

Sabbath School Today **With the 1888 Message Dynamic**

Salvation by Faith Alone: The Book of Romans **Lesson 4: Justification by Faith**

Long before the Sabbath was changed from the seventh to the first day, this apostate power sought to corrupt the true idea of *agape* that is essential to appreciating Day-of-Atonement righteousness by faith.

Perhaps his most successful method has been to invent the doctrine of the natural immortality of the human soul. It permeates many religions. The idea came from paganism and was adopted early on by apostate Christianity. It has had a devastating effect on the true idea of the gospel, for it paralyzes it. The Seventh-day Adventist Church does not believe in that false doctrine, but the modern lukewarmness that pervades the world church comes from importing popular ideas of the gospel that are related to it.

For example, if the soul is naturally immortal, Christ could not have died the equivalent of “the second death.” For those who accept natural immortality, His sacrifice is automatically reduced to a few hours of physical and mental suffering while He was sustained throughout by hope. Thus the pagan-papal doctrine dwarfs “the width and length and depth and height” of Christ’s love. It reduces His *agape* to the dimensions of a human love motivated by self-concern and hope of reward.

The result is a diluting of the idea of faith. It becomes an egocentric search for security. The highest motivation possible remains ego-centered. All pagan religions are self-centered in their appeal, and since almost all Christian churches accept this pagan-papal doctrine, they get locked in to what is basically an egocentric mind-set. Despite their great sincerity, so long as human minds are blinded thus they cannot appreciate the dimensions of the love revealed at the cross, and in consequence are hindered from understanding the righteousness by faith idea that relates to the cleansing of the sanctuary truth.

The result has to be a widespread lukewarmness, spiritual pride, self-satisfaction, due to subservience to ego-centeredness. Fear always lurks beneath its surface.

As best he could in his day, Luther understood this dynamic of faith as a heart-appreciation of *agape*, yet he fell short of an adequate grasp of its full dimensions because he lived too early to grasp the idea of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary. And after his death his followers soon reverted to the pagan-papal concept of natural immortality. Most Protestant ideas of justification by faith are therefore conditioned by this idea. A few individual exceptions prove the fact.

Our 1888 message began to cut the ties that blinded us by Protestant views that beneath the surface were related to Rome. Now those ideas are bearing fruit in Protestantism, which is more and more openly leaning toward Rome. The 1888 message was “the beginning” of a rediscovery of what Paul and the apostles saw.

When Jesus died on the cross, did He make a mere provision whereby something could be done for us if we first did our part? Or did He actually do something for “all men”? If so, what did He do for them?

Romans assures us that He “is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 1:2; cf. Rom. 3:25). As “all have sinned,” so all are “being justified freely by His grace” (Rom. 3:23, 24). “God was in Christ reconciling *the world* unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (2 Cor. 5:19). Since “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23), Jesus came that He “should taste [that] death for every man” (Heb. 2:9). Through His “righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life” (Rom. 5:18, NKJV).

The common idea is that the sacrifice of Christ is only *provisional*, that is, it does nothing for anyone unless he first does something to activate it and “accepts Christ.” As it were, Jesus stands back with His divine arms folded, doing nothing for the sinner until he decides to “accept.” In other words, salvation is a heavenly process that remains inert until we take the initiative. Like a washing machine in a laundromat, it has been *provided*, but it does nothing for us until we first pay the price to activate it.

In contrast, the 1888 message understands our texts: Christ tasted “death [the second] for every man.” As “all have sinned,” so “all” “are” being justified freely by His grace. This is a *legal* justification; He does not force anyone to become righteous against his will. By virtue of Christ’s sacrifice, God is not “imputing their trespasses” unto the world (2 Cor. 5:19). He imputed them to Christ instead. This is why no lost person can suffer the second death until *after* the final judgment, which can come only after the second resurrection. And this is why all can live even now, believers and unbelievers alike. Our very life is purchased by Him, even though multitudes have no knowledge of that truth. “The whole world” has been redeemed, if only someone could tell them and they could believe it. Consequently, hearing and believing that truth transforms the heart.

Ellen White agrees. Every person owes his or her physical life and all he has or is to the One who “died for all.” “To the death of Christ we owe even this earthly life. ... Never one, saint or sinner, eats his daily food, but he is nourished by the body and the blood of Christ. The cross of Calvary is stamped on every loaf. It is reflected in every water spring.” [1]

When the sinner sees this truth and his heart appreciates it, he experiences *justification by faith*. This is therefore far more than a legal declaration of acquittal—which was made at the cross for “all men.” *Justification by faith includes a change of heart*. It is the same as the forgiveness that actually takes the sin away from the heart. The Greek word for forgiveness means taking it away, reclaiming *from* it.

In other words, the believer who exercises such faith becomes inwardly and outwardly obedient to all the commandments of God. Such faith, if it is not hindered and confused with Babylon's error, will grow to be so mature and powerful that it will prepare a people for the return of Christ. This is why Ellen White wrote, "[justification by faith] is the third angel's message in verity." [2]

Not all will be saved. But the reason is deeper than that they were not clever or prompt enough to seize the initiative. There is something beyond it. They will have actually resisted and rejected the salvation already "freely" given them in Christ. God has taken the initiative to save "all men," but humans have the ability, the freedom of will, to thwart and veto what Christ has already accomplished for them and has actually placed in their hands. They can repeat what Esau did who "despised" his birthright and "sold" it for "one morsel of food" (Heb. 12:16).

We can cherish our alienation from Christ and our hatred of His righteousness until we close the gates of heaven against ourselves. According to the 1888 concept, those who are saved at last are saved due to God's initiative; those who are lost at last are lost because of their own initiative.

—Paul E. Penno

Endnotes:

[1] Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 660.

[2] This was Ellen White's phrase to describe the 1888 message. Cf. *Review and Herald*, April 1, 1890.

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno's video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://youtu.be/tm9WPscFa-I>

You may subscribe to the e-mail version of *Sabbath School Today* by sending a request to sabbathschooltoday@1888message.org