

THE EVERLASTING COVENANT: GOD'S TOOLS TO SAVE US

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You have to have the right tools to get the job done. If you want to remove an oil filter from a car you need a special claw which attaches to a ratchet wrench. If you try to remove it by hand, it will never come off. Now the old covenant, initiated by the promises of the people, can never get the job done. The goal of the gospel is to provide everlasting righteousness. God's everlasting covenant in Christ fulfills God's purpose for humanity.

From the perspective of God's government which is under an all-out assault from Satan in an ideological warfare of ideas to annihilate it, we want to set the truth of God's covenant in its true perspective.

When God commanded Adam not to eat of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, . . . for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Gen. 2:17), it is true that Adam died spiritually; but more profoundly, God told the truth and He had reference to literal, physical, eternal death. Adam sinned and "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). Adam should have been struck dead for his personal choice of rebellion against God, but he wasn't. Why?

The reason is that in the long ago before the creation of the world, God the Father and God the Son made a promise; or covenant to one another, as they were planning the creation of free-will agents to live in an environment of God's love on the earth. The Son pledged Himself as Surety for man should he choose to sin. The Scriptures represent the Father, in the economy of our salvation, before the creation of mankind, as entering an agreement with the Son even unto death should man's representative, Adam, prove a failure in unbelief. God promised the Son (Gal. 3:16) a kingdom. Direct reference is made to this covenant in the words of Jesus to His disciples: "I appoint (*diatithemi*) unto you a kingdom, even as My Father appointed unto Me." Luke 22:29. "And I engage by covenant unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath engaged by covenant unto me." Witsius' translation.¹

¹ "I covenant to give you, as My Father has covenanted to give Me, a kingdom." Weymouth. "I covenant with you—according as My Father covenanted with Me—

Since the first man, Adam, was the head of the new race of intelligent beings; should he sin, Satan, the adversary of God, would demand that sinning Adam receive his just reward by instant death. However, there was a mitigating factor; in that Lucifer sinned, while having the fullest knowledge of the character of God; whereas Adam sinned, not having been exposed to all the cosmic pre-history existing between Lucifer and God. There was a degree of innocence wherein he had been sheltered. Thus God was fully within His rights to give man a second probationary opportunity to learn the nature of the two competing governments of the universe and make an informed choice for life or death.

God's ways are always just and true. He must legitimize sinning man's survival of eternal death. He did this on the basis of the everlasting covenant between the Father and the Son. (Zech. 6:13.)

God justified the existence of fallen man by means of the last Adam, Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Christ had a legitimate claim on humanity in that He was their Creator. In addition, He is the vast resource of life from which all derive their breath and existence. Hence, God's government justified the existence of sinful man on the pledged Lamb's death for sin, from the foundation of the world. "Ye were . . . redeemed . . . with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world." 1 Peter 1:18-20.²

No society or government can exist without the rule of law and a court system to adjudicate and administer the law. God's government is no exception. It is not by sheer despotic force that God maintains sinful man's existence in the eyes of sentient cosmic beings, angels, and demonic principalities and powers. It is some form of democracy which acclaims and perceives that He is acting upon the rule of law and yet dealing mercifully with the erring giving them a second probation because of their representative Head.

a kingdom." Rotherham. The verb used here is *diatithemi*, the word from which *diatheke* is derived, which means to appoint by will, testament or covenant.

² "As soon as there was sin, there was a Saviour. Christ knew what He would have to suffer, yet He became man's substitute. As soon as Adam sinned, the Son of God presented himself as surety for the human race, with just as much power to avert the doom pronounced upon the guilty as when He died upon the cross of Calvary." Ellen G. White, "Lessons from the Christ-life," *The Review and Herald* (March 12, 1901), par. 4.

And so with Adam's sin there proceeded the legal condemnation by the universal law of justice, and thus man was severed from his source of life and death was the inevitable result. There would be no human race. But, on the basis of God's covenant, God the Son took Adam into Himself. He reversed the results of Adam's sin. Now the race had one temporal life in which they were justified from sin. Hence they were not condemned by the law and therefore subject only to the consequence of corruptible, mortal life which is the first death, or sleep from which there is a resurrection in Christ who was raised from the dead,—i. e., Christ was raised from the second eternal death,—for He paid their wages of sin which is annihilation and forever death.

The entire human family is in Christ. Believer and unbeliever alike are in Christ. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2 Cor. 5:19). This does not mean that everyone has Christ in them.

Calvary justifies the existence of all life. His epistle to the Romans contains the teaching of God's universal justification for the existence of all sinful life. Notice that the first half of the sentence contains the word "all" which is understood as the subject of the last half of the sentence. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; [the "all" are] being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Romans 3:23, 24. It isn't difficult to see that without exception, everyone born into the world has sinned. It is the "all [who] have sinned" that are "being justified." This, of course, is a legal term meaning pardoned from sin, on the basis of a redemptive price paid by Christ. As an objective, legal reality, all human life is acquitted from sin because of the redemption of the cross.

Paul forthrightly states the objective, legal, setting right of the race in Rom. 5:18: "Therefore as by the offence of one *judgment came* upon all men to condemnation [κατακριμα is the punishment of eternal death]; even so by the righteousness of one *the free gift came* upon all men unto justification of life." Adam's one sin was judged (vs. 16) by God and he was pronounced guilty for his personal sin, but since he was the fountain head of the whole human family and could only pass on to his descendants that which was in him, "all men" receive "condemnation," i.e., the punishment, meaning eternal death.

However, Adam's one offence is reversed by "the righteousness of one" which is "upon all men unto justification of life" (vs. 18).³ There is a reference here to "one act of righteousness" [see margin of KJV]; i.e., one judgment or decision. Obviously it was the Divine judgment against sin, which act was publicly displayed before the world, at the cross. He received the punishment for all the world's sin. The Divine wrath against sin was executed upon Christ.

The cross was not done in a corner. Satan saw it. The angels beheld their beloved commander crucified. Our human representatives were there as eyewitnesses. It has been recorded as a witness for eternity in the Sacred Word. By means of the cross of Christ, it came "upon all men unto justification of life" (vs. 18). All of human life both in the past, present, and future exists because it is justified by the cross. Calvary justifies the existence of all life. So when reference is made to "justification of life" it is a specific Scriptural term for the legal reality of legitimizing, from God's standpoint in His government, because of the great controversy with Satan, why He has given a second probation to sinful mankind. And this temporary probationary life of each individual is a real pardon from sin whether they are believers or unbelievers. It is a reality that goes far beyond the enjoyment of bread, food, family, loving relationships, a semblance of societal bliss, an accommodation of living within laws of social respect, etc. It goes far beyond making it possible for God to treat sinners in Christ as though they had never sinned. It is a fundamental answer to Satan's charges to destroy sinners immediately if God's government is one of law and order.

This necessitates the understanding that Christ made the atonement of the cross for all. We read that "whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son." Romans 8:29.

³ "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. 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." E. J. Waggoner, "Studies in Romans. The Free Gift," *The Signs of the Times* 22, 11 (March 12, 1896), pp. 164, 165.

Our Calvinist friends understand God's predestination to mean that before the creation of intelligent beings on this earth, God chose to favor certain ones with salvation and others He chose for eternal hell fire. There is no Seventh-day Adventist who would follow such an interpretation of God's predestination.

"Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified." Romans 8:30. If God's predestination here pertains only to believers and not to unbelievers, then God has singled out only those who respond by faith to His offer of salvation as eligible for justification and glorification.

But the Father, without whose knowledge not even a sparrow falls to the ground, knew from ancient times every son and daughter of Adam who would ever live upon this earth. And "whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son." Rom. 8:29. So that instead of predestinating certain ones who would believe only to be saved, God predestinated to eternal life every one who was to be born.⁴

Consider the phrase "whom He did predestinate."⁵ This is completed action. This predestination is in Christ. "In Christ we have already been blessed with all spiritual blessings."⁶

"Them He also called." "All men are called to that which God has prepared for them."⁷ God's gift to every one who has been born would not be well-intentioned unless His call was particular to each individual. Calling involves conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit.⁸ Surely the Lord leaves no one who has ever been born out of this important step of conversion. "The call of God is addressed to every man

⁴ W. T. B., "The Election of Grace," *The Present Truth* 17, 9 (February 28, 1901), p 132.

⁵ "He did not merely in His premundane decree, acquit them of sin, but also *clothe them with glory*: the aorist *edozaren* being used, as the other aorists, to imply the completion in the divine counsel of all these, which are to us, in the state of time, so many successive steps,—simultaneously and irrevocably." Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament, Vol. II*, (Rivingtons: London, 1886), p. 599.

⁶ W. T. B., "The Election of Grace," *The Present Truth* 17, 9 (February 28, 1901), p 132.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ "Calling is the drawing of the sinner to Christ, and it is a work wrought by the Holy Spirit upon the heart, convicting of sin, and inviting to repentance." Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 390.

individually.”⁹ “I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine.” Isa. 43:1.

“Them He also justified.” This is past action on God’s part. Every one has been given the gift of justification of life. But Paul continues further by saying, “them He also glorified.” How can the unbelieving be said to be glorified? In the same sense that Paul said his unbelieving fellow Jews—“kinsmen according to the flesh”—“who are Israelites” pertained “the adoption, and the glory” (Rom. 9:4). Glorification is the change that comes when Jesus returns and bestows immortality upon mortal flesh and we are no more subject to temptation. In Christ the unbelieving person has been given the gift of legal justification and glorification.

This was the gospel God proclaimed to Abraham. “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed” Gal. 3:8. Literally all nations are blessed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. They all receive the gift of life and justification by virtue of the cross.

God’s covenant consisted of seven fantastic promises given to Abraham. “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” Gen. 12:2, 3.

We read further down that Abraham “believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness” Gen. 15:6. There is a sense in which when we are born again, converted, and baptized and appreciate what it cost for our sins to be forgiven by the death of Jesus, that a legal declaration is made by God that we are pardoned; and that experience has a profound effect upon our assurance of salvation in Christ.

Abraham believed and he had Christ in him. Having Christ within, he had the righteousness of Christ which is the faith of Jesus. “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ” (Gal. 2:16). The faith of Christ is motivated by pure *agape*. He died on the cross doing the will of His Father. Love precedes doing God’s will. And so having the faith of

⁹ W. T. B., “The Everlasting Mercy,” *The Present Truth* 17, 10 (March 7, 1901), p. 147.

Jesus love is manifested by doing the will of God. We love Him because He first loved us. Genuine faith works by love.

Later in the experience of Abraham after God had promised him a son through whom the covenant surety would arise, he listened to his wife Sarah who persuaded him to add “dead works” to his faith. And so he took the Egyptians slave woman Hagar and she bare him Ishmael. This unbelief in God’s promise led Abraham into the experience of bondage to sin. “Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. 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. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children” Gal. 4:22-25. The old covenant is faith and works. There is no forgiveness or power for deliverance in Abraham’s works.

Still later in the history of Abraham’s descendants, God delivered the Israelites from Egyptians slavery and gave them His everlasting covenant. “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” Ex. 19:4, 5.

Their response was, “All that the LORD hath spoken we will do” Ex. 19:8. That was their old covenant with God, their promise was to obey. “For these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage” Gal. 4:24. The promise of the people could never forgive sins and supply power from sin. It could only deepen them in sin by trusting in their promises to obey. Such is the bondage of the old covenant.

Ellen White provides this explanation of the old covenant. “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. . . . But if the Abrahamic covenant contained the promise of redemption, why was another covenant formed at Sinai? 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."¹⁰

There is no salvation in the old covenant. And so in order to lead the people to His everlasting covenant God lovingly provided many object lessons that would point them to Christ rather than their own promises to obey. These were called the ordinances consisting of sacrifices, feast days, the earthly sanctuary, the priesthood, which were all dispensational for the time before the cross. "Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary" Heb. 9:1. Indeed, it all did perish with the crucifixion of Christ. "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; . . . Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ" Col. 2:14-17. The ordinances of the old covenant were nailed to the cross and that aspect of the first dispensation Hebrew church was down away with.

But the issue of the old covenant experience based on promises to obey God's commandments remains not only from the Hebrew church but into the church of the new dispensation. "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: . . . their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" Hebrews 8:7-12.

God's covenant promises that sins forgiven and blotted out with His law written in hearts and minds. This is the day of atonement. Jesus actually took our sinful flesh and was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. Through the veil of His flesh he has opened the

¹⁰ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 371, 372.

way into the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary. We sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Eph. 2:4-6.

As over four hundred graduates received their degrees in commencement grove at Pacific Union College last Sunday, hundreds of parents and well-wishers were there to cheer on their candidates. They were taking pictures. They had balloons of celebration. They were throwing tortillas into the air. Each time a student's name was announced by the academic dean, a cheer would arise from the crowd on behalf of their loved one. The whole family was there on the stage in their representative graduate shaking hands with the president of the college and receiving his or her diploma.

At the cross Christ has opened a fountain of blood and water for the forgiveness of sins and power to cleanse the life from sin, which He ministers to us as High Priest from the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary. His blood—his endless life and sinless life—purifies the conscience from sin. As He overcame sin in sinful flesh, likewise he gives us, who follow Him by faith within the veil, sinless living in sinful flesh. Character perfection is the completion of God's everlasting covenant in Christ.

The story is told of a prisoner who sat in his death cell awaiting execution. One day a clergyman bearing a message from the governor came to see the prisoner. As the clergyman entered the prisoner's cell, the prisoner shouted, "I don't want to see you. I need none of your prayers."

"But," the minister insisted, "I have a message for you from the governor."

When he handed the prisoner an envelope, the convict shouted, "Take it away! I don't want to hear anything from him, either."

Greatly disappointed, the minister left with the message still in his pocket. Later the warden told the prisoner, "The message you refused from the governor contained your pardon!"

It is said that when he was executed, the prisoner's last words were: "I'm dying not because I murdered a man, but because I refused a pardon."

No one will be eternally lost because he is a sinner; he will be lost because he refused the pardon given him from heaven. And anyone who is saved will be saved because of the initiative of God in giving the gift of righteousness in Christ who died for the sins of the whole world. The cross legally justifies the existence of all temporal life on

the earth. Those who appreciate this gift of life believe God's promise,—the everlasting covenant,—and thus experience the forgiveness of sins and deliverance from its bondage.