

Lesson 4

"Justification by Faith Alone"

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ' (Rom. 5:1). What does this mean? What is it to be justified? Both professors and non-professors often mistake its meaning. Many of the former think that it is a sort of half-way house to perfect favor with God, while the latter think that it is a substitute for real righteousness. They think that the idea of justification by faith is that if one will only believe what the Bible says, he is to be counted as righteous when he is not. All this is a great mistake" (E. J. Waggoner, *The Signs of the Times*, May 1, 1893).

Our Sabbath School lesson "wrestles" with those same questions, and in Wednesday's lesson arrives at a similar conclusion: "... an intellectual assent to the gospel is not enough, for, in that sense, "even the demons believe."

Something our lesson did not cover, however, is one of the main "gospel truths" concerning justification by faith: "The 1888 message is especially 'precious' because it joins together the true biblical idea of justification by faith with the unique idea of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary. This is a Bible truth that the world is waiting to discover. It forms the essential element of truth that will yet lighten the earth with the glory of a final, fully developed presentation of 'the everlasting gospel' of Revelation 14 and 18" (*Ten Great Gospel Truths That Make the 1888 Message Unique*, p. 34).

Justification by faith is greater than a legal declaration; it's the "dynamite" of the 1888 message. A correct motivation for serving Christ is another term for the dynamic of genuine justification by faith. It produces heart obedience to all the commandments of God. The truth of justification by faith in the 1888 message is the missing ingredient in both "historic Adventism" and the "new theology." Both generally follow the Arminian view, which in effect makes the sinner's salvation dependent on his own initiative.

The Faith of Jesus: But Paul says "a man [person] is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 2:16). Thus the 1888 message was the first powerful message in Adventism that joined "the faith of Jesus" to God's law. Here is the 1888 idea:

"The faith of Christ must bring the righteousness of God, because the possession of that faith is the possession of the Lord himself. This faith is dealt to every man, even as Christ

gave himself to every man. Do you ask what then can prevent every man from being saved? The answer is, Nothing, except the fact that all men will not keep the faith. If all would keep all that God gives them, all would be saved" (Waggoner, *Signs of the Times*, Jan. 16, 1896).

What exactly is the "faith of Jesus Christ"? Ellen G. White has given us a clear definition:

"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. ...

"'The faith of Jesus.' It is talked of, but not understood. What constitutes the faith of Jesus, that belongs to the third angel's message? Jesus becoming our sin-bearer that He might become our sin-pardoning Saviour. He was treated as we deserve to be treated. He came to our world and took our sins that we might take His righteousness. And *faith in the ability of Christ to save us amply and fully and entirely is the faith of Jesus*" (*Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 172; emphasis supplied).

Crucified With Christ: For "self" to be crucified *with* Christ does not mean a human effort to torture ourselves by an agonizing do-it-yourself crucifixion. It is always "with Christ." When Paul says, "I am crucified with Christ," he is not saying, "See what a strong Christian I am! I am nailing nails through my hands and feet, I am crucifying myself!" Rather he is saying, "My proud self is already 'crucified with Him.' I have learned from Him--"I [too] am crucified *with Christ*." I kneel with Him in Gethsemane. Paul says, self in human nature is so strong that it was like sweating blood for Christ to say "No!" to self; but I, Paul, say "*let* this mind be in me, which was also in [Him]."

Self *cannot* live and reign any longer because His *agape* has annihilated the love of self. Honest human hearts identify with Christ on His cross. As with Him, the natural result is: self is crucified. The slightest taint of legalism "frustrates the grace of God" and denies the cross (2:20, 21).

Now, Paul goes on to say, "nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." To respond any less than that, says Paul, would be to "frustrate the grace of God," and that I now refuse to do, he adds (vss. 20, 21).

When in verse 16 he says emphatically it's "not of works" he means not even 1 percent. His impassioned Letter to the Galatians is on one side of the perennial debate: "I do not

frustrate the grace of God [even 1 percent 'works' will frustrate that grace!]: for if righteousness come by law, then Christ is dead in vain" (vs. 21). There's no "balance" between righteousness by faith and righteousness by works (Laodicean lukewarmness, hot and cold water "balanced;" this confusion is Laodicea's problem).

The Closing Work: Ellen White linked the message of justification with the work of the great High Priest in His "closing work of atonement" in the Most Holy Apartment. She said our people didn't understand this. Her messages to the ministers and the church after 1888 suggest she was obsessed with this aspect of what Jones and Waggoner had presented at the 1888 General Conference Session. She was excited; if the ministers and people would follow Christ in His closing work, the coming of the Lord would be very soon.* The High Priest can never cleanse the sanctuary in heaven *until He can first cleanse human hearts here on earth.*

The Good News! Paul points us to Christ's cross: in His sacrifice, was He motivated even 1 percent by egocentric concern for Himself? His assurance to the believing thief *appears* to say yes ("Hang on, fellow victim; you and I will be in Paradise today!"). But that was in the morning when the sun was shining; "at the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land," including the heart of the Son of God. He cried, "My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" He "poured out His soul unto death," even the second (Isa. 53:12). Not even 1 percent of an egocentric motivation—totally love for us, none for Himself. That was *agape*.

--Compiled mainly from the writings of *Robert J. Wieland*