

WHAT IS THE ELIJAH MESSAGE? ALIENATED HEARTS RECONCILED BY JUSTIFICATION

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Is it possible to drive a wedge between Ellen White and the clear concepts of the 1888 message? If we try to do so, we distort her words out of their true context. Without realizing it, sincere people can choke the third angel's message in the process.

The problem comes when they insist that the Good News can't be as good as the 1888 messengers said it is—that Christ bore the condemnation of the sin of “all men,” setting them legally free from condemnation. They insist that when Christ died on the cross, He could not have done something for “the whole world,” for “all men.” He could not justify “all men.” The best He could do was to make a *provision* whereby justification *might* come upon those who first do something to activate it. They sincerely fear that the 1888 message of Christ's righteousness will lead to Universalism, “new theology,” or to relaxing the demands of the law.

But there is no other way to “establish the law.” The 1888 view of justification by faith and that of the “new theology” are as different as day and night.

Briefly stated, the 1888 view says that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross accomplished for “all men,” “the whole world,” a legal justification, and this is the reason why “all men” can enjoy the present gift of life. If they now had to bear the full burden of

condemnation due to their sin, they would perish in a moment. Whether or not they know and confess Christ, they already owe everything to Him, for He already has taken their sin upon Himself, died for it, and given them their present life instead. Writing with the 1888 idea obviously in mind, Ellen White said:

To the death of Christ we owe even this earthly life. The bread we eat is the purchase of His broken body. The water we drink is bought by His spilled blood. Never one, saint or sinner, eats his daily food, but he is nourished by the body and the blood of Christ. The cross of Calvary is stamped on every loaf. It is reflected in every water spring (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 660).

Therefore “all men” owe everything to Christ because the Father imputed their “trespasses” unto Him as He hung on His cross (2 Cor. 5:19). No sinner has ever yet borne the full burden of his true guilt. “By the grace of God” Christ has already tasted “death for every man” (Hebrews 2:9). That's why “every man” can live here and now, whether or not he believes.

When the sinner hears the news and appreciates it, he believes this gospel. This is the experience of justification by faith. It is a change of heart which forthwith makes him obedient to all the commandments of God. Instead of weakening obedience to the law, this truth is the only way to obey it (cf. *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 91, 92).

The opposite view denies this. It says that justification by faith is itself only a legal declaration

of acquittal. Thus, when the sinner “accepts Christ,” he activates the heavenly process which then proclaims the legal sentence that Christ now takes upon Himself the sinner’s condemnation.

But, says this view, the sinner is not and never will be truly just until the resurrection, or until translation at the coming of Christ. Any change of heart takes place not in justification by faith, but in a subsequent work known as sanctification. And because sanctification is never complete in this life, the believer is doomed never to become fully obedient to the law of God.

According to this view, true obedience always remains a legal assumption, a substitution “in Christ,” never a reality in personal life. Currently this view is widely upheld. One example is Helmut Ott’s *Perfect in Christ* (Review and Herald, 1987), which has been hailed by “new theology” supporters as a denial of “historic Adventism.”

But there is a problem with so-called “historic Adventism.” It is vulnerable if it does not recognize the greater light of the 1888 message. Ellen White said we must have that “light” if the Adventist message is to become complete. The “new theology” view could never have made effective headway among us if “historic Adventism” for the past century had understood and accepted the 1888 view. This is evident as follows:

(1) Justification is a term that no one can honestly deny has a legal meaning. The sinner has transgressed the law of God and must suffer the consequent condemnation of death. Therefore for him to be “covered” so he can live even for a

moment requires a legal justification. The question of questions is: *when does this take place?*

(2) The “Reformationist” and the “historic Adventist” views both agree on a superficial answer: not until the sinner “accepts Christ.” *But if a legal justification takes place only when the sinner accepts Christ, justification by faith has to be only a legal acquittal.* One moment the sinner supposedly bears the total guilt of all his sins; the next moment after he “accepts Christ,” his legal liability is suddenly gone and he is considered totally just. And the “historic Adventist” doesn’t realize that his position has played into the hands of the so-called “new theology.”

(3) The reason is that both views are still logically mired in the essence of legalism: *salvation is due to the sinner’s initiative.* He has *done* something, performed a work, which activates his legal justification. His decision to “accept Christ” has started the heavenly machinery, which so far as he is concerned has stood idle until this moment. His justification is therefore the consequence of his own initiative.

Paul says, No: “I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness [justification, Greek] come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” (Gal. 2:21). If justification comes by any human initiative, says Paul, then we frustrate grace and “Christ is dead in vain.” Failure to embrace the true view negates true faith and thus true obedience (sanctification) as well.

(4) According to the Bible and Ellen White’s writings, justification comes by God’s initiative, not

man's. When the Saviour hung on His cross, "God was in Christ, reconciling *the world* unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word [news] of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19).

"The word" is not a promise of a provisional "maybe" or "perhaps," contingent on the sinner's success in doing something right first. It is the Good News of a reconciliation *already accomplished*. Christ "is the propitiation for our sins: and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). John is positive. He does not say that provisionally, possibly, maybe, Christ can be "the propitiation for the sins of the whole world" if; and not until, the sinner does something first. Christ already is that "propitiation."

Paul agrees. "Our Saviour Jesus Christ . . . hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10). For all men He has brought "life;" for those who believe, He has also brought "immortality."

(5) A centuries-old battle between Calvinism and Arminianism finds an extension among us today. It focuses on Paul's statement in Romans 5:18: "As by the offence of one [Adam] judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness [justification] of one [Christ] the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." Calvinism says the grace of justification must be effective, "irresistible," and therefore cannot be true for "all men" because many obviously will be lost. Christ died to justify only "the elect."

Arminianism objects. You can't wash Paul's "all men" down the drain so easily, it says. True, many will be lost; therefore this "justification" must be only provisional, a possibility, not effective or sure, but only *available* to "all men." But what is "available" never becomes real for the sinner until he does something first.

Generally speaking, "historic Adventism" has favored Arminianism because we want to steer away from "easy-believism." But in missing the 1888 view, we have invited confusion and entrenched our apathy and lukewarmness. Waggoner's 1888 view of Romans 5:18 corrects the error in Arminianism:

There is no exception here. As the condemnation came upon all, so the justification comes upon all. Christ has tasted death 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. (*Signs of the Times*, March 12, 1896; *Waggoner on Romans*, p. 101).

(6) The reason Ellen White rejoiced so in the 1888 message of justification by faith is that she saw how it is a breakthrough which solved the *impasse* of both Calvinism and Arminianism. When Christ died,

He accomplished something positive, effective, for “all men.” Our present physical life is a benefit of His sacrifice. It is not only *available* for all men—they already enjoy it. For “*all men*” He has “*brought life . . . to light.*”

Thus the whole world is in His debt, not merely potentially or provisionally. He already tasted the second “death for every man” (Hebrews 2:9), and suffered the imputation of all our trespasses. He bore the burden of the guilt that should have killed us all, and He has purchased for “all men” the otherwise forfeited gift of life itself. This is the “justification of life” that Paul speaks of. All of us live because of the legal imputation of our sin upon Christ.

Furthermore, He delivered this grace to us. He placed it in our hands, not merely *offering* it to us as something “available” if we will do something first. Says *Steps to Christ*: “In the matchless gift of His Son, God has encircled the whole world with an atmosphere of grace as real as the air which circulates around the globe.”

“If the Good News is so good, why will many be lost?” Because they choose to resist and reject the justification already given them: “All who *choose to breathe* this life-giving atmosphere will live, and grow up to the stature of men and women in Christ Jesus” (*Steps to Christ*, p. 68, emphasis supplied). *For those who believe, Christ has “brought . . . immortality to light”* (2 Tim. 1:10). It is those who don't believe who suffer “condemnation” (John 3:18, 19). Not-believing is a deliberate evil choice.

For “all men” that grace is as “free as the rain and sunshine” (*Mount of Blessing*, p. 97). All owe everything to it (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 250; *Testimonies*, Vol. 6, p. 268). Only those who resist it can be lost (*Steps to Christ*, p. 27). That's what sin is—a constant resistance of that grace of Christ. Says the 1888 message:

Faith is dealt to every man [Romans 12:31, 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 (Waggoner, *Signs of the Times*, January 16, 189); Waggoner on Romans, p. 69).

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 (*Ibid.*, March 12, 1896; *Waggoner on Romans*, p. 101).

One of Ellen White's favorite illustrations of this truth is President Lincoln's *Emancipation Proclamation* of 1863. When he signed it, every slave was legally free. But not until the slave heard the good news and believed it was he experientially free. So with Christ's sacrifice. At the cross “with His own blood He has signed the emancipation papers of the race” (*Ministry of Healing*, p. 90).

(7) By recognizing the 1888 message, we place justification by faith in its true light. It is effective, life-changing, transforming the believer into an obedient doer of “all the commandments of God.”

Ellen White whole-heartedly agrees. In her view, our “accepting Christ” does not activate the heavenly machinery that has previously stood idle. God has already been at work in behalf of every sinner, and faith now responds to that on-going work of grace. Christ “took in His grasp the world, . . . and . . . restored *the whole race of men* to favor with God.” “He has snatched the race as a brand from the fire.” “Christ made satisfaction for the guilt of the whole world” (*Selected Messages*, Book One, p. 343, 392; *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 169; emphasis added).

“Faith . . . is belief *rooted in the heart*” (*Selected Messages*, Book One, p. 391). It is a heart-appreciation of the sacrifice made for “all men” and of the High Priestly ministry in their behalf. “With the heart man believeth unto righteousness,” and such faith “works a radical change of mind and spirit and action” (Romans 10:10; *ibid.*, p. 393).

Justification by faith is more than a legal pronouncement. The “new theology” view is mired in confusion. It has not embraced the glorious breakthrough that “the Lord in His great mercy sent” in the 1888 message. “The mind can only be freed from error when every thread is cut that binds it to . . . fallacy” (*Manuscript Releases*, Book 7, p. 189). Dr. Arnold Wallenkampf supports the 1888 view in his new book, *What Every Christian Should Know about Being Justified* [Review and Herald, 1988]. He is probably the first prominent Adventist book author to do so in this century.)

When Ellen White speaks of “conditions” for obtaining or retaining “justification,” her meaning is clear: she speaks of justification by faith.

“Justified by Faith” in *Selected Messages*, Book One, pp. 389-398, in its entirety demonstrates her complete harmony with the 1888 idea. Our personal faith does not force Christ to die for us again; He already did that “once for all.” (It was not necessary for each slave to apply individually to President Lincoln for freedom, at which time the President would again sign a legal document for him.) The “condition” she speaks of is faith, a heart-response to what Christ has already done for us. Persistent unbelief (which causes disobedience) frustrates the grace already given to “all men.”

Note Ellen White’s clear 1889 statement supporting the truth of salvation by only one “condition”—faith, faith understood in its true Biblical sense, “which works by love” (*agape*):

Says one, “you cannot be accepted unless you repent.” Well, who leads us to repentance? Who is drawing us? . . .

Here we look at the cross of Calvary. What has made us look at it? Christ is drawing us. Angels of God are in this world, at work upon human minds, and the man is drawn to the One who uplifts him, and the One who uplifts him draws him to repentance. It is no work of his own; there is nothing that he can do that is of any value at all except to believe (*Manuscript 5*, 1889; *Manuscript Releases*, Book 6, pp. 7, 8).

The question will come up, How is it? Is it by conditions that we receive salvation? Never by conditions that we come to Christ. And if we come to Christ, then what is the condition? The condition is that by living faith we lay hold wholly and entirely upon the merits of the blood of a crucified and risen Saviour. When we do that, then we work the works of righteousness [the fruit of justification by faith: sanctification]. But when God is calling the sinner in our world, and inviting him, there is no condition there; He draws by the invitation of Christ, and it is not, Now you have got to respond in order to come to God. The sinner comes, and as he comes and views Christ elevated upon that cross of Calvary, which God impresses upon his mind, there is a love beyond anything that is imagined that he has taken hold of. . . .

Christ is drawing every one that is not past the boundary. He is drawing him to Him today, no matter how great that sinner is, He is drawing him (*Manuscript* 9, 1890; *ibid.*, p 32; emphasis supplied).

What is our problem? We do not sense the heart-humbling, heart-melting implications of the concepts that so fired Ellen White in the 1888-1896 era.

Sometimes she has articulated Arminian ideas; there is some truth in Arminianism. But such statements do not deny that she also recognized in the 1888 message a greater truth that was the "beginning" of the light yet to .lighten the earth with glory. The ultimate test that must come to Seventh-

day Adventists is whether they will accept the fourth angel's message to complete the third angel's message. The ancient Jews had to decide whether or not to accept the New Testament to complete their Old.

The Bible principle is that lesser truth never negates greater truth, but greater truth always defines lesser truth.