

## WHAT IS THE TRUTH OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH IN VERITY?

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Is the 1888 message idea of justification by faith the same as that held by the Evangelical Sunday-keeping churches? “The everlasting gospel” of Revelation 14 is the 1888 view of justification by faith because Ellen White defined the latter as “the third angel’s message in verity” (*Review & Herald*, April 1, 1890). She also says, “The doctrine of justification by faith has been lost sight of by many who have professed to believe the third angel’s message.” “Not one in one hundred . . . understands for himself the Bible truth on this subject [justification by faith] that is so necessary to our present and eternal welfare” (August 13 and September 3, 1889). Is the proportion much better today?

The real question is: In what way is the Lord’s 1888 message of justification by faith (which “in His great mercy He sent” us) different from that of the Sunday-keeping churches? Or does it differ? This is the principal point on which opposers have contended for over 50 years.

Did Martin Luther and the 16th century Reformers proclaim the essence of the 1888 message? If the answer is “yes” there is no need for the existence of the Seventh-day Adventist Church other than that we can contribute legalism. A superficial reading of Ellen White gives the impression that the answer is yes. If this is correct, there is no need for us to

recover the 1888 message (the position of those who oppose). Here’s the Ellen White statement often cited: “The great doctrine of justification by faith, so clearly taught by Luther . . .” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 253).

But there are other statements she made that need to be considered: “Luther had a great work to do . . . yet he did not receive all the light which was to be given to the world. From that time to this, new light has been continually shining upon the Scriptures and new truths have been constantly unfolding” (pp. 148, 149). This must include the 1888 message.

Ellen White said that Luther did not preach all of the gospel: “The message of salvation has been preached in all ages; but this message [the third angel’s message which in essence is justification by faith] is a part of the gospel which could be proclaimed only in the last days, for only then would it be true that the hour of judgment had come” (p. 356). Why is this true? Because since 1844 we have been living in the cosmic Day of Atonement. The “new light” and “new truths” she speaks of must include a clearer understanding of justification by faith which is parallel to Christ’s “new” work (since 1844) of cleansing the heavenly sanctuary. What wasn’t true in Luther’s day is true today—this is the heavenly Day of Atonement, and of judgment.

Ellen White continues on the same page: “No such message has ever been given in past ages.” Hebrews says that Noah preached “righteousness which is according to faith” (11:7), but it wasn’t in the light of the cleansing of the sanctuary! Ellen

White continues: “Paul, as we have seen, did not preach it; he pointed his brethren into the then far-distant future. . . . The Reformers did not proclaim it.” That also includes Calvin and the Wesleys.<sup>1</sup>

The only conclusion possible: There is an understanding of the gospel of justification by faith that is “new light” for these last days, a message that must include “showers from heaven of the latter rain,” and “the beginning” of the loud cry that must yet lighten the earth with glory. *That is the 1888 message.*

### **How does it differ? How does it go beyond Luther?**

Although we as Seventh-day Adventists have made little if any effort to tell the 1888 view to the Catholic and Protestant world, it resolves the centuries-old conflict between Calvinism and Arminianism. It agrees with Calvinism in that Christ’s work of justification accomplished on His cross was effective, He accomplished what He set out to do. It disagrees with Calvinism’s “limited atonement” confined only to the “elect.”

It agrees with Arminianism’s insistence that what Christ accomplished is available to “all men,” but it disagrees with its insistence that it is only available, that there is nothing in it effective for “all men” unless they do something first. The 1888 view says

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<sup>1</sup> “Great truths that have lain unheeded and unseen since the day of Pentecost, are to shine from God’s word in their native purity. To those who truly love God the Holy Spirit will reveal truths that have faded from the mind, and will also reveal truths that are entirely new.” Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 473.

that Christ’s sacrifice has touched “every man” who has ever come into the world in that mankind’s very life is the purchase of His blood. The Father can make “His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and send rain on the just and on the unjust only because of the objective or legal justification that Christ has *given* to “all men” (Matt. 5:45; Rom. 5:15-18).

Waggoner stated the message clearly: “By the righteousness of One the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life” [Rom. 5:18]. *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 only upon 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. So many spurn the gift offered so freely” (*Waggoner on Romans*, p. 5.101, 1896).

Waggoner made plain that this 1888 view of justification is not the heresy of Universalism: “Do you mean to teach universal salvation?’ someone may ask. We mean to teach just what the Word of God teaches—that ‘the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men.’ Titus 2:11,

RV. [the Greek sustains this rendering]. God has wrought out salvation for every man, *and has given it to him*: but the majority spurn it and throw it away. The judgment will reveal the fact that full salvation was given to every man and that the lost have deliberately thrown away their birthright possession" (*The Glad Tidings*, pp. 13, 14, 1900). "The gift is ours to keep. *If anyone has not this blessing, it is because he has not recognized the gift, or has deliberately thrown it away*" (p. 66).

Jones was in agreement: "All that were in the world were included in Adam; and all that are in the world are included in Christ. In other words: Adam in his sin reached all the world; Jesus Christ, the second Adam, in His righteousness touches all humanity. . . . Does the second Adam's righteousness embrace as many as does the first Adam's sin? Look closely. Without our consent at all, without our having anything to do with it, we were all included in the first Adam's sin; we were there. All the human race were in the first Adam. What that first Adam, what that first man, did, meant . . . it involved us. . . .

"Jesus Christ, the second man, took our sinful nature. He touched us 'in all points.' He became we and died the death. And so in Him, and by that, every man that has ever lived upon the earth, and was involved with the first Adam, is involved in this, and will live again [1 Cor. 15:22]. . . . Therefore, just as far as the first Adam reaches man, so far the second Adam reaches man. The first Adam brought man under the condemnation of sin, even unto death; [so] the second Adam's righteousness

undoes that., and makes every man live again" (*General Conference Bulletin*, 1895, pp. 268, 269; *The Third Angel's Message*, pp. 73, 74).

### **Why is this larger view so important?**

(a) By recovering the true points of both Calvinism and Arminianism while rejecting their errors, it rediscovers the original truth involved in the cross of Christ in a way that none of the Reformers were able to achieve.

(b) Thus Christ actually saved the world, and in doing so, He saved "every man" in an objective sense. As Paul states it, "The judicial action, following upon the one offence [of Adam], issued in a verdict of condemnation, but the act of grace, following upon so many misdeeds, issued in a [judicial] verdict of acquittal. . . . The issue of one just act is acquittal and life for all men" (Rom. 5:16, 18, NEB).

(c) Thus the 1888 message could grasp the truth that Christ died the second death for "every man" (Heb. 2:9). Luther almost reached this truth because he alone of the Reformers began to understand the nature of man; but as a whole the Reformation could not grasp it due to their prevailing belief in natural immortality. Their name "protestant" was "dead" (Rev. 3:1).

Likewise the Sunday-keeping Evangelicals of the 1888 era could not grasp it for the same reason. "The breadth, and length, and depth, and height" of the love (*agape*) of Christ was over their heads. In 1888 God intended Seventh-day Adventists to supply what was missing.

(d) The conclusion: *God has entrusted to Seventh-day Adventists a unique understanding of the cross that with His blessing is yet to lighten the earth with glory.* This understanding cannot be grasped except in the light of the cleansing of the sanctuary. Ellen White long ago detailed the tragic importance of not following Christ by faith into the Second Apartment of the heavenly sanctuary (*Early Writings*, pp. 55, 56). Failure to do so exposes us to the extremely subtle counterfeits of the work of a false holy spirit. Genuine justification by faith in the light of Daniel 8:14 will save us from confusion and deception.

(e) When an honest heart recognizes this ultimate truth of what happened on the cross, “the love [agape] of Christ constraineth” (compels) the soul to live “henceforth” only for the One who died our second death for us. The results, in God's plan, are phenomenal: All old covenant, egocentric motivation is transcended. The Sabbath truth, for example, comes into its own. In the final loud cry yet to come, for which the 1888 message was an advance billing, “the rays of light penetrate everywhere, the truth is seen in its clearness, and the honest children of God sever the bands which have held them. Family connections, church relations, are powerless to stay them now. Truth is more precious than all besides. . . . A large number take their stand upon the Lord's side” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 612). That glorious denouement to the gospel commission was what the Lord intended “us” to see in the 1888 era. But rejecting (“in a great degree”) the beginning of the latter rain could lead to a spiritual abortion.

The old covenant motivation of fear will not figure in this closing work. “The grace of God that brings salvation . . . teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.” Why this ultimate power in soul-winning? The “grace” points to the cross: “Our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, . . . gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good” (Titus 2:11-14, NIV; not perfection of the flesh but perfection of Christlike character is embodied here).

(f) According to Ellen White's divinely inspired prophecy in *The Great Controversy*, our denominational evangelism has yet to come fully into its own. When we are willing to embrace the full truth of biblical justification by faith (with its concomitant blessings of the new covenant truth and the nearness of our Savior) we will have a message that will startle modern Evangelical churches. Then the thrilling prophecies of *The Great Controversy* will be unfolded, yes, those of Revelation 18.

Does the 1888 Message weaken obedience? Ellen White declared in 1889 that “we have preached the law, the law, until we are as dry as the hills of Gilboa.” The question naturally arises, How does the 1888 message (which Ellen White endorsed so heartily) relate to God's law? Does it proclaim cheap grace? Does it encourage disobedience to the law of God? Does the message lower church standards? Does it dwell too much on the cross of

Christ and what happened there, and then neglect to remind us of our works, the obedience we must continually demonstrate?

We know that Ellen White was overjoyed to hear Jones and Waggoner present the message. She declared it to be the clearest presentations of the gospel she had heard publicly “for the past forty-five years.”<sup>2</sup> She also said that if they had not brought the message, we wouldn't have had it, meaning that the Lord laid a burden on them He had not laid on her.<sup>3</sup> If in any way their message weakens obedience to God's law, it could not be “precious,” let alone “most precious.” What made her so happy was that their understanding of justification by faith was fresh, unique, and dynamic. It set the law before the people in its true light.<sup>4</sup> She was painfully aware that the views held by the Sunday-keeping Evangelical churches denigrated God's law, declaring either (a) that it had been abolished at the cross or (b) it was impossible for us fallen humans to obey. Either way, this popular view of justification by faith was employed to refute the Sabbath truth. She rejoiced that the 1888 message presented the Ten Commandments as ten promises—glorifying obedience.

**The 1888 view became clear as follows:**

(1) *Justification by faith is far more than a legal declaration.* The legal proclamation (or declaration)

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<sup>2</sup> *Review and Herald*, March 11, 1890.

<sup>3</sup> *1888 Materials*, p. 608; Ellen White never claimed that she herself was bringing the message of the latter rain or the loud cry; she said that of their message.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Waggoner on Romans*, p. 3.68, 69.

of “acquittal for all men” was made at the cross (John 12:32, 33; Rom. 3:23, 24; 5:15-18; anything that Christ accomplished at His cross cannot be restricted or denied to anyone). The 1888 message went a step further; it made the believer become “obedient to all the commandments of God.”

(2) *Justification by faith now became a personal experience.* The heart of the one who believes is now reconciled to God. And since no one can be reconciled to God and not at the same time be reconciled to God's holy law, it follows (says Ellen White) that genuine justification by faith makes the believer manifest “obedience to all the commandments of God.”<sup>5</sup> That of course includes the Sabbath commandment (but it also includes obedience to the seventh commandment). Fornication and adultery are not to be “named” among those who prepare for Christ's second coming (Eph. 5:3). In the 1888 era, Ellen White was especially concerned: a minister who breaks the seventh commandment “is a traitor of the worst type. From one such tainted, polluted mind the youth often receive their first impure thoughts. . . . A second trial would be of no avail . . .”<sup>6</sup>

(3) *Thus the 1888 message proved to be a first “clear” message in Adventism that joined “the faith of Jesus” to God's law.* The message produces the kind of obedience that will enable “His people to stand in the day of God.” Ellen White so recognized it, which is why she declared it to be the initial

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<sup>5</sup> *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 91, 92. See also *Waggoner on Romans*, p. 3.77.

<sup>6</sup> *General Conference Bulletin*, 1893, p. 162.

“showers from heaven of the latter rain” and “the beginning” of the message of Revelation 18:1-4 that will close the great gospel commission.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> “God has revealed himself again and again in a most marked manner in Battle Creek. He has given a large measure of his Holy Spirit to the believers there. It has come unexpectedly at times, and there have been deep movings upon hearts and minds; a letting go of selfish purposes, and a bringing into the treasury many things that you were convicted God had forbidden you to have. This blessing extended to large numbers; but why was not this sweet, holy working continued upon hearts and minds? Some felt annoyed at this outpouring, and their own natural dispositions were manifested. They said, ‘This is only excitement; it is not the Holy Spirit, not showers of the latter rain from heaven.’ There were hearts full of unbelief, who did not drink in of the Spirit, but who had bitterness in their souls.” *Special Testimonies*, Series A, No. 6, p. 19. “The time of test is just upon us, for the loud cry of the third angel has already begun in the revelation of the righteousness of Christ, the sin-pardoning Redeemer. This is the beginning of the light of the angel whose glory shall fill the whole earth.” *Review and Herald*, Nov. 22, 1892; cf. “The message of the fall of Babylon, as given by the second angel, is repeated, with the additional mention of the corruptions which have been entering the churches since 1844. The work of this angel comes in at the right time to join in the last great work of the third angel’s message as it swells to a loud cry. And the people of God are thus prepared to stand in the hour of temptation, which they are soon to meet. I saw a great light resting upon them, and they united to fearlessly proclaim the third angel’s message.

Angels were sent to aid the mighty angel from heaven, and I heard voices which seemed to sound everywhere, ‘Come out of her, My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her

(4) *All “obedience” which is motivated by fear of punishment or by the egocentric hope of reward comes far short of true obedience.* It is the righteousness of the Pharisees. Outward compliance with the stipulations of the law when the heart is unreconciled is the lukewarmness plague of the “church of the Laodiceans.” This was the problem which “the Lord in His great mercy” sought to heal by sending His 1888 message.

(5) *Thus Jones and Waggoner caught a vision of the cross in the third angel’s message.* They glimpsed what will be the light that enlightens the world at last: the proclamation of Christ and Him crucified which leads to self being crucified with Him.

(6) *But we must beware of the latest counterfeit.* We need not employ Mel Gibson’s new movie about the cross in order to proclaim “the third angel’s message in verity,” which is “Christ and Him crucified.” The movie has not made “the foolishness of preaching” *passe*, but Mark Brown of the American Tract Society says, “It is the greatest

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iniquities.’ This message seemed to be an addition to the third message, joining it as the midnight cry joined the second angel’s message in 1844. The glory of God rested upon the patient, waiting saints, and they fearlessly gave the last solemn warning, proclaiming the fall of Babylon and calling upon God’s people to come out of her that they might escape her fearful doom.

The light that was shed upon the waiting ones penetrated everywhere, and those in the churches who had any light, who had not heard and rejected the three messages, obeyed the call and left the fallen churches.” *Early Writings*, pp. 277, 278.

evangelism tool to come along in years—maybe 2000 years.” (Pastors and evangelists: Gibson’s movie won’t run you out of business.) Trial showings are reported to have caused audiences to cry “buckets of tears” as people are led to an infatuation with the human character portrayed in the movie as “Jesus,” and then mourn as “he” is tortured in the crucifixion pain. But those tears are human emotion, easily aroused; the audience can go out of the theater as world-loving as they entered. The movie does not (cannot!) portray “Jesus” as dying the *second* death for the sins of the world. That truth is still left to be proclaimed by flesh-and-blood people.

(7) *But is there danger that presenting too strongly the truth of what happened on the cross may lead people to neglect obedience to the law?* We have this answer (speaking of the 1888 message): “The theme that attracts the heart of the sinner is Christ, and Him crucified. . . . Present Him thus to the hungering multitudes, and the light of His love will win [people] from darkness to light, from transgression to obedience and true holiness. Beholding Jesus upon the cross of Calvary arouses the conscience to the heinous character of sin as nothing else can do.”<sup>8</sup> That phrase “nothing else can do” must include our famous preaching “the law, the law, until we are as dry as the hills of Gilboa.” “We” learned a better way in the 1888 message. And the future still awaits lightening the earth with glory (Rev. 18:1-4).

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<sup>8</sup> *Review and Herald*, Nov. 22, 1892.

(8) *Never in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist church has a message been more powerfully demonstrated to produce obedience to God’s holy law.*<sup>9</sup> The opponents of a century-plus ago were afraid that too much grace would undermine obedience. Paul says that nothing but proclaiming that “grace of God” can motivate us to “say No to ungodliness, and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age” (Titus 2:11, NIV). Fear won’t do it; hope for heavenly real estate won’t do it; only Christ’s grace can do it.

(9) *The issue which this generation must settle is whether we shall proclaim the gospel as the New Covenant, or as the Old Covenant.* The former proclaims “liberty to the captives,” the latter,

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<sup>9</sup> “When I stated before my brethren that I had heard for the first time the views of Elder E. J. Waggoner, some did not believe me. I stated that I had heard precious truths uttered that I could respond to with all my heart, for had not these great and glorious truths, the righteousness of Christ and the entire sacrifice made in behalf of man, been imprinted indelibly on my mind by the Spirit of God? Has not this subject been presented in the testimonies again and again? When the Lord had given to my brethren the burden to proclaim this message I felt inexpressibly grateful to God, for I knew it was the message for this time.

“The third angel’s message is the proclamation of the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus Christ. The commandments of God have been proclaimed, but the faith of Jesus Christ has not been proclaimed by Seventh-day Adventists as of equal importance, the law and the gospel going hand in hand. I cannot find language to express this subject in its fullness.” Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 172.

“bondage.” One proclaims the Ten Commandments as God’s ten promises; the other proclaims a fear-laden motivation as ten impossible-to-obey requirements.

(10) *“Godly fear” is appropriate for any true-hearted Christian. Jesus describes a group who will appear before Him in judgment at last. They think they have “kept the commandments.” But Jesus must tell them sorrowfully, “I never knew you” (Matt. 7:21, 22). What could have gone wrong? Their good “works” were “wonderful.”*

Paul can help us understand the mystery: these dear people had misunderstood what true commandment-keeping is. It does include Sabbath-keeping, health reform, tithe-paying, all the good works we can think of; but it fails to be true obedience unless it is motivated by *agape*: “Love [*agape*] worketh no ill to his neighbor; therefore love [*agape* in the original] is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom. 13:10).

Popular Christianity which teaches that we can be saved in sin rather than from it, fails to grasp the import of *agape* because people generally hold to the natural immortality of the soul. The world needs to hear the “most precious message,” which if proclaimed will be “Pentecost” over again.