satan had done in heaven, so he did on earth; he declared God's government unjust, the restrictions of His law unnecessary, and bade men, as he had angels, to throw aside the yoke and let the dictates of their own nature be their only guide and law. He promised liberty; but as he himself is the servant of corruption, he brought the race into bondage to sin, misery, and death. He represented God as claiming all, and giving nothing; as requiring men's service for His own glory, but denying Himself nothing for man's good.

In the work of creation, Christ was with God. He was one with God, equal with Him,—the brightness of His glory, the express image of His person, the representative of the Father. He alone, the Creator of man, could be his Saviour. No angel of heaven could reveal the Father to the sinner, and win him back to allegiance to God. But Christ could manifest the Father's love; for God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. Christ could be the "day's

man" between a holy God and lost humanity,—one who could "lay His hand upon us both." None but Christ could redeem man from the curse of the law. He proposed to take upon Himself the guilt and shame of sin,—sin, so offensive in the sight of God that it would necessitate separation from His Father. Christ proposed to reach to the depths of man's degradation and woe, and restore the repenting, believing soul to harmony with God. Christ, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, offered Himself as a sacrifice and substitute for the fallen sons of Adam, though in this offering all Heaven was involved in infinite sacrifice. But the Father so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that through His smitten heart a channel might be found for the outflowing of Infinite love for fallen man. Man had become so degraded by sin, his nature so perverted by evil, that it was impossible for him of himself to come into harmony with Him whose nature is purity and love. But Christ redeemed the sinner from the condemnation of the law, and imparted Divine power, that, through man's co-operation, the transgressor could be restored to his lost estate.

The grace of Christ alone could change the heart of stone to a heart of flesh, make it alive unto God, and transform the character, so that a degraded child of sin might become a child of God, an heir of heaven. Man had no power to justify the soul, to sanctify the heart. Moral disease could be healed only through the power of the great Physician. The highest gift of Heaven, even the only begotten of

the Father, full of grace and truth, was able to redeem the lost.

The only hope for the fallen race was found in becoming reconciled to God. Satan had so misrepresented God that man had no true conception of the Divine character. Christ came to the world, and, in carrying out the plan of salvation, revealed to man that “God is love.”¹

“JESUS answered and said, I thank Thee, O Father, the Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and has revealed them unto babes.” The Lord Jesus presented the heavenly treasures to the Jewish people, but many of them would not receive them. The educated men thought themselves too wise to need instruction, too righteous to need salvation, too well honored to need the honour that Jesus would confer upon them in making them laborers together with God. In the scribes, Pharisees, and rulers, Jesus found not the bottles for his new wine. He was obliged to turn from them to humble men, whose hearts were not filled with envy, covetousness, and self-righteousness. The lowly fishermen obeyed the call of the divine Teacher, while the scribes and Pharisees refused to become converted.

The disciples that Jesus called were uneducated, and were far from being perfect in character when Jesus united them with Himself; but they were willing to learn from the greatest Teacher the world ever knew. They were truly converted men, and

¹ Ellen G. White, “The Plan of Salvation,” *The Present Truth* 9, 21 (August 24, 1893), pp. 329-330.

became the new bottles into which Jesus could pour the new wine of His kingdom. But though they were converted to Christ, yet, because of their limited earthly comprehension—the result of the teaching they had had from the Jews—they were unable fully to understand the spiritual nature of the truth He could impart. The burden of His instruction was the necessity of His followers having pure and holy hearts, for holiness alone would fit them to become subjects of His heavenly kingdom.

The Divine Sower scattered grains of precious seed, which we cannot see until a skilful labourer, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, gathers them together and presents them to us as a complete system of truth, unfolding the depths of Divine love. For all ages Jesus, the Author of truth, through prophets and people, had presented truth upon truth to the Jews, from the pillar of cloud and fire. But the truth He had given had become mingled with error, and it was necessary to separate from the companionship of heresy and evil. It was necessary to readjust it in the framework of the gospel, in order that it might shine forth in its original luster and illuminate the moral darkness of the world. Wherever He found a gem of truth that had been lost from its setting, or had been marred with error, He reset it, and stamped upon it the signature of Jehovah. He proved Himself to be the word and the wisdom of God.

The commonplace matters of time and earth had engrossed the minds of the people at the time of Christ, just as Satan had designed that they should. Sin had expelled from the heart the love of God,

and instead of the love of God there was found in the heart the love of the world, the love of sinful indulgence of evil passions. Christ alone could adjust the claims between heaven and earth. Man's vision had become blinded, because he did not keep in view the spiritual and eternal world. But the kind of teaching that Christ gave to the world did not harmonize with the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees; for their religion consisted in a round of forms and ceremonies, and the offering of sacrifices, which had been designed by Christ to keep His sacrifice in mind, had lost its significance. Unless the sacrifices were offered in faith, accompanied with contrition and humility, they were valueless in the eyes of God, and even an abomination to Him. God repeatedly had declared that the sacrifices acceptable to Him were a broken and a contrite heart. He said, "The Lord is {57} nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."

In Christ's perfection of character was found the ransom for the sinner, the way in which the rebel against God might be reconciled to God. Those who will submit to the drawing power of Christ, may be justified by a just God. Jesus is the ladder which Jacob saw. The base of this ladder rests upon the earth, in the human nature of our Lord, and its top reaches the throne of God, in His Divinity. The light of the glory of God illuminates the whole ladder, and that light shines into every believing heart, enlightening, strengthening, encouraging. Angels of shining brightness ascend and descend upon this ladder, and minister to those who shall be heirs of

salvation. Through the merit of Christ, intercourse between heaven and earth has been opened, and the system of sacrifices instituted at Adam's fall had no virtue except as they showed forth the great Mediator between God and man. Jesus was the true Sacrifice, who was to die for man's transgression. The sacrifice of Cain was rejected because it was not an offering that acknowledged the sacrifice of Christ for the sins of the world. In Cain's offering there was no confession of sin, no acknowledgment that he was in need of a Saviour. To-day there are thousands and tens of thousands who are making the same mistake as did Cain, and as did the Pharisees in the days of Christ. They are trusting in self, and depending upon their own wisdom, and do not realize their own spiritual poverty. To them comes the Laodicean message: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would that thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

As in the days of Christ, the Pharisees do not know their own spiritual destitution. The Lord says, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see." Faith and love are the gold tried in the fire. But with the Pharisees the gold has become dim, and the rich treasure has

been lost. To them it is said: "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."

But while these messages of reproof are addressed to those who have backslidden, and who have left their first love, yet He who knows all things has given us this precious promise: "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them." One who has been anointed with the spirit of wisdom and understanding, is able to lead every soul who will submit to be led, and He has trodden every step of the way before us. "If any man lack wisdom," let him lean upon his fellow-man?—No; "let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not."

In the person and work of Christ the holiness of God is revealed; for Christ came to reveal the Father. Satan had cast his shadow athwart the pathway of humanity, and misrepresented the character of God. The controversy of Satan did not end when he was expelled from the courts of heaven. He hated Christ for His position in the courts of God, and he hated Him the more when he himself was dethroned. He hated Him when He came to a ruined world, to show mercy and manifest His compassion toward a race of sinners. Through the chief priests and Pharisees the hatred

of Satan was manifested toward the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.²

² Ellen G. White, "Truth Revealed to the Humble," *The Present Truth* 10, 4 (January 25, 1894), pp. 56-57.