

THE EVERLASTING GOSPEL

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Chapter 1

The Birth of the Advent Movement

Out of the great disappointment of 1844, God raised the Advent movement, namely the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Revelation 10:8-11

Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: “Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.” So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, “Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but ‘in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.’” I took the little scroll from the angel’s hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. Then I was told, “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings.”

His purpose in doing this was not to add another denomination to the large list of those already existing. Rather, I believe God raised up the Advent movement to restore, proclaim, and demonstrate the power of the full and pure gospel, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Matthew 24:14:

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

The fulfillment of this prophecy is the everlasting gospel proclaimed by the three angels of Revelation 14:6-12, a unique Seventh-day Adventist message:

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth — to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.”

A second angel followed and said, “‘Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great,’ which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.”

A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, they, too, will drink the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name.” This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus.

This is how Ellen G. White described our divine mission:

“As Christ’s ambassadors, they [God’s people] are to search the Scriptures, to seek the truths that have been hidden beneath the rubbish of errors. And every ray of light received is to be communicated to others. One interest will prevail, one subject will swallow up every other, Christ Our Righteousness.” (Review and Herald, Extra, 23 December 1890.)

The above statement was made in the context of the 1888 message of justification by faith, “the third angel’s message in verity” (The Review and Herald, 1 April 1890). This “most precious message” (Testimonies to Ministers, 91) was sent by God to liberate Adventists from a subtle form of legalism (saved by grace plus keeping the law), similar to the Galatian problem. In the 27 May 1976 Adventist Review, a group of church leaders, quoting Ellen G. White, admitted that the 1888 message was “the beginning of the latter rain and the loud cry.” They also confessed: “It is clear that the fullness of the marvelous blessing God wanted to bestow upon the church was not received at that time nor subsequently.” Had this message been fully received and proclaimed to the world, it would have lightened the earth with God’s glory culminating in the second advent.

Prior to 1888, the pioneers of the Adventist church were preoccupied with preaching the law, in their attempts to counteract the teachings of dispensationalism — a teaching which had done away with the law. This law emphasis was greatly responsible for the legalism in which early Adventists were trapped. Because of this emphasis, the glorious truth of justification by faith was lost sight of

and, therefore, excluded from the main thrust of the church's teachings.

For example, from August 17 to December 19, 1874, Uriah Smith published a series of articles in the Review and Herald under the heading "Leading Doctrines of the Review." No mention was made of justification by faith. Three years later, in 1877, James White and Uriah Smith conducted The Bible Institute to train ministers for the work of evangelism. Again, there was no mention of justification by faith. The following year, 1878, Uriah published a book entitled Synopsis of Present Truth. In all of the 336 pages of this book, no mention was made of justification by faith, but there was much about the law. No wonder Ellen G. White warned the church, "We have preached the law until we are as dry as the hills of Gilboa that had neither dew nor rain" (Review and Herald, 3 March 1890).

In trying to correct this problem, Ellen G. White made the following statement to the ministers gathered at a workers meeting in Battle Creek, Michigan [U.S.A.]:

"The danger has been presented to me again and again of entertaining, as a people, false ideas of justification by faith. I have been shown for years that Satan would work in a special manner to confuse the mind on this point. The law of God has been largely dwelt upon and has been presented to congregations, almost as destitute of the knowledge of Jesus Christ and His relation to the law as was the offering of Cain. I have been shown that many have been kept from the faith because of the mixed, confused ideas of

salvation, because the ministers have worked in a wrong manner to reach hearts. The point that has been urged upon my mind for years is the imputed righteousness of Christ. I have wondered that this matter was not made the subject of discourses in our churches throughout the land, when the matter has been kept so constantly urged upon me, and I have made it the subject of nearly every discourse and talk that I have given to the people.” (Manuscript 36, 1890. Now published in Faith and Works, 18).

Sad to say, many Seventh-day Adventists still have mixed, confused ideas of salvation, even to this day. As a result, many of God’s people are practicing a legalistic type of religion with no assurance of salvation. Robbed of the peace and joy of salvation, they are living the Christian life out of fear of punishment or desire for reward. “Such religion,” says the Spirit of Prophecy, “is worth nothing” (Steps to Christ, 44).

In order to fulfill our “Global Mission,” it is imperative that we restore the everlasting gospel in all its fullness, beauty, and power, the good news of salvation that will bring joy, peace, and victory to God’s people. Unless we do so, we will never be able to “finish the work.” After more than a century and a half, God is still waiting patiently to lighten this earth with His glory through the remnant. How much longer are we going to keep Him waiting?

The intent of this two part series of studies is, therefore, to define and explain the everlasting gospel, the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. In so doing, it is also the heartfelt purpose of this “African bush

preacher” to expose to God’s people in Africa that “most precious message” that God brought to the Adventist church over a century ago. With this brief historical background, we are now ready to examine the unique understanding of the everlasting gospel God raised the Advent movement to proclaim in its global mission.

The Everlasting Gospel Defined

According to the apostle Paul, the gospel is “the righteousness of God.”

Romans 1:16

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

Romans 3:21

But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

By this he meant it is a righteousness planned by God from the foundation of the world...

Ephesians 1:4

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

Revelation 13:8

All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast — all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.

...A righteousness promised by God since the Fall...

Genesis 3:15

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.

...A righteousness fulfilled by God through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, the everlasting gospel.

Romans 1:1-4

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God — the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

2 Corinthians 5:18-21

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The gospel, in other words, is a righteousness that is all of God's doing on behalf of the fallen human race.

At the Fall, not only did all mankind come under the condemnation of death in Adam...

Romans 5:12,18

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.... Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

1 Corinthians 15:21-22

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

...But man's very nature was corrupted, sold into slavery to sin.

2 Peter 2:19

They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity — for “people are slaves to whatever has mastered them.”

John 8:34

Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.”

Romans 3:9-12

What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”

Romans 7:14

We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.

Consequently, since the Fall, holy and sinless living, apart from God's grace, became impossible and therefore, no one is justified "by the works of the law."

Romans 3:20

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

Galatians 2:16

...Know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

But what the law could not accomplish, because of weakened human nature, God did in Christ Jesus. By sending His own Son in "the likeness of sinful man" Christ obtained for mankind a salvation full and complete from every aspect of our sin problem from the guilt and punishment of sin, the power and slavery to sin, and the nature and presence of sin.

Romans 8:2-4

...Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:5-6

...Made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus....

This is what constitutes the good news of the everlasting gospel.

Unfortunately, as a church, we have given the word “gospel” a very broad meaning. As a result, many Adventists are confused regarding the relationship between justification the imputed righteousness of Christ, and sanctification the imparted righteousness of Christ. The Bible describes three phases of salvation that are related yet distinct. These three phases of salvation are:

The gospel; The fruits of the gospel; and The hope of the gospel.

Failure to see the relationship and distinction between them has produced confusion in our midst. The following is a brief description of these three phases of salvation, showing their relationship as well as their distinction.

1. The Gospel.

This is the unconditional good news of salvation obtained for all humanity in Christ's holy history — His birth, life, death, and resurrection. It is referred to as the objective facts of salvation and is a finished or completed work, to which mankind has made, and can make, no contribution whatsoever.

Romans 3:28

For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.

Romans 5:18

Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.

It is therefore, entirely the work of God and that is why it is described by the apostle Paul as “the righteousness of God.” It is this holy history of Christ that constitutes the everlasting gospel and saves sinful man from sin — now, and in the judgment. When received by faith, the gospel becomes justification or righteousness by faith.

Each of the above four facts that constitute the gospel message — the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ — is vital to our salvation. In the incarnation or Christ’s birth, God united the Son’s sinless divine nature to our corporate fallen human nature that needed redeeming. This not only qualified Christ to be mankind’s legal substitute and representative, but it also made our humanity, which was spiritually dead, spiritually alive in Christ.

Ephesians 2:4-5

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved.

By His life, which He lived for 33 years bearing our corporate humanity, Christ perfectly obeyed the positive demands of the law (He fulfilled the injunction “obey and live”), on behalf of the human

race He came to redeem. But since that human nature He assumed in the incarnation was our corporate condemned humanity that needed redeeming, His perfect obedience could not, in and of itself, atone for our sins. Consequently, having satisfied the positive demands of the law by His sinless life, Jesus then went to the cross and bore the wages of sin in our corporate humanity. In doing this, His death met the justice of the law on behalf of all mankind.

On the cross, the collective life of the fallen human race died forever in Christ, the second or eternal death, the just demands of the law. But the incredible good news of the gospel is that God so loved the world that He gave the eternal life of His only begotten Son to and for the human race.

1 John 5:11-12

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

As a result, the human race was resurrected in Christ as a redeemed humanity, cleansed from all sin.

2 Timothy 1:8-10

So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. He has saved us and called us to a holy life — not

because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

It is on this basis that Paul could declare to the Corinthian Christians:

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

This, in a nutshell, is what constitutes the fantastic good news of the everlasting gospel.

It is important to note at this point, however, what Christ actually saved mankind from in His holy history — His birth, life, death, and resurrection. For everything we believers experience pertaining to our salvation, in this present life and in the life to come, is based or founded on this finished work of our Saviour.

1 Corinthians 3:11-13

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be

shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work.

The Bible clearly teaches that God sent His Son into this world to save mankind from sin.

John 1:29

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

John 3:17

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

But sin is a multiphased problem. All Adventists are aware that sin is "the transgression of the law"...

1 John 3:4

Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.

...that results in guilt and punishment, the curse.

Galatians 3:10

For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.”

But the Scriptures also define sin as a state a force, a law or principle that resides and controls our sinful human nature, the flesh.

Romans 7:17,20,23

As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ...Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. ...But I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.

And further, the corruption and physical infirmities of our bodies are also part and parcel of our sin problem from which we need to be redeemed.

Romans 8:23

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

1 Corinthians 15:53-57

For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ — by His birth, life, death, and resurrection — redeemed fallen humanity from every one of these sin problems: its guilt and punishment, its power and slavery, as well as its nature and presence. Therefore, the good news of the everlasting gospel is that Christ obtained for mankind salvation full and complete.

Through the incarnation, we who were spiritually dead were made spiritually alive in Christ.

Ephesians 2:5

...Made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved.

Based on this fact, believers can experience the new birth.

Titus 3:5

...He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit....

Then, by His perfect life and sacrificial death Christ re-wrote mankind's history and changed humanity's status from condemnation to justification to life.

Romans 5:18

Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

Having reconciled the sinful human race to God on the cross...

Romans 5:10

For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

...Christ, in the resurrection, cleanses the human race from every defilement of sin. He then took this redeemed humanity (in Himself) to heaven to intercede for us at God's right hand, as our great High Priest in the heavenly Sanctuary.

Romans 8:34

Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Ephesians 2:5-6

...Made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus....

1 John 2:1-2

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father — Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

But since Christ's holy history — His birth, life, death, and resurrection (i.e., the gospel) — is God's supreme gift to mankind, and, in view of the fact that God created man with a free will, this good news of the gospel demands a human response.

John 3:16-18

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For

God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

Mark 16:15-16

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

Consequently, those who accept the gospel message by faith are counted perfect in Christ — in performance, in justice, as well as in nature. This is what justification by faith or imputed righteousness is all about and which entitles all believers to eternal life and heaven, now and in the judgment. So while the gospel, the truth as it is in Christ, is unconditional good news to all humanity, experiencing that salvation is conditional and will only be enjoyed by those who believe or receive Christ by faith.

John 5:24

"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life."

Romans 5:17

For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

Hence, the good news of the everlasting gospel is that, in Christ, God not only obtained for the human race "justification unto life," but in that salvation is also included sanctification, total victory over the sinful nature, as well as glorification, the total redemption of our bodies. As a result, the believer who is justified by faith not only stands "complete in Christ"...

Colossians 2:10

...And in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.

...but the faith that justifies also makes it possible for the believer to live the sanctified life, manifesting the selfless love of the Saviour in this present evil world.

Galatians 1:4

[The Lord Jesus Christ], who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father....

And if that faith continues or endures to the end, it will culminate in glorification at the second advent.

Romans 6:22

But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.

1 John 3:8-11

The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister. For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.

This was the essence of the 1888 message. This is the everlasting gospel which I believe God raised up the Advent Movement to proclaim to all nations as a witness before Christ returns to execute judgment.

2. The Fruits of the Gospel.

This subjective experience — living out what Christ obtained for humanity through the gospel — is what the Holy Spirit produces in the life of the believer who has been justified by faith, who has peace with God, who has experienced the new birth, and who is walking in the Spirit.

Galatians 5:16,22-23

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ...But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

In saving us from sin, Christ not only saved us from death to life, or from condemnation to justification, but also from sinful living to a life of good works.

Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who 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 3:8

This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

John 14:12

Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

Hence, the gospel is not only the means of our salvation into heaven but is also the basis of holy living and good works.

Ephesians 2:8-10

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

This holy living or fruit bearing the Holy Spirit produces in the life of believers is referred to in Scripture as sanctification, which is also experienced by faith. These fruits do not contribute one iota towards our justification, which entitles us to heaven, but witnesses or manifests the salvation we already possess in Christ. We must ever

keep in mind that the Holy Spirit is not a co-redeemer with Christ. His part in the plan of salvation is to communicate or make real in our experience the righteousness of Christ. Consequently, sanctification must not be equated with the gospel, even though it is good news, but defined as the fruits of the gospel.

Failure to distinguish justification (the means of our salvation) from sanctification (the fruits of salvation) has produced the insecurity common among so many Adventists. We must never forget that the justification of the believer, which brings peace with God...

Romans 5:1

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ....

...is based on a finished work, the gospel. But sanctification or holy living, as a subjective experience produced by the Holy Spirit, is an ongoing process that will continue as long as life will last or until the second advent, whichever comes first.

Through the gospel, the believer stands perfect in Christ; this is the basis of assurance. But the good works or holy living demonstrates that the believer's faith is genuine and not a sham.

James 2:14-26

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that — and shudder. You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

True justification by faith will express itself in Christlike behavior, and this godly behavior is included in the salvation we have in Christ. Genuine justification by faith, therefore, always produces good works...

Matthew 13:23

“But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

...even though these good works have no merits per se, and may not be apparent to the believer himself.

Matthew 25:37-39

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’”

It is for this reason that the New Testament teaches that we are justified by faith alone...

Romans 3:28

For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.

Galatians 2:16

...Know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus

that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.

...yet judged by works.

Matthew 7:21

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

Matthew 25:34-40

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and

invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”

John 5:28-30

“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out — those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.”

Romans 2:5-8

But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God “will repay each person according to what they have done.” To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.

2 Corinthians 5:10

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

The works being not the means, but the evidence of justification by faith.

James 2:20-22

You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.

Further, as mentioned above, justification is entirely God's doing and a finished or completed work which is received by faith alone; while sanctification does involve our human co-operation, "walking in the Spirit," and, as already indicated, is an ongoing process, "the work of a lifetime."

Faith, according to the New Testament, is more than a mental assent to truth, but involves a heart obedience to the gospel what God did for and to our corporate humanity in Christ.

Romans 6:17

But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance.

Romans 1:5

Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake.

Galatians 5:7

You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth?

2 Thessalonians 1:3-8

We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing. Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey

the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

Such obedience of faith means a total surrender of the will to the truth as it is in Christ. Thus, in justification by faith, the believer identifies with Christ and Him crucified, which is the true significance of baptism.

Romans 6:3-11

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin — because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Unlike any other religion, Christianity is more than following a set of rules, do's and don'ts; it is participating in Christ's life and death.

The believer is reminded of this in the Lord's Supper, in partaking of the bread and wine.

1 Corinthians 10:16-18

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf. Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar?

With Paul, all Christians must confess:

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

This is true justification by faith, the fruit of which is holy living.

3. The Hope of the Gospel.

This refers to the ultimate reality of salvation, which will be experienced by all believers at the second coming of Christ. It is at this time when "this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality":

1 Corinthians 15:53

For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

The Bible calls this experience “glorification.”

While the experience of conversion and the process of sanctification does bring about a change to the Christian’s character, no change takes place to the believer’s basic nature, which remains sinful throughout his or her earthly existence or until the second advent. It is for this reason that Christians groan within themselves, waiting patiently for the redemption of their sinful bodies.

Romans 8:22-24

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?

Philippians 3:20-21

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables

him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Like sanctification, glorification must not be equated with the gospel but is the hope of the gospel. For while the gospel is the good news of salvation that God obtained in Christ for all humanity, glorification is “the blessed hope” only for the believers who are rejoicing in the saving power of the gospel and looking forward to the second advent.

Titus 2:11-13

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ....

To the unbelievers, those who have deliberately, persistently, and ultimately rejected the gospel, the second coming of Christ is “the great day of His wrath.”

Revelation 6:12-17

I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The heavens

receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?”

It is for this reason that a distinction must be made between the gospel as an objective truth (what Christ accomplished for mankind in His birth, life, death, and resurrection), and salvation as a subjective experience (what the Holy Spirit does in the believer). While the gospel is the unconditional good news of salvation for all humanity, salvation as an actual experience is conditional. In fact, the New Testament makes it clear, all three experiences of salvation — the peace that comes through justification by faith, the victory over sin and holy living through the process of sanctification, and the ultimate reality of salvation at glorification — are conditional.

Thus, to experience the “justification to life” Christ obtained for all men by His perfect obedience, the condition is faith or belief.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 5:24

“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”

Hence, “the just shall live by faith.”

Hebrews 10:38

And, “But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back.”

Secondly, to experience the sanctified life Christ accomplished for sinful humanity in His holy history, the condition is walking in the Spirit.

Galatians 5:16

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

Colossians 2:6

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him....

Romans 13:14

Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

And finally, if we are to receive the glorified body of Christ that He was resurrected with and which He took to heaven, our faith must endure unto the end.

Matthew 10:22

You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Hebrews 10:38-39

And, “But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back.” But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.

As long as we stand under the umbrella of justification by faith, we have full assurance of salvation. This, incidentally, does not imply “once saved means always saved,” a heresy that is based on the false Calvinist doctrine of double Predestination (God has predetermined some to be saved, and others to be reprobates). Scripture repeatedly warns believers that to reject Christ through unbelief is to reject salvation in Christ.

Hebrews 6:4-6

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

This is the peril of apostasy.

When we look at these three experiences of salvation, which are communicated to us by the Holy Spirit, we can rejoice in the fact that God dealt with every aspect of our sin problem when He sent His beloved Son to redeem mankind. It is in view of this full, perfect, and complete salvation that Christ could cry on the cross, “It is finished.”

John 19:30

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Having defined and explained what the good news of the gospel is all about, our next study will consider the two pillars or fundamental truths of Scripture on which the everlasting gospel rests — the love of God, which is the ground of our salvation, and the “in Christ” motif, the means of our salvation. It is essential that God’s people understand these truths if we are to be fully established in Christ and

our faith is to become unshakable. This unshakable faith is what the seal of God is all about and which will prepare the last generation of Christians to survive the great tribulation.

Luke 18:1-8

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’ For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’” And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”

Chapter 2

Review

In part one of this study, I defined the everlasting gospel — that I believe God raised the Advent movement to proclaim to the world in its global mission — that the gospel is the good news about the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. I also distinguished this everlasting gospel from what is generally taught within Christianity: that, in Christ, God has obtained salvation, full and complete, for the entire human race. This means that, in Christ's holy history, God has redeemed mankind not only from the guilt and punishment of sin (the emphasis of most Christian denominations), but also from the power and slavery to sin, as well as from the nature and presence of sin.

In this study we will examine the two pillars which together go to make up the good news of the everlasting gospel. The first is the unconditional agape love of God, which is the ground of our salvation. The second is the “in Christ” motif, or the truth as it is in Christ, which is the means of our salvation. On these two pillars rest the hope of the human race.

God not only so loved the world that He gave humanity His only begotten Son, but the incredible good news of the everlasting gospel is that He has already reconciled the entire human race to Himself by the death of His Son, Jesus Christ. On these two pillars rest our whole hope of salvation, now and in the judgment. Let us, therefore,

examine what the Bible has to say regarding these two fundamental truths that together constitute the everlasting gospel.

The Love of God

According to the favorite text of the Bible:

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

It is this love of God that is the ground of our salvation. In Ephesians 2, after painting a dark, dismal, and hopeless picture of mankind in verses 1-3...

Ephesians 2:1-3

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

...the apostle Paul penned these words in verse 4:

Ephesians 2:4-5

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved.

This same idea is expressed by Paul:

Titus 3:3-5

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit....

Turning to the epistle of John we read these words of hope:

1 John 4:16-18

And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear [of the judgment] in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

Yet, the fact is that too many Adventists are afraid of the judgment. One reason for this fear, apart from their “mixed, confused ideas of salvation,” is because they have failed to realize that God’s love completely contradicts human love. As a result, by projecting human ideals of love onto God, we pervert the good news of the gospel. It is only when we know and understand God’s love, and what that love accomplished for mankind in Christ, that the fear of the judgment will be cast out and God’s people will be set free to turn this world upside down with the matchless charms of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The New Testament word for God’s love is the noun *agape*. Unfortunately, there is no English word equivalent to this Greek word. In fact, unlike the verb *agapao*, which means something different, the noun *agape* can hardly be found in secular Greek, the language of the New Testament. It is as if the New Testament writers coined this word to describe God’s unique love, which completely contradicts our natural human love.

How does God’s *agape* love differ from natural human love? It is of utmost importance that we see the distinction between these two loves, if we are to truly understand and appreciate the gospel. The contrasts between God’s *agape* love and the love we humans naturally manifest are:

1. God’s *agape* love is unconditional, in contrast to man’s natural love, which is conditional. Unconditional love means that it is spontaneous and uncaused. It does not depend on the goodness or

the beauty of the one to be loved. Conditional love, on the other hand, is reciprocal. It is not a giving love but rather a need love. It, therefore, depends on the goodness and beauty of the one to be loved. As a result, it needs arousing. When such conditional love is projected onto God, it perverts the good news of the gospel into good advice or conditional good news — we have to meet certain requirements — such as confessing our sins, obeying God's law, and doing good works — before He can forgive us and take us to heaven.

But it is the unconditional agape love of God that is the ground of our salvation. In Romans 5:6-10, the apostle Paul describes this agape love, which God has poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (verse 5):

Romans 5:5-10

And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son,

how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

In reading this passage (verses 6, 8, and 10), you will notice that God's agape love, which is the ground of our salvation, is in complete contrast to human love (verse 7). It is while we were "powerless" (i.e., incapable of saving ourselves), "ungodly" (i.e., wicked), "still sinners," and even God's "enemies," that Jesus died for us and reconciled us to God. In contrast, human love can only die for a good person, and even this, says Paul, is rare.

It is only as we are rooted and grounded in this agape love...

Ephesians 3:17-19

...So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

...that our faith can be established solidly on the rock Jesus Christ, and we can confess with the apostle Paul:

Romans 8:38-39

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

2. God's agape love is everlasting.

Jeremiah 31:3

The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness."

That is why, in describing agape in 1 Corinthians 13, the apostle Paul wrote:

1 Corinthians 13:8a

Love [agape] never fails.

In contrast, natural human love is changeable and, therefore, unreliable. Out of sincere human love, Peter insisted he would rather die than deny his Saviour.

Luke 22:31-34

"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

But he replied, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.”

Jesus answered, “I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.”

Yet, when he was put to the test, he denied his Lord three times.

John 18:17-27

“You aren’t one of this man’s disciples too, are you?” she asked Peter.

He replied, “I am not.”

It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.

Meanwhile, the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching.

“I have spoken openly to the world,” Jesus replied. “I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said.”

When Jesus said this, one of the officials nearby slapped him in the face. “Is this the way you answer the high priest?”he demanded.

“If I said something wrong,”Jesus replied, “testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?” Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing there warming himself. So they asked him, “You aren’t one of his disciples too, are you?”

He denied it, saying, “I am not.”

One of the high priest’s servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, “Didn’t I see you with him in the garden?” Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.

In contrast, this is what we read about Jesus:

John 13:1

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

Because God’s agape love never fails, we can have full confidence in the day of judgment. Or, as Paul put it:

Romans 8:31b-32

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all [the death of the cross] — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

Faith in God's everlasting agape love is what will give the remnant courage to stand for Christ in the last days, even though they will feel forsaken of God during the great tribulation.

Isaiah 54:5-10

For your Maker is your husband — the Lord Almighty is his name — the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. The Lord will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit — a wife who married young, only to be rejected,” says your God. “For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you,” says the Lord your Redeemer. “To me this is like the days of Noah, when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth. So now I have sworn not to be angry with you, never to rebuke you again. Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the Lord, who has compassion on you.

3. Finally, unlike human love, which is ego-centric, God's agape love is self-emptying. In Philippians chapter 2, the apostle Paul tells us that, even though Christ was equal with the Father, so that divinity was not something to be grasped at, He emptied Himself and took the form of a slave and was made in the likeness of man, totally dependent on the Father. But more than that, He was even willing to step down further and become obedient unto death, "even the death of the cross."

Philippians 2:5-8

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross!

It was at the cross that God, in Christ, demonstrated that His love for us is stronger than His love for Himself. To the Jews of Christ's day, hanging on a cross was equivalent to hanging on a tree, the curse of God.

Deuteronomy 21:22-23

If someone guilty of a capital offense is put to death and their body is exposed on a pole, you must not leave the body hanging on the

pole overnight. Be sure to bury it that same day, because anyone who is hung on a pole is under God's curse. You must not desecrate the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.

And that curse is God abandonment, which results in the experience of the second death. On the cross, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by being made a curse for us.

Galatians 3:13

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole."

What did this involve?

Ellen G. White tells us that, as Jesus hung on the cross:

"The Saviour could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that their separation was to be eternal." (Desire of Ages, 753.)

This is what He experienced for us on the cross.

In spite of this, He did not come down from the cross and save Himself, as Satan three times tempted Him to do.

Luke 23:35-39

The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.”

The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”

There was a written notice above him, which read: This is the King of the Jews.

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

The only explanation for this is that He loved us more than Himself and, therefore, was willing to say good-bye to life forever so that we could live in His place. On the cross Jesus “tasted death (the second or eternal death) for all men.”

Hebrews 2:9

But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

This is what constitutes the supreme sacrifice of the cross and which demonstrated God’s unconditional and self-emptying agape love for

us. Incidentally, it was this self-denying agape love of Christ, manifested on the cross, that constrained or compelled the early Christians to put self aside and live only for Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

But the fact that God loves us unconditionally is not enough to save fallen mankind. God cannot, even out of pure agape love, forgive sinners by overlooking or excusing their sins. God is also a holy and just God and His saving grace cannot go against His own law which condemns sinners to death. This brings us to the second pillar of truth on which the good news of the everlasting gospel rests, the "in Christ" motif.

The In Christ Motif

While God sent Christ into the world to be the gospel, it was Paul whom God commissioned to explain it.

Romans 1:1

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God....

That is why the Pauline epistles comprises almost half of the New Testament. In reading Paul, you will find that there is a key phrase that runs throughout his epistles. If you were to take this phrase out, there would be very little left of Paul's exposition of the gospel. This recurring phrase, which is the central theme of Paul's theology, is the expression "in Christ" or "in Christ Jesus." This phrase is sometimes expressed by other similar phrases, such as "in Him," or "by Him" or "through Him," or "in the Beloved," or "together with Him," etc. These are all synonymous terms implying the "in Christ" motif or idea.

The truth behind this phrase was first introduced by Christ Himself, when He told His disciples to "remain in me"...

John 15:4

Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

...something they could not do had God not included them in Christ's humanity at the incarnation.

1 Corinthians 1:30

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God — that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

These “in Christ” phrases are the undergirding words of the gospel. And if we don’t understand what Paul means by “in Christ,” we will never be able to fully understand the message of the everlasting gospel.

There is nothing we have as Christians except we have it “in Christ.” As already mentioned, everything we enjoy and hope for as believers — the peace that comes to us through justification by faith, the holy living we experience through the process of sanctification, and the blessed hope we will experience at glorification — is ours always “in Christ.” Outside of Him we have nothing but sin, condemnation, and death.

The expression “in Christ,” however, is a rather difficult phrase to understand. Just as “you must be born again” was mind boggling to Nicodemus; so likewise, the concept of “in Christ” is a very difficult idea for us to understand. How can I, as an individual, be in someone else? Even harder to understand is, how can I, born in the twentieth century, be in Christ who lived almost 2,000 years ago? This makes absolutely no sense to our way of thinking.

But what does Scripture mean when it tells us that we were together with Christ in His birth, life, death, burial, and resurrection, and now, are sitting with Him in heavenly places?

Ephesians 2:4-6

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus....

Because we cannot fathom these facts, we tend to ignore or skim over them. Yet the whole understanding of the everlasting gospel hinges on our understanding the significance of these two vital words: “in Christ.”

The “in Christ” motif or concept is based on the biblical idea of solidarity or corporate oneness. Therefore, if we are to come to grips with this phrase, we must first understand what the Bible has to say about solidarity. Two texts that help us understand Biblical solidarity are first, Romans 9:12:

Romans 9:12

...Not by works but by him who calls — she was told, “The older will serve the younger.”

The twins, Esau and Jacob, represent two nations, not individuals.

Genesis 25:23

The Lord said to her, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.”

The second is Hebrews 7:7-10.

Hebrews 7:7-10

And without doubt the lesser is blessed by the greater. In the one case, the tenth is collected by people who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living. One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.

Levi paid tithe to Melchizedek “in Abraham,” since he was “in the loins” or body of his great grandfather Abraham when he paid tithe to Melchizedek.

Scripture presents three fundamental truths concerning the human race. All these three facts are based on Biblical solidarity. The first is that God created all men in one man, Adam.

Genesis 2:7

Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Here we read God breathed into Adam's nostrils "the breath of life." In the original Hebrew text, the word "life" is in the plural form ("the breath of lives") and not singular, as our English Bible renders it. That is why God named that first man Adam. In Hebrew, Adam means "mankind." Of the 510 times the word "Adam" is found in Scripture, in the majority of cases, it refers to mankind rather than the individual Adam.

Secondly, Scripture clearly teaches that Satan ruined all men in one man, Adam.

Romans 5:12

Therefore, just as sin entered the world [human race] through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned....

Paul concludes:

Romans 5:18

Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

It is for this reason Paul can point to Adam as the source of our death problem.

1 Corinthians 15:22

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

But the third fundamental truth of Scripture, and which constitutes the fantastic good news of the gospel, is that God redeemed all men in one man, Jesus Christ. In order for Christ to legally or lawfully save fallen man, He had to first qualify to be our Saviour or substitute. God did this by uniting the divine life of His Son to the corporate life of the human race that needed redeeming.

1 Corinthians 1:30

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God — that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

This is what made Christ to be the second or last Adam.

1 Corinthians 15:45-48

So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust

of the earth; the second man is of heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven.

That is why we must never look at Christ as just one man among many men, but as the One in whom all humanity was gathered up.

Once the divinity of Christ and the human race He came to redeem were united in one person, Jesus was then able to re-write our history, by His life, death, and resurrection. In doing this, He changed mankind's status from condemnation to justification unto life.

Romans 5:18

Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.

This is how the apostle Paul describes this incredible good news:

Ephesians 2:4-6

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus....

This is the truth on which the doctrine of righteousness by faith is founded.

Ephesians 1:3

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

When we put these two facts together — the unconditional agape love of God and the truth as it is “in Christ” — we have the everlasting gospel that comprises the three angels’ message of Revelation 14. And when this message is preached into all the world for a witness, accompanied by the power of the fourth angel of Revelation 18, this earth will be lightened with the glory of God and there will be no excuse for anyone to be lost. Then the end can come.

Revelation 22:17

The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let the one who hears say, “Come!” Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.

Amen.