

# QUESTIONS ABOUT THE 1888 MESSAGE

By Paul Penno Jr.

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It is admitted that the “everlasting gospel” is the same in all generations; but the important point is that the revelation of the light of truth regarding Christ’s righteousness is continually unfolding, clearer and brighter, with the end result of making a people ready for the coming of the Lord.

That there was a distinct difference between the 1888 message and that of the Protestant Reformers is evident from Sister White’s clear statements to the effect that the 1888 message was the beginning of the “latter rain” and the “loud cry.” The Reformers taught much truth; but never did they proclaim the full light of glorious truth prophesied in Rev. 18:1. To say that the three angels’ message were proclaimed by Luther and the other Reformers is to revive the heresy of Conradi.

A few thoughts of analysis of Jones’ and Waggoner’s message:

(a) It was said by Ellen G. White to be the Laodicean message (Letter S-24-1892). While Luther, for example, doubtless understood a general application of the Laodicean message to all Christian people, he could have had no concept its primary application to a remnant church living in the time of the investigative judgment.

(b) Their message was particularly a presentation “of the righteousness of Christ in relation to the law” . . . “not presented in its light heretofore” by our people. (See Ms. 15, 1888). The Reformers never

really understood the Law in its magnitude, as prefigured in Isa. 42:21. This is evident when one considers the statement Sister White made at Minneapolis itself: “Said my guide, ‘There is much light yet to shine forth from the law of God and the gospel of righteousness. This message understood in its true character and proclaimed in the spirit will lighten the earth with its glory.’” (Idem.) (Also 6T 19). Jones and Waggoner began to present the Law in a way that truly “magnified” it and made it “honorable” as we have never read the like in Luther, Wesley or any other Adventist writer except Sister White. And even she highly recommended their presentations as light sent of God. It is our humble opinion that had their message not been resisted and rejected, their simpler heart-warming presentations would have broken down the prejudice of many in the popular churches, prejudice that all too often persists to the present day. This is confirmed by various EGW statements such as her letter of Jan. 9, 1893, in the 1893 Bulletin, page 419.

(c) The message of 1888 was an understanding of righteousness by faith parallel to and consistent with the Seventh-day Adventist doctrine of the cleansing of the sanctuary. The Reformers had no concept of that doctrine. To say that Adventists’ concept of righteousness by faith is the same as that of the Reformers is actually to deny the real significance of the great doctrine that made us a people. The ethical significance of the cleansing of the sanctuary will certainly be to prepare a people for the coming of the Lord, “without spot, or wrinkle,

or any such thing,” a community of God’s people which will “come . . . unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Obviously, the time had not come in the 16th century for such a work to be accomplished.

(d) It may be objected that Jones and Waggoner themselves lamentably failed to attain to such a high standard. True; but this fact in no way alters the truth of what Sister White said, that their message was from the Lord and was the beginning of the latter rain and loud cry. The difficulty is that they were not able to stand up against the bitter opposition presented them, because they never got beyond that beginning. I think that the letter referred to of Jan. 9, 1893, confirms this. The manna was left until morning without being eaten; thus it “bred worms, and stank.” Because Moses’ manna did this is no reason to deny it came from Heaven. In the context of our history, it is not reasonable to demand perfection of either Jones and Waggoner’s message, nor of their own experience. Nonetheless, their message should be carefully investigated and accepted for its truth. Then we may get beyond the “beginning.”

(e) Had their message been allowed to develop as God intended, it would have brought deliverance from that root of sin, the love of self. It follows that genuine and complete acceptance would have made a people ready for the coming of the Lord in that very generation. But it is no disparagement of saints who are at rest to say that God intends His people to progress continually toward actually reaching a higher standard than any previous

generation reached, nothing less than perfect likeness to Jesus in character. This experience is quite distinct from the “justification by faith” preached by the Reformers; hence it is that Sister White frequently was wont to describe the 1888 message as “the message of Christ’s righteousness” more than as “justification by faith,” though she did occasionally use the latter term. Luther is wonderful, and he pioneered the way; but they went much further.

(f) Jones and Waggoner discerned the real significance of Babylon’s fall. We often say that had the popular churches gone on in the way the Reformers began, they would never have fallen. But Jones and Waggoner perceived that Babylon’s theology on “justification by faith” was based ultimately on the basic love of self; thus a fall was inevitable. They put their finger on the sore spot of Protestant theology. Obviously, their truth went far beyond the Reformer’s. I base these remarks on a study of Jones’ sermons in the 1893 Bulletin.

(g) The Reformers apparently never had an inkling of the real doctrine of the Sabbath. Quite apart from the question of what day to observe, they failed to get far enough to discern the doctrine of Sabbath rest itself, as a concomitant of genuine righteousness by faith. Hence it is that popular Protestant or Catholic concepts of “justification by faith” come vitally short. The Sabbath grows out of the cleansing of the sanctuary; and the cleansing of the sanctuary is implicit in the Sabbath itself. In this sense, it can be said that the Cross and the Sabbath together constitute the “seal of God” (cf.

SDA Com., Vol. 7, p. 968, quoted in a recent Review editorial). In other words, if a soul clearly understands ultimate righteousness by faith, he will of necessity find the Sabbath truth in it. His prejudice and fear will vanish. Perhaps this is the significance of Sister White's pregnant statements about the 1888 message fulfilling Rev. 18:1, 2, 4. She says we will be surprised at the simple means the Lord will use to finish His work.

(h) Jones and Waggoner had a clearer concept of the love of God in Christ than the Reformers had. They understood that righteousness by faith is based on genuine love, and began to break up the synthesis of Hellenistic self-centered love and New Testament agape (which is self-giving love) that had weakened us so prior to 1888. (I fear we are still weakened by it). They restored New Testament love to its rightful place as the constraining power that makes a new life. It is true that Luther began to do this also; but it seems to me that the 1888 message went so much farther as to begin the final work.

(i) A few minor points: The 1888 message presented the typical sanctuary services in relation to practical righteousness by faith. The sinner not only looked "forward" to Calvary, but found Christ crucified, slain from the foundation of the world. I have never read elsewhere this truth so clearly presented. Again, Jones and Waggoner spoke of the faith of Jesus, a clear concept of His righteousness perfected in the likeness of sinful flesh by faith. This also I have never found so clear in Luther or the Reformers, though Luther possibly

began to see it. Again, their understanding of the two covenants surpasses anything I have ever read elsewhere (cf. Glad Tidings).

How does the 1888 message fit in with our special task?

"The Lord in His great mercy sent" it as "the beginning" of the Loud cry message of Revelation 18:1-4 (*Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 91-93; *Review and Herald*, November 22, 1892). Ellen White often recognized this as its true identity (cf. Letter B2A, 1892; MS. 15, 1888, etc.). Never did she say that it was a mere re-emphasis of what the pioneers had always believed, or of what the Protestant Evangelical churches teach.

She also identified the 1888 message as "showers of the latter rain from heaven" (*Special Testimonies*, Series A, No. 6, p. 19). She had already stated that the latter rain would come either as a preparation for the loud cry or simultaneously with it (*Early Writings*, p. 271; MS. 15, 1888). Never did she identify any other message at any other time as the latter rain. She could not have said that the loud cry began with the 1888 message unless the latter rain had come at the same time.

The latter rain and the loud cry are to the church today what the birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem was to the Jews. For many decades we have been praying for the Lord to give us this gift of the latter rain, as the Jews prayed for their Messiah to come. They were to find the fulfillment of their destiny in Him. But they did not receive Him (John 1:11). Likewise this church is to find the fulfillment of its

destiny in the latter rain and the loud cry that began more than a century ago.

What is meant by “loud cry” and “latter rain”?

The three angels of Revelation 14:6-12 proclaim a worldwide message, but the original Greek gives the picture of their flying “in the midst of heaven” like a helicopter flying over the tree-tops. The past 150 years of history indicate to a candid observer that their message has so far attained only a limited penetration of the world.

But the fourth angel of Revelation 18 comes down “having great power, and the earth [is] lightened with His glory.” This angel comes like a great space ship with light that envelopes the whole world. He cries “mightily with a strong voice.” Here at last is total, final penetration with the message.

Because God is love and must be fair to everyone, His Good News message must go everywhere before Christ can return. An inspired messenger tells us that the mark of the beast “is to be presented in some shape to every institution and every individual” (*Selected Messages*, Book 3, p. 396). To be fair, God must see to it that the warning message has equal penetration.

The “latter rain” is the final outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It will empower God’s people to be His witnesses in the last conflict of the ages. Although the “former rain” at Pentecost was glorious, we are told that the final outpouring will be far greater in scope.

What is the most important subject of the 1888 message?

It is primarily a “revelation of the righteousness of Christ, the sin-pardoning Redeemer” (*Review and Herald*, November 22, 1892). It proclaims “justification through faith in the Surety, . . . the righteousness of Christ” (*Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 91, 92.)

In reading through the hundreds of Ellen White’s endorsements of the message from 1888 through 1896, one is impressed with her overwhelming conviction that it was “the beginning” of a final revelation of the gospel of righteousness by faith. It was to be more clear and powerful than our people (or the world) had heard, at least since the days of Paul.

One statement goes so far as to say that it was the beginning of light not clearly seen since *before* Paul’s day, that is, since Pentecost (*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 473; cf. *Review and Herald*, June 3, 1890). In other words, even Paul could learn something from “the third angel’s message in verity.”

There were other ancillary aspects of the message, such as health reform, educational and organizational reform, etc. But what rejoiced Ellen White’s heart repeatedly was the much more abounding grace in its righteousness by faith. It’s easy to see that her hundreds of endorsements are overwhelmingly concerned with that aspect of the message.

I have heard it often said that the 1888 message was only a “re-emphasis” of the preaching of Martin Luther, John Calvin, the Wesleys, and the popular

evangelists of the 19th century such as Dwight L. Moody and Charles Spurgeon. Is this true?

A study of the actual content of the 1888 message reveals very marked differences with that of the 16th-century Protestant Reformers and the Evangelicals of the 19th-century or even of today.

Ellen White recognized those differences. She said that the 1888 message of righteousness by faith is “the third angel’s message in verity” (*Review and Herald*, April 1, 1890). This is a problem to some of our people, for the general idea has been that there is only one kind of righteousness by faith, that which the Evangelicals teach.

But the problem can easily be solved by asking one simple question: did Luther, Calvin, the Wesleys, and the Sunday-keeping Evangelicals of her day proclaim “the third angel’s message”? If the answer is yes, we have no denominational foundation and there is no reason for this church to exist. Logically, the popular “re-emphasis” view says this, has created the confusion which has caused many pastors and members to leave the church. If the Evangelicals preach the true gospel of righteousness by faith, why not join them?

So far as we know, Ellen White never took her pen to characterize the 1888 message as a “re-emphasis” of the gospel others had taught. In fact, she said it was “the first clear teaching on this subject from any human lips” that she had ever heard proclaimed publicly (MS. 5, 1889).

Doubtless there were some minor aspects of the message that others had always proclaimed; but she recognized a new and distinct perspective

never before clearly seen. Like a picture more sharply focused, “great truths that [had] lain unheeded and unseen since the day of Pentecost [began] to shine from God’s word in their native purity” (*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 473). This is why she identified the message as “the beginning” of the latter rain and the loud cry, light which had never before lightened the earth with glory.

If we accept the righteousness-by-faith message of the popular Sunday-keeping churches of today (“Evangelical Christianity”) will that not suffice as a substitute for the 1888 message?

If the 1888 message “is the third angel’s message in verity,” it is obvious that Evangelical concepts cannot substitute for it, because the popular Sunday-keeping churches are not proclaiming the message of the seal of God and the mark of the beast. In fact, the genuine justification by faith message of 1888 “is made manifest in obedience to all the commandments of God” (*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 92). That must include observance of the fourth commandment! Yet the Evangelical churches have generally opposed the Sabbath and sanctuary truths for the entire period of Seventh-day Adventist existence. Something somewhere does not add up.

There are fundamental truths of the atonement, the cross, the meaning of genuine love and faith, the motivation to obedience, that are either absent from Evangelical “righteousness by faith” or are seriously distorted there. The very finest Evangelical minds are not wrestling with the real

problem of the atonement. Why have 2000 years of history elapsed since the grand event of the cross which they saw was the final victory? Other than by Calvinist predeterminism, they are helpless to explain why this long delay continues.

Ancient Israel was constantly tempted and enticed by the counterfeit doctrines of her neighbors. Those pagan ideas were superficially similar. One such was Baal worship. If the Lord has entrusted the third angel's message to Seventh-day Adventists, we must also face in principle the same temptation to be confused by a counterfeit. Somehow a clearer truth of the cross of Christ must emerge than has been presented by the Sunday-keeping churches.

For many decades we have heard righteousness by faith preached in our churches, camp meetings, and workers' meetings. How does the 1888 message differ from what we have already heard all these many years?

There are many fresh, beautiful truths in it that are not usually understood today. For example:

(1) The revelation of the nearness of the Saviour. This is what Ellen White termed "the message of Christ's righteousness." Righteousness means something different than "holiness." At His birth, He was "that holy thing" (Luke 1:35). But as He grew to manhood and finally came to His cross, Christ developed a character of "righteousness." Holiness denotes the character of one who in a sinless nature is holy. Thus we read of the "holy angels." Never do we read of "righteous angels."

Righteousness denotes the character of one who has taken a *sinful* human nature but has resisted

and conquered sin. Thus the phrase "Christ our righteousness" means that Christ "overcame" and "condemned sin" in the same fallen, sinful nature that we have. He came so close to us 2000 years ago and ever since that He has "condemned sin in the flesh" (cf. revelation 3:21; Romans 8:3). Since the Father and the Son are one and the Father was in Christ during His incarnation experience, the Father is also spoken of as "righteous."

Christ has made sin to become *passe*. There is no excuse for it any longer. He truly became one of us, 100% God, yet also 100% human. He "took upon His sinless nature our sinful nature" (*Medical Ministry*, p. 181), so He can save every one of us *from* our sins, not in them. He knows how we are tempted, for He was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

This Good News grips human hearts. In it lies the truth that explains the reason for the 200-year delay in the return of Christ that the popular churches do not comprehend.

(2) Christ's closing sanctuary ministry of the final atonement. Here is where the nature-of-Christ truth shines brightest and transcends sterile theological argument. The Book of Revelation shows us a people who at last are the "firstfruits" of Christ's sacrifice and who stand before His throne "without fault" (ch. 14:5-12). The key to their victory lies in their overcoming *even as He overcame*" (ch. 3:21).

Here the truth of the nature of Christ comes into its own. The High Priest's ministry in the Most Holy Apartment since 1844 is a grand truth yet to lighten the earth and bring into sharp focus the closing

issues of the great controversy (*Evangelism*, pp. 221, 222). Our Seventh-day Adventist identity rests on that sanctuary-truth foundation, yet it is common knowledge that it is all but lost in our contemporary preaching. And our evangelical brethren teach no concept of that Day of Atonement ministry.

(3) The 1888 message joins justification by faith to that special closing work of atonement. This is why Ellen White saw it to be distinctly and uniquely “the third angel’s message in verity.” She rejoiced to recognize the long-awaited connection.

In the early months of 1890 she wrote a series of articles in the *Review* that demonstrated how this message is the essence of the cleansing of the sanctuary truth (January 21 through June 3).

(4) The message is not a stern “get-ready-or-else” demand, but glorious Good News of how to get ready. It transforms Adventist imperatives into gospel enablers. It reveals the Saviour as a Divine Physician of souls, a “nigh-at-hand” Healer of every wound that sin has caused in the human psyche. He is the grand, effective Original of every stop-gap, 12-point program devised by experts to meet the desperate need of addicts of every kind from alcoholics to shopaholics. It is also the only hope for saints addicted to worldly lukewarmness.

It’s Heaven’s intention that addicts every kind “shall [find] deliverance. . . in the remnant” rather than in worldly programs (cf. Joel 2:32). Seventh-day Adventists were called to be “foremost” in uplifting a real Saviour who was tempted in all points like as every addict on earth is tempted, *yet without sin*. Thus He can save to the uttermost.

(5) Assurance of salvation comes with the 1888 truth of justification by faith. Calvinism says that Christ died only for the elect. While Arminianism protests that He died for “all men,” it also says that He merely made a “provision” whereby it *might be possible* for “all men” to be justified *if* they take the initiative in doing something right first. If the sinner does not take advantage of the offer, then the death of Christ on the cross has done and will do him no good. This is the general idea our people have had.

The 1888 messengers saw that the cross accomplished far more than making a mere provision which is dependent on the sinner’s initiative. Christ has done something for every human being! “All men” owe even *this present life* to the sacrifice of Christ. Human salvation depends on God’s initiative and damnation depends on man’s initiative. When the sinner hears the Good News and believes, he responds to God’s initiative, and thus he *experiences* justification by faith.

Here is where the 1888 idea of justification by faith exposes subtle legalism. In pure New Testament justification by faith “boasting. . . is excluded” (Romans 3:27), but in the popular view the key factor is the sinner’s initiative. He can say, “*I* took advantage of the offer, *accepted the provision*, made the decision that brings me to heaven. Christ’s sacrifice did me no good until *I* did something about it.” Thus an egocentric mindset is locked in, and a subliminal legalism remains.

Something is tragically missing in this idea. Christ actually tasted the second death “for every man,” and made propitiation for the “sins of the whole

world” (Hebrews 2:9; 1 John 2:2). The sins of “all men” were legally imputed unto Him as He died so that no one has as yet had to bear the true burden of his guilt (Romans 5:16-18; 2 Corinthians 5:19).

Therefore “all men” live because He died for them whether or not they believe (vss. 14, 15). Not only at Easter when people eat hot cross buns, but *every loaf of bread is “stamped” with the cross*. This means that both saint and sinners are “daily” equally nourished by the sacrifice of Christ (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 660). He has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Timothy 1:10). For whom has He brought life? For “all men.” For whom has He also brought immortality? For those who believe.

Therefore, since “all men” live because their trespasses were imputed unto One who died in their place, it is correct to say that a legal justification has been effected for all men. (Some prefer the term “corporate justification” or “temporary universal justification.” The truth is the same.) As “all men” are under legal “condemnation” “in Adam” by birth, so Christ has become the “last Adam” in whom the entire human race are legally acquitted (1 Corinthians 15:22; Romans 5:16-18, N.E.B.). This is the “in Christ” idea of the New Testament.

This does not mean that “all men” will be saved against their will. The gift Christ has given “every man” can be despised and refused. He will not force anyone. But the 1888 messengers maintained that when the sinner hears and believes this Good News, his experience of justification *by faith*

forthwith makes him “obedient to all the commandments of God,” including the Sabbath commandment. This is the only possible result of a sinner laying hold of Christ’s righteousness by an intelligent, informed faith. No wonder Ellen White rejoiced when she first heard the message.

Thus the 1888 message recognizes what truth there is in both Calvinism and Arminianism, but goes far beyond both. As Calvinism rightly discerns, the sinner’s salvation is due entirely to *God’s* initiative. As Arminianism rightly discerns, all men have an equal *possibility* of salvation. But as neither discerns, Christ has borne the sins of “all men,” and has died the second death for “every man.” He has taken the initiative to save “every man.” The only reason any sinner can be lost therefore is because he has taken the initiative to *despise and reject* the justification already given him and placed in his hands (see John 3:16-19; 12:48).

Thus the 1888 message sees sin in a far more serious light than most Adventists see it. It is not a passive do-nothingness. Sin is so terrible that it constantly resists and rejects the saving grace of God. The sinner doesn’t realize what he is doing, and must be told. Only in this light can repentance be seen and appreciated in its true dimensions.

(6) The Holy Spirit is far more powerful than we have thought. When one understands and believes how good the Good News is, then he sees that it is easy to be saved and hard to be lost.

Salvation is not dependent on our seeking and finding God (the root element of every pagan religion in the world), but on our believing that he is

seeking and has found us. The Holy Spirit is stronger than the flesh (Galatians 5:16, 17), and grace much more abounds than abounding sin (Romans 5:20).

(7) In other words, the 1888 message lifts the love of God as Saviour far above the merely-provisional category. The 1888 message does not present Him as casually giving the sinner a take-it-or-leave-it, “Too bad for you if you don’t take advantage of the bargain.” Christ is seen as a Good Shepherd who is actively seeking His lost sheep “until he find it” (Luke 15:4). The sinner must hear the Good News.

God’s love is immeasurably clarified by the Biblical concepts in the 1888 message. The only possible result: a replacement of dead works by a heart-felt service of faith, a devotion that knows no limit. Lukewarmness becomes impossible to one who understands and believes the pure gospel.

(8) The heart-changing power of the two-covenants truth. This unique 1888 concept is not understood well in the church today, nor in modern Evangelicalism. Ellen White “was shown” that the Lord gave the 1888 messengers the correct view (Letters 30, 59, 1890).

This again is not a theological puzzle. It is practical godliness. Paul says that a wrong idea of the covenants “gendereth to bondage” (Galatians 4:24). Not knowing what we are doing, we have taught children and youth the old covenant ideas for decades. It results in many losing their way spiritually. When the 1888 view of the two covenants is compared with the view generally taught among us today, it is no wonder that 70% of

our youth don’t understand the gospel according to the Valuegenesis Survey, and that we lose so many of them.

Again, like an inadequate view of justification, the non-1888 view opens the door to a self-centered motivation—the essence of legalism. We are not saved by making promises to God, but by believing His promises to us. (A re-discovery of the 1888 idea of the two covenants was the spark that generated the present revival of interest in this message).

(9) A correct motivation for serving Christ is another term for the dynamic of genuine justification by faith. The *legal* justification was achieved at the cross for “all men;” this is *objective*. The *experience* of justification by faith motivates the believer to complete devotion to Christ; this is *subjective*. All self-centered motivation involves legalism. To be “under grace” is to realize the higher motivation imposed by a heart appreciation of the grace of Christ. This delivers from the lesser motivation of fear of hell or hope of reward (cf. Romans 6:14, 15; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 480).

While the 1888 message is glorious Good News to those who appreciate the cross of Christ, it opens up the possibility of very Bad News for Adventists who are unconscious of their true spiritual condition. To be “under the law” is the opposite of being “under grace.” This is why legalism is the true essence of all motivation imposed by fear of being lost or desire for reward. But there is a remedy. “Perfect love (*agape*) casteth out fear” (1 John 4:18).

Our superficial “assurance-of-salvation” concern appears childish in comparison, but the 1888 concept of grace makes possible a deliverance from this deeper root of selfishness. It enables the believer to share a total closeness with Christ, to be “incorporate” with Him, the *ego* being “crucified with Him.” Paul frequently addresses the “believers incorporated in Christ Jesus.” He says that “we have become incorporated with him in a death like His” (Ephesians 1:1; Romans 6:6. N.E.B., etc.).

Anything short of this is an immature “righteousness by faith,” suitable only for the flower girl at the wedding. A true bride has a higher concern—the honor and vindication of her Bridegroom, for she has at last become “incorporated” in Him.

(10) Thus the 1888 idea of “perfection” is not a fear-oriented grasping for security, but a Christ-centered concern for Him to receive His reward. No longer is overcoming degraded to a topic for theological arguments, forcing Ellen White’s words into mind-twisting contradictions.

Granted, a true “under grace” motivation is impossible for any sinful human apart from the revelation of Christ’s sacrifice. But to “glory in the cross” is an experience that is possible for any sinner who will behold and believe. A people can be prepared for the coming of Christ!