

THE EVERLASTING COVENANT COMPLETE

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At the Questions on Doctrine 50th year Anniversary Conference it was impressed upon the listeners by the evangelical Adventists that Jesus death upon the cross is the final vindication of God's character. For us to think that God needs us in the last days to stand up for Him and live sinless lives is the height of arrogance. God doesn't need us for that. In fact, one speaker stated it this way, I have enough guilt of my own to worry about and enough sin without having the additional pressure of vindicating God in the last days.

One presenter, a professor of some stature at one of our major universities, and a son of a deceased pastor who wrote a book entitled *The Word Made Flesh* which seeks to uphold the post-fall view of the humanity of Christ, told about what life was like for him under such legalistic thinking.

He told about life as a teen and how they lived in a beach side community. The pastor father had an early model convertible which was his pride and joy. To prevent rust-out he washed and waxed it constantly. One day the teen got behind the steering wheel while the vehicle was parked in the garage in pretended that he was driving. Then he spotted some interesting buttons on the dash which he pushed. Having pulled out the lighter he saw all those concentric circles hot and brightly lit. He thought how nice that would look on the leather steer-wheel. So he pressed it into the soft material. It left a deep impression which he could not smooth out, but he thought it looked beautiful. So he proceeded to press the lighter all around the steering wheel. When he was done with that job, he thought how nice it would look to do the same throughout the leather interior of the car. When he had finished the job here were all these concentric circles deeply etched into the leather.

When all of this was discovered by the father he was asked about it, so he lied to cover it up and blamed it on someone else. The son telling the story said, my father never punished me for the damage done on his car. I was punished for lying about it.

Father said, Son, do you think that Jesus would be happy about your lying to me?

No, I don't think He would be too happy.

What do you think the servant of the Lord would say about lying?

Well, I guess she would be too pleased about that either.

Well then, neither am I pleased about your lies. The father then whipped out his belt and proceeded to give his son a sound thrashing.

Herein lies the problem with an old covenant view of the post-fall sinful nature of Christ. Christ is predominantly an example to follow, and the motivation for obedience is fear of losing heaven and not gaining the reward, and fear of destruction in hell fire. Perfection becomes a wedge that drives families apart. There is no *agape*. It's about maintaining the integrity of the family name. So don't disgrace it by behaving or doing something foolish.

We are at a crisis turning point at least for my generation, the baby boomer Adventists, over the Bible doctrine of Christian character perfection with the bride of Christ. There is a declared all-out theological war going on over this teaching. One prominent professor said it at the conference and there was open snickering at those who sought to stand up for the truth in their presentations. This same individual has recognized that the notion of Christian perfection traced back from M. L. Andreasen finds its fountain head in E. J. Waggoner, one of the messengers which the Lord sent to us as a people.

“While it is true that Waggoner never used such terminology as “Final Generation Vindication” or “Last Generation Theology” (common since the days of M. L. Andreasen),¹ his concepts were essentially the same as Andreasen’s. This March 6 sermon was very forthright that “God has left the vindication of his character to His children. He has, as it were, risked His character with men.” And how can this be? The basic theme of the balance of this sermon expounds his, by now, well-honed theme of the Christ who dwells in His

¹ Andreasen’s theology featured a strong accent on the “final atonement” which would feature the final vindication of God’s requirement of perfect obedience against the charges of the Devil that obedience to the law of God by sin affected humans is impossible. This issue has also been strongly advocated by numerous other twentieth and twenty-first century Seventh-day Adventist teachers and writers (the most notable being Herbert Douglass, Robert Wieland, Dennis Priebe, and more recently, Larry Kirkpatrick). *It seems that the father of this theology was none other than E. J. Waggoner.* Woodrow Whidden, Chapter Ten “Waggoner the Churchman: The Pernicious Path to “Separation,” in his forthcoming biography on E. J. Waggoner to be published by the Review and Herald.

believers and it is the indwelling Christ who, through His followers, vindicates the Father's character.²

There are those who say that in teaching the Bible and Spirit of prophecy truth regarding the humanity of Christ and Christian character perfection that such ones are troublers of the people. They are creating a ferment of disunity. Those who stand up for the truth are in good company. King Ahab accused Elijah of bringing all the woes of upon Israel, but he turned it back upon the king and said he was the one who brought on the trouble.

Meekness does not mean rolling over and playing dead, saying nothing in defense of the faith. In fact, Jude wrote "ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (vs. 3). Contending for the faith doesn't mean to be contentious in a spirit of antagonism toward brothers and sisters, but it does mean to earnestly struggle for the faith of Jesus. And Paul wrote to the Galatians that "there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:7, 8).

We have made the case that the post-fall humanity of Christ in which Jesus developed His faith in the Father was perfected by His death upon the cross. This paved the way for His personal sinless life to be resurrected and glorified in heaven. The promise of Christ to His 144,000 is "to him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne" (Rev. 3:21).

The problem of the delay in Christ's second coming and entering into His promised rest our inheritance of the new earth wherein we shall dwell in righteousness for ever, centers on unbelief in God's covenant. This was ancient Israel's failure to enter their promised rest. This parallel is plainly stated by the apostle in addressing the Hebrews. And these things are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the earth are come.

"For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end; while it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it

² *General Conference Bulletin*, March 6, 1897, Vol. II, pp. 54ff.

not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief” (Hebrews 3:14-19).

The same gospel promise in Christ was given to ancient Israel as is given to us. They provoked the Lord by failure to believe His everlasting covenant. Therefore they failed the test of faith and could not enter in their earthly promised land, much less the new earth.

This is truly our problem today as it was theirs. We do not understand the everlasting covenant much less do we believe it. Look at all the different views of the two covenants that are written and taught. Even the most recent scholarly productions now being picked up by seminary libraries all over the country from our prestigious university press does not have a clear presentation of the two covenants. But God sent this message to us in 1888. We had the opportunity to learn His Word from teachers who pointed to things in the Bible about the covenants that had not been seen before. To this day there is failure to submit by faith to His promise.

When God gave His covenant to Israel at Mount Sinai, it was the same everlasting covenant He had given their father Abraham. Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness. God did not ask for Abraham to promise Him anything in return. “For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise” (Gal. 3:17).

That covenant which God promised Israel was the same as His covenant with Abraham. “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey [listen] my voice indeed, and keep [cherish] my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. . . . And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD.” Ex. 19:4-5, 8. “The people did not realize the sinfulness of their own hearts, and that without Christ it was impossible for them to keep God’s law; and they readily entered into covenant with God. Feeling that they were able to establish their own righteousness, they declared, ‘All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient.’ Exodus 24:7.” (PP 371, 372).

That is the old covenant. The old covenant is the promise of the people to obey. “Another compact—called in Scripture the ‘old’ covenant—was formed between God and Israel at Sinai, and was then ratified by the blood of a sacrifice.” (PP 372).

Israel broke their covenant promise soon afterward while Moses was receiving the ten commandments from the Lord up on the mount. That’s why he broke the tables of stone when he saw their revelry. There is not salvation in the old covenant. There is no forgiveness of sins and neither is there any power to overcome sin. There is no Saviour Jesus Christ in the old covenant. All of this is to be found only in God’s everlasting covenant.

This is the covenant he gave to their father Abraham. “The Abrahamic covenant was ratified by the blood of Christ, and it is called the ‘second,’ or ‘new,’ covenant, because the blood by which it was sealed was shed after the blood of the first covenant.” (PP 371). This covenant is found in Gen. 12:2, 3, “And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”

Of this everlasting covenant we read that Abraham “believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness” (Gen. 15:6). Abraham was saved the same way that we are saved. God “preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed” (Gal. 3:8).

That the everlasting covenant is God’s promise there is no doubt for we read: “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise” (Gal. 3:16-18).

Paul makes clear that the two covenants, the old and the new covenants are represented by Hagar and Sarah. “But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar” (Gal. 4:23, 24). The covenant at Mount Sinai

was the old covenant for the people's promise to obey the law gendered to bondage.

Paul makes this all very clear in Hebrews. "For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: and they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Hebrews 8:7-12).

The lesson for us is that God gives us His promise to save us from sin in Jesus. He does not ask us to add our promises to obey to His promise that He will forgive sins and write His laws on the heart and mind. "You desire to give yourself to Him, but you are weak in moral power, in slavery to doubt, and controlled by the habits of your life of sin. Your promises and resolutions are like ropes of sand. You cannot control your thoughts, your impulses, your affections. The knowledge of your broken promises and forfeited pledges weakens your confidence in your own sincerity, and causes you to feel that God cannot accept you; but you need not despair. What you need to understand is the true force of the will. This is the governing power in the nature of man, the power of decision, or of choice. Everything depends on the right action of the will. The power of choice God has given to men; it is theirs to exercise. You cannot change your heart, you cannot of yourself give to God its affections; but you can choose to serve Him. You can give Him your will; He will then work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Thus your whole nature will be brought under the control of the Spirit of Christ; your affections will be centered upon Him, your thoughts will be in harmony with Him." (SC 47).

If we do not hinder the Lord in His covenant work, our character will be made perfect and such righteousness will fit us to receive the

promised inheritance of the new earth for ever and ever. This is the everlasting covenant complete.

The problem with ancient Israel was that from the time of Mount Sinai onward in their history they couldn't get it out of their heads that the covenant was "Obey and live." They never could properly understand God's promise was given to them in His seed who is Christ.

God wanted them to enter the gospel rest of Jesus Christ right there at Sinai. "And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness" (1 Cor. 10:4, 5).

When at Kadesh-barnea God commanded them to enter the land, they sent up spies who brought back a discouraging report of giants. And except for very few, to a man, they all believed it was impossible. Paul says: "Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swore in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest." Hebrews 3:8-11.

After forty years of wandering in the wilderness that whole generation went to their rest and it was left for the new generation to believe God's promise. The crossing of the River Jordan at flood-tide was by faith in the promise of God. The walls of Jericho came tumbling down because the people believed God's promise. There wasn't one word of complaint or murmuring in the camp of Israel that they had to encompass the city for six days by march and then seven more times on the Sabbath. This would have been the case with their fathers. On the fourteenth time they marched around Jericho they all shouted the victory that by faith God had won the battle. "And it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat." Joshua 6:20. "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days." Heb. 11:30.

But they soon lapsed into their old patterns of thinking and we are told that not even Joshua "had given them rest" (Heb. 4:8). And so the promised rest of the everlasting covenant remains today as a standing invitation from God to a generation who will believe. "Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time;

as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. . . . There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.” Hebrews 4:7, 9.

The problem that exists today is a faulty understanding of the two covenants. There is a persistent belief that the old covenant is good. We must “obey” in order to have eternal life. This is driven by the motivation of fear of hell and hope of heavenly reward, all selfish motivations. This is to our shame for it has driven many young people from my generation as well as our children out of the church.

Add to this the fact that many are going around, formerly preachers in our midst who have left, that play upon our faulty understand of the two covenants. They teach that the ten commandments are done away with; for Christ nailed the old covenant to His cross. Now after the cross we live without the law by faith in the Christ of the new covenant. This dispensational understanding of the two covenants has convinced many to forsake the Sabbath and the law in Seventh-day Adventism and go out to the evangelicals.

The truth of the matter is that the two covenants are not dispensational, the old covenant before the cross and the new covenant after the cross. They are experiential in nature and descriptive of two conditions of the heart that exist both before and after the cross. The heart of unbelief in God’s promise which seeks to add works is the old covenant. The heart of belief in God’s promise motivated by His *agape* love is the new covenant experience.

It may seem all too simplistic to say it, but a failure to believe God’s everlasting covenant has caused the delay in entering our promised inheritance. “For he that is entered into His rest [the gospel], he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from His. Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.” Hebrews 4:10, 11.

A belief in the old covenant may be sufficient to prepare one to die and have the hope of the resurrection at the second coming of Christ. That is a wonderful blessing. The Lord knows that many of the pioneers of the second advent movement did not understanding the everlasting covenant. May such individuals as Uriah Smith, George Butler, and others come up in that special resurrection to join the 144,000 in seeing Jesus come in the clouds of glory.

But the old covenant will never prepare the 144,000 to honor God in the hour of His judgment and be translated without seeing death. It is the new or everlasting covenant that promises Jesus will prepare the

144,000 to witness the power of His gospel to stand in the final crisis. It is the new covenant experience that will give them the faith of Jesus to stand alone through the mark of the beast issue, and the battle of Armageddon. The Commander, the Lord of hosts, needs an all-volunteer army of 144,000, it's a symbolic number so you are invited to be included, to lead into this battle. They are the ones who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. Yes, they follow Jesus to the cross at the time of the death decree over the Sunday issue. They count not their lives dear unto themselves, but consider the honor of God more vital than themselves. He must increase while they decrease. Because of their love for Jesus and the Father, they let his mind be in them. They do not hinder the work of God. Christ in you, the hope of glory.

The everlasting covenant, the new covenant, the covenant with Abraham, which is the pledge of *the inheritance* that is *promised* to the Seed, *is not met* in its fullness in those who accept it, till the *second coming of Christ*.

“The sky opened and shut, and was in commotion. The mountains shook like a reed in the wind, and cast out ragged rocks all around. . . . And as *God spoke* the day and the hour of JESUS' COMING, and *delivered the EVERLASTING COVENANT to his people*, he spoke one sentence, and then paused, while the words were rolling through the earth. The Israel of God stood with their eyes fixed upward, listening to the words as they came from the mouth of Jehovah, and rolled through the earth like peals of loudest thunder. . . . And when the *never-ending blessing* was pronounced on those who had honored God in keeping his Sabbath holy, there was a mighty shout of victory over the beast and over his image.”—“*Early Writings*,” pp. 145, 146.

“The voice of God is heard from heaven, declaring *the day and hour of Jesus' coming* and delivering *the everlasting covenant* to his people. . . .

Soon there appears in the east a small black cloud, about half the size of a man's hand. It is the cloud which surrounds the Saviour, and which seems in the distance to be shrouded in darkness. The people of God know this to be the sign of the Son of Man. In solemn silence they gaze upon it as it draws nearer the earth, becoming lighter and more glorious until it is a *great white cloud*, its base a glory like consuming fire, and above it, the *rainbow* of THE COVENANT.—“*Great Controversy*” pages 635-641.

When God spoke on the Mount it was as “the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (for they could not endure that which was commanded. . . Whose voice then shook the earth” (Heb. 12:19, 20, 25).

“But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect [those who enter the heavenly Jerusalem will be perfect], and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, . . . See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven: whose voice then shook the earth: but now He hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.” Hebrews 12:22-27.

At the second coming of Jesus the covenant will be complete.