

# THE WRECK THAT WAS CONVERTED<sup>1</sup>

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A preacher needed a good car, but he didn't have the money to buy a nice one. Then he discovered that a government agency had wrecked their brand new blue Volkswagen sedan. It had turned over on the road. It looked awful! The top was bashed in, the windshield was broken, the left door was bent out of shape, the left front fender was mangled; and the front wheel was bent in.

But they were selling the wreck cheap, so he bought it. It was a new car. He welded a new top on. He bought a second-hand door and fender and wheel and put them on. Then he painted the car the same blue it was when it was new. When finished, you couldn't tell it from a new VW just off the showroom floor. And of course the engine and everything was new. It ran perfectly.

The wreck was "converted" to be a nearly new VW again. You would not have laughed at him if you had seen him driving it. You would have thought he was driving a new car! He enjoyed driving that VW more than if he had had the money to put down to buy a brand new one from the factory. He had restored this one! That made it special for him.

Don't ever think that anybody is a wreck that can't be "converted." He felt just a little bit proud of himself for restoring that banged up VW. Then he

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<sup>1</sup> "At the Cross" 163; Mark 14:3-9; "Chief of Sinners Though I Be" 295.

got to thinking about how Jesus rebuilds ruined people.

It's what He loves to do most. Of course He loves sinless angels who have never fallen into sin like we humans have done. But He has a special love for some human being like you and me who were lost, someone who made a mess of his life, maybe became an alcoholic or a drug addict or even a criminal, someone who had lost all hope and thought he was doomed to die forever as a wreck.

When such a person hears the good news of the gospel of Jesus and his heart takes hold of it, a change comes over that person from top to bottom. People who saw that alcoholic lying in the gutter may have thought, "There's a hopeless person!" but they are surprised when that person is delivered from the sins and addictions that have held him, and becomes a new and free person "in Christ Jesus."

Jesus tells us that when the news is sent to Heaven of such a transformation, all the holy angels break out into song, they are so happy. It's like when the Good Shepherd finally found His sheep that was lost. He tells His friends, "'Let us celebrate!' In the same way, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner that repents than over ninety-nine respectable people who do not need to repent" (Luke 15:4-7).

Deep guilt was created in the human soul in the Garden of Eden when our first parents fell. It is as true of us today as it was for Adam, for "in Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15:22). All of us have repeated Adam's fall (Rom. 5:12).

Anyone who turns away from Him wrecks his life more than that VW was wrecked. Stay out of the world's "junkyard."

The first result of this guilt was shame: "Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden" (Gen. 3:8).

The second evidence was fear: "And . . . Adam . . . said, I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself" (vss. 9, 10).

The third consequence was the erection of a barrier creating an unconscious condition. Adam found himself unable to realize his guilt and confess it. Thus he repressed it immediately. He blamed it all on Eve: "And the man said, The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat" (vs. 12). The guilty pair would have died then and there had they been conscious of the full extent of their guilt, for "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).

When the lost at last fully grasp the enormity of their guilt, they will suffer the second death in fulfillment of the Lord's warning to Adam and Eve that when they should sin, "thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). We need to recognize that the guilt of sin brings its own built-in penalty of eternal death, and the very fact that our physical life is extended through probationary time is prime evidence of the existence of an unconscious mechanism of repression which had its origin in Eden.

This "thou knowest not" condition was therefore a blessing, for it made continued life possible. God's purpose of course was to give man an opportunity to learn repentance and faith in a Saviour.

The fourth consequence was the development of an *enmity* against God: “The woman which *Thou* gavest to be with me. . . .” Adam felt that the trouble was really God’s fault! Eve shared this newly erected unconscious barrier in that she also could not accept and confess her own guilt any more easily: “The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat” (Gen. 3:13).

Ever since that first sin in the Garden, mankind have been repeating the tragic pattern. Unless man has faith in a divine Saviour who bears the full burden of his guilt, a full realization of guilt kills him. Seen in this light, it is merciful that we do not realize our depth of sin and guilt. This condition of “thou knowest not” could go on forever and ever, except that there must come a second advent of Christ and there must come an end to sin. Hence the Laodicean message!

When Adam and Eve “hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God,” they did so because they were hiding from themselves as well. Their new conviction of guilt was naturally unwelcome to their knowledge. We cannot overestimate the traumatic effect of this original sin and guilt upon their human souls. They just could not face themselves. For some mysterious reason they felt naked in front of each other and before God. They were different. “The Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day” had suddenly become to them an unwelcome interloper. They wished He would leave them alone. His presence awakened unpleasant convictions that they would fain forget.

Jesus says that “anyone who hates Me loves death” (Prov. 8:36). Can you imagine that?

That is what Jesus has actually saved you and me from. Take a deep breath; that is proof that Jesus has saved you from that second death because if He had not saved us from it, we would all be dead right now in it. So don’t ever think that Jesus has done nothing for you!

All this means that God intends that the life you and I have today shall be the beginning of everlasting life. And it will be so, if we “walk with Jesus.” He is not “I-want-to-be-your-Savior.” He is your Savior! Now don’t push Him away.

People can catch hold of big ideas! When we think of what Jesus has saved us from, we want to say the biggest “Thank You” we can think of, because He could never have saved us this way unless He had already died our second death for us. And that’s just what He did when He died on His cross. The death He died was hell itself, the real thing.

Many people don’t see this, and that’s why they don’t give themselves to Jesus to live for Him. But now you do see it, don’t you?

Yes, you might see ninety-nine VW “bugs” going by on the highway every day; so what? But if you had saved one from the horror of being left in the dreary junkyard forever! That one was special.

Think of how nice it looked and how perfectly it ran when it was finished! Yes, telling the story makes one happy. And Jesus will tell everybody forever how happy He is that He saved you and me from a far worse “junkyard.”

or me. So everybody looks forward to seeing Him in person when He comes the second time. But when we do see Him we will thank Him, because He has already saved us from death. But that's not the ordinary kind of death that He has saved us from. It's not the death that has happened when there's a funeral.

Jesus tells us that a funeral isn't about the real thing. When a person dies now, he simply goes to sleep until God's resurrection day, when He will come up again. Jesus said that God "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). The death that people die now is not what that word "perish" means. When people die now it's just like when at night you say, "Good night, see you in the morning."

There is another kind of death—that's what the Bible says is "the second death" (Rev. 2:11; 20:14). And that is what it means to "perish." At the end of the great "thousand years" that are yet to come, the wicked people will be judged, and they will "perish" in the lake of fire. No resurrection from that—ever. They will just be gone forever. That's what "hell" will be.

It's not because God will be extra angry with them; He does not hate them. He still pities them. But they themselves have made their choice to "perish." God won't force them to change their minds. They don't want to live forever in God's kingdom. They actually want to be separate from Him and separate from His kingdom. And so, God must give them what they really want. It sounds crazy, and it is, but

Thus it has been with man ever since. "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind" (Rom. 1:28).

The knowledge of God was repressed because it awakened the intolerable sense of guilt from which man longed to escape. Thus it was driven into deep hiding. This function of repression as consequent on guilt is alluded to by Paul: "We see divine retribution revealed from heaven and falling upon all the godless wickedness of men. In their wickedness *they are stifling the truth*. For all that may be known of God by men lies plain before their eyes; indeed God Himself has disclosed it to them. . . . But all their thinking has ended in futility, and their misguided minds are plunged in darkness" (Rom. 1:18-21 NEB, emphasis added).

"Yes," someone says, "but all this refers to the wicked. They have these problems, not we. We are born-again Christians and we don't have any problem with repressed guilt as they do. The blood of Jesus Christ has already cleansed us from all this!" But our Lord, the "Faithful and True Witness," says that we too have a problem with unknown sin: "Thou knowest not" your true condition, He says. Something has delayed the coming of the Lord and held up the Loud Cry for decades in spite of the fact that we are such sincere, born-again Christians!

The sinful Adam in the Garden had a problem with "enmity with God." Could we, nearly six thousand years away from him, have the root of the same problem and not be aware of it? "The carnal mind is enmity against God," says Paul (Rom. 8:7). Until

the people of God are truly ready for the sealing and the close of probation, they most certainly do have a problem. If we keep going into our graves as have countless generations before us ever since Eden, we are continually taking our problem with us to the grave. Not until the problem is solved can God's people possibly be prepared to "stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator" (GC 425). Not until there is "a special work of purification, of putting away of sin among God's people upon earth," can we assume that alienation is really overcome.

Latent "enmity against God" is the root of the problem. This is what has created a need for a "final atonement." But we just don't see it. It is an unconscious sin. We are like our beloved brother Peter. Years after his baptism and his ordination to the ministry and after years of schooling under Christ Himself, Peter did not know or understand his own hidden motivations:

"When Peter said he would follow his Lord to prison and to death, he meant it, every word of it; but he did not know himself. Hidden in his heart were elements of evil that circumstances would fan into life. Unless he was made conscious of his danger, these would prove his eternal ruin. The Saviour saw in him a self-love and assurance that would overbear even his love for Christ. . . . Christ's solemn warning was a call to heart searching."<sup>2</sup>

Could words more plainly say that Peter's problem lay in his unknown heart? As our Saviour beholds

20:22). When James and John wished to call down fire from heaven as retribution on the hapless Samaritans who had in prejudice turned Jesus away, they sincerely thought they were motivated by a righteous zeal. In a declaration parallel to the one He makes to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans, Jesus said: "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of" (Luke 9:55). Like ourselves, these godly apostles, unquestionably the best men in the world, were victims of their own unknowing. Using Ellen G. White's frequent and apt phrase, they had "changed leaders" and did not know it.

Truly, the human "heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9). Only Christ could fully know it; and what He knew finally killed Him on Calvary's cross. No merciful barrier blacked out His consciousness of our sin. He was made "to be sin for us, who knew no sin. . ." (2 Cor. 5:21).

Now, what has Jesus done for you? The Bible tells us that He is "the Savior of the world." It sounds nice to say that, but what does it mean?

We are all a part of the world, so what the Bible really says is that He has saved us. But what has He saved us from? What can you thank Jesus for?

No person in the world today has actually seen Jesus, but He is a real man, and He is also God. But for sure He is one of us and He belongs to us. The reason why we can't see Him like we see any other person is that He is much greater than any other person. Billions of people would want to see Him (and they will see Him some day soon), but it wouldn't be fair for Him to show Himself only to you

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<sup>2</sup> *The Desire of Ages*, p. 673.

time “third angel’s message” when in reality they reject the beginning of the Latter Rain and the Loud Cry. Thus, again, in 1888, “they know not what they do.”

Again, decades later, another form of self-deception threatens us. We interpret mass baptisms in Third World countries as evidence that we have accepted the once rejected Latter Rain, and that our spiritual condition is therefore satisfactory. Thus, once again we virtually boast of being “rich and increased with goods [church growth], . . . [in] need of nothing” (Rev. 3:17).

According to the Laodicean message, then, the Saviour is still praying for us, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

We have seen that it was at the Fall that this barrier of unconscious guilt began. Was there such a thing in Christ when He became man? Sent “in the likeness of sinful flesh,” did he inherit this barrier that hides from us the reality of our true guilt?

No. For Him there was no such barrier. “He knew all men and needed not that any should testify of man: for He knew what was in man” (John 2:24, 25). No one else has ever known, not the full depths. All through His ministry this painful knowledge burdened Him:

“And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? (Matt. 9:4).

“Jesus knew their thoughts. . . (Matt. 12:25) “He knew their thoughts. . . (Luke 6:8).

On several occasions we find Him telling His most faithful and trusted disciples that they did not know their own hearts. “Ye know not what ye ask” (Matt.

us now, on the eve of our last great trial, what does He see hidden in our hearts that must be “made conscious” to us?

When Peter finally denied his Lord, he did that which none of us dare repeat in the final test when “the righteous must live in the sight of a holy God without an intercessor”:

“Peter had just declared that he knew not Jesus, but he now realized with bitter grief how well his Lord knew him, and how accurately He had read his heart, the falseness of which was unknown even to himself.<sup>3</sup>

And yet Peter was a truly sincere “born-again Christian.” Thank God the final tests have not come as yet! Who of us would truly be ready?

The original sin of Adam and Eve was to the cross at Calvary what the acorn is to the oak. The seed or resentment against God is evident in Adam’s statement blaming Him. But Adam would have been horrified had he fully realized how this seed would grow into the eventual murder of the Son of God. He would have been unable to endure the full disclosure of the real dimensions of his guilt. The sacrificial victim offered in the Garden outlined for Adam the dimmest shadow of the cross, for he “saw Christ prefigured in the innocent beast suffering the penalty of his transgression of Jehovah’s law.”<sup>4</sup> And “he trembled at the thought that his sin must shed the blood of the spotless Lamb of God. This scene gave him a deeper and more vivid sense of the

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<sup>3</sup> *The Desire of Ages*, p. 713.

<sup>4</sup> *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Vol. 6, p. 1095.

greatness of his transgression, which nothing but the death of God's dear Son could expiate."<sup>5</sup> But the full consciousness of their sin and guilt was veiled from the guilty couple:

"After Adam and Eve had partaken of the forbidden fruit, they were filled with a sense of shame and terror. At first their only thought was, how to excuse their sin before God, and escape the dreaded sentence of death. . . . The spirit of self-justification originated in the father of lies, and has been exhibited by all the sons and daughters of Adam."<sup>6</sup>

It is fortunate that ever since the Fall man's guilt has remained partly unconscious because if it were fully conscious it would kill him. Hence the Creator's kindly sentence, "In the day that thou eatest thereof *dying thou shalt die*" (Gen. 2:17, mg.). Had Adam and Eve been fully conscious of their guilt in the Garden, it would have killed them outright as it killed Christ on His cross. Not until He came did anyone fully sense it. Only "He was made to be sin for us who knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21).

The real reason why we do things is often veiled from us. Because recognition of the true motive would horrify us, we "stifle the truth" as Paul says. We can believe ever so sincerely that we act out of a sense of justice when in reality we may be motivated by cruelty. We can sincerely believe that we are motivated by love and yet be driven instead by a self-centered craving for acceptance. We can believe that duty is our guide when our main

motivation is vanity. We can believe that we stand secure in "righteousness by faith" when in reality an egocentric concern is driving us to seek personal security and we are in fact "under the law," ignorant of genuine New Testament faith. We can fondly imagine that we are truly constrained by the love of Christ when we don't really comprehend "what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height" of that love and are therefore most certainly living unto ourselves, the very thing the cross was intended to make impossible "henceforth."<sup>7</sup>

These rationalizations can be very self-deceiving. And the more ardently we want to protect ourselves from coming face to face with our true motivations, the more desperately we must make ourselves believe in our mistaken assumptions. And yet the existence of this "thou knowest not" state is not something so hidden from us that we cannot recognize the problem is there. It can readily be glimpsed if we will look at ourselves candidly, and accept the Word of God sincerely and intelligently.

The ultimate self-deception, of course, is reached when God's people, and especially their spiritual leadership, believe they are motivated by a wholesome desire to preserve "the nation," but crucify the Christ from the real motivation of "enmity against God." Thus "they know not what they do" (Luke 23:32). And the sad day also comes centuries later when the leaders of God's people sincerely believe they are motivated by a desire to "stand by the old landmarks" and preserve the old-

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<sup>5</sup> *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 68.

<sup>6</sup> *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5, pp. 637, 638.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. 2 Cor. 5:14, 15.