

THE GOOD NEWS FOR LAODICEA

*Study Guide Four***The Easily-Understood Simplicity of the 1888 Message**

There are two opposite mistakes that are commonly made concerning the 1888 message:

(a) Many assume that it is the same message they have heard all their lives in camp meetings and weeks of prayer. Everybody believes it and nobody seriously opposes it. Ho-hum. A renewed interest in the message is like re-inventing the wheel. Why the excitement?

(b) The opposite error is to assume that because the message is different, it must be a difficult, complex, theological puzzle that few can unravel.

We must understand why both ideas are dead wrong. A little thought can readily show why (a) is a mistake. The 1888 message was “the beginning” of the latter rain and the loud cry, which was to have gone like fire in the stubble and in a short time lightened the earth with the glory of the closing message. (The American Congress came closer to passing a national Sunday law at that time than at any time before or since). But now a century has dragged by wearily. Two World Wars and many other tragedies have cursed the earth during this long delay. Something went wrong.

A century’s long history demonstrates beyond doubt that Ellen White’s testimony is true: the message was “in a great degree kept away” “from our people” and “from the world” (cf. *Selected Messages*, Book One, pp. 234, 235). What we have taught as righteousness by faith during this century is “in a great measure” imported from popular non-Adventist theologians. Many of our people assume that our righteousness by faith “doctrine” is the same as that of the conservative Baptist or other Protestants. This is far from the truth. The time has come when the difference between the two messages must be clearly understood.

This lesson is to demonstrate also that (b) is not true. The message is simple; even a child can understand it.

The only difficulty is that our deep human pride must be laid aside. Genuine righteousness by faith always lays “the glory of man in the dust,” including the glory that teachers and preachers find so tempting (cf. *Christ Our Righteousness*, p. 104). Our 1888 history and message prove that “God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise....And the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence” (I Corinthians 1:27, 29, NKJV). A child can see and understand the clear difference between genuine righteousness by faith and its clever counterfeits, the wise in their own eyes cannot see it.

According to Jesus, it is only those who “hunger and thirst after righteousness [by faith]” that *can* be filled (Matthew 5:6).

*The Basic Difference Is Motivation***1. What are the motives that are generally employed to lead people to become Seventh-day Adventist Christians?**

(a) The desire to secure a reward in heaven. This is a common motive. It is natural for all of us to desire a place there. The motive is not evil, but neither is it good because it is not lasting. Satan will always find a way sometime to make us forget that ambition.

(b) The fear of being lost in hell. This is the other side of the same coin. It is also natural for us to fear being lost. This motive is also not evil, but neither can it produce a truly unselfish character. It too will fail under strong, alluring temptation. These twin motives can only produce a Laodicean lukewarmness of devotion. Yet these are the motives generally exploited in our church's soul-winning endeavors, the same in principle as those the non-Adventist churches employ.

This self-centered motive has often been used in the past, and many people have become Christians because of an appeal to man's basic *sense of need*. Evangelists are salesmen or saleswomen whose technique is borrowed from popular business methods developed in your prospect of sense of need and then convince him that your product will satisfy that need. Thus "the sale" is made.

Can we not see what happens? The center of concern always remains *self*. Subsequent appeals to look away from self become vain words. "Looking to Jesus" always remains tied to this radius of self-concern and insecurity. The deep root of fear is not cast out. There is a "more excellent way." It must be found if a people are to be prepared for the return of Christ.

2. In contrast, what is the motive to which the New Testament gospel appeals? 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; Galatians 2:20-3:5.

Note: The apostles began with a presentation of *God's deed* in the sacrifice of the cross, and not with *man's need* of personal security. Thus they by-passed the usual self-centered motivations of the human heart and appealed directly to the latent sense of wonder and awe and heart-appreciation that God's fantastic love arouses. Sowing such seed produced a crop of early Christians who were not lukewarm in their devotion. Many sacrificed their all for Him who sacrificed His all for them, often cheerfully laying down their lives as martyrs, singing hymns as they went to the arenas.

The 1888 message began to recover that Christ-centered motivation.

3. What does it mean to be "under the law" or "under grace"? Romans 6:14, 15.

Note: The usual understanding of "under the law" is "under the condemnation of the law." Although this is true, it only partly so. When Christ died, He "tasted death for every man," paying the penalty of every man's sin. Thus in a legal sense, He has already taken the condemnation of the law that was due to us. "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Psalm 130:3).

If we can discover what being "under grace" means, we can understand what being "under the law" means, for they are opposites. If someone risked his life to save you from death, and you understood how horrible your death would have been and how much he risked for you, you would ever afterward feel a sense of obligation to him, a gratitude that would motivate you to do anything you could for him. You would not think of *asking him* for a reward; you would want to *give him* one. Christ literally saved us from the horror of the "second death," and what is also a hell on earth even now. To be "under grace" is to be under a new motivation imposed by the demands of that love for us.

Such was the motivation that appealed to the early Christians. “Did the Son of God give Himself for *me*, dying like a criminal on the Roman cross, tasting my second death of forsakenness by God? Oh, I must henceforth live for Him!” The result was a beautiful, unmeasured devotion.

To be “under the law” is therefore the opposite: to be under a motivation imposed by a sense of “I-ought-to-do-this,” or “I-should-be-more-faithful,” or “I-should-sacrifice-more,” or “I-should-stop-this-bad-habit,” etc. The rock-bottom motivation is always a fear of hell or a hope of reward in heaven. This falls short of New Testament faith, which transcends hope of reward or fear of punishment. “Perfect *agape* casteth out fear” (1 John 4:18; cf. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 480).

The basic reason why the church is so lukewarm, as Jesus says, is that many, many church members are “under the law.” This would not be true if we had truly believed the 1888 message. We feel “rich and increased with goods,” assuming that we have accepted the message, when in reality we are “poor” in that we have never truly understood and appropriated (appreciated) it (cf. Revelation 3:14-21).

What is Justification by Faith?

4. How have we confused and beclouded what Paul made clear and simple?

Note: The common idea (borrowed from the popular churches) is that justification by faith is purely a legal declaration that God makes when you “accept Christ,” a pronouncement millions of light years away that has no relation to your human heart. When you verbally “accept Christ,” you start the heavenly machinery rolling. Your name is entered in God’s computer and your eternal social security benefits are then *credited* to your account. *Your decision* has initiated this process of legal acquittal. Until you make the initial decision, so far as you are concerned the heavenly machinery stands idle.

An element of pride can enter here; *you* initiated the process of your salvation. It’s like signing a proposal form that initiates an insurance policy, so that you can thank yourself that you took the step which “covered” your house or your car.

But there can be no pride or “boasting” in true faith. Now read Romans 3:19-27. Note Paul’s idea of the corporate guilt of “all the world,” how “all have sinned,” how all of us are involved in the sin of Adam. The NEB says, “all *alike* have sinned.” “Death spread to all men, because all sinned” (5:12, NKJV). Not one of us is innately better than anyone else. As all lions are by nature man-eaters, so all humans are by nature at “enmity with God,” and since “whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer” (1 John 3:15), we are all “*alike*” by nature guilty of the crucifixion of the Son of God. So says Paul.

But just as all have sinned, so all are “being justified freely by His grace.” The heavenly machinery is *already* working, long before you make your “decision”! God does not count those who have not understood the gospel as wolves to be shot down as soon as possible but as lost sheep to be sought by the Good Shepherd; the lost coin is not junk—it is still a piece of silver.

Note also that it is God Himself who has taken the initiative--“God set forth [Christ] to be a propitiation by His blood,...to demonstrate...His righteousness.” And note that it’s the “blood” which accomplishes the propitiation. It doesn’t make sense to say that the sacrifice of Christ *propitiates the Father* because He already loves us; He gave Christ for us. Nor does it make sense to say that the blood propitiates the devil, buys him off as it were. He still remains our enemy. Who then is propitiated by that blood? We

are! We were alienated from God. We hated righteousness, but now we are reconciled, at-one-with Him.

Christ has already “tasted death for every man” with “the world’s” sins imputed to Him (Hebrews 2:9; 2 Corinthians 5:19). God “set forth” Christ on His cross, so that when He is “lifted up...[He] will draw all men” unto Himself by the sight of that blood. When the sinner stops resisting and lets his human heart be melted by that cross, *justification by faith takes place*. This makes him fully obedient to the law of God. Faith works. With no thought of reward for himself, he appreciates that divine love. Formerly a slave to selfish fear and sin, now he is a slave to Christ’s love, and he joins Paul in singing, “The love of Christ constraineth us.” This is what it means to be “under grace.”

5. How did the 1888 messengers understand justification by faith?

(a) *It makes the believer to be obedient to the law of God.* “God justifies the ungodly...It does not mean that He glosses over a man’s faults, so that he is counted righteous, although he is really wicked; but it means that he makes that man a doer of the law. The moment God declares an ungodly man righteous, that instant that man is a doer of the law....It will be seen, therefore, that there can be no higher state than that of justification. It does everything that God can do for a man short of making him immortal, which is done only at the resurrection....Faith and submission to God must be exercised continually, in order to retain the righteousness—in order to remain a doer of the law” (E.J. Waggoner, *Signs of the Times*, May 1, 1893).

“The word of God which speaks righteousness has the righteousness itself in it, and as soon as the sinner believes, and receives that word into his own heart by faith, that moment he has the righteousness of God in his heart; and since out of the heart are the issues of life, it follows that a new life is thus begun in him; and that life is a life of obedience to the commandments of God” (Waggoner, *The Gospel in Creation*, p. 28).

(b) *Saving faith is a heart appreciation of the sacrifice of Christ.* “In this blessed fact of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, which was accomplished for every soul, there is not only laid the foundation of faith for every soul, but in it there is given the gift of faith to every soul. And thus the cross of Christ is...the very power of God manifested to deliver us from all sin, and bring us to God” (A.T. Jones, *Review and Herald*, October 24, 1899).

(c) *Genuine justification by faith is meaningless apart from appreciating how close Christ has come to us.* “There is no element of weakness in the law; the weakness is in the flesh. It is not the fault of a good tool that it cannot make a sound pillar out of a rotten stick...Poor, fallen man had not strength resting in his flesh to enable him to keep the law. And so God imputes to believers the righteousness of Christ, who was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, so that ‘righteousness of the law’ might be fulfilled in their lives...Christ took upon himself man’s nature, and will impart of his own righteousness to those who accept his sacrifice” (Waggoner, *Bible Echo*, February 15, 1892). More about this in our next study guide.

(d) *This special, unique message was intended by the Lord to prepare His people for translation.* “What means, then, this special message of justification which God has been sending these [seven] years to the church and to the world?...This special message of justification which God has been sending us is to prepare us for glorification at the coming of the Lord. In this, God is giving to us the strongest sign that it is possible for him to give, that the next thing is the coming of the Lord” (Jones, *General Conference Bulletin*, 1895, p. 367).

How Good News Permeated the 1888 Messages

6. A so-called “gospel without Good News is a counterfeit. What was the burden of the apostles’ message?” Acts 13:32-34.

Note: The apostles’ good news was not phony. It gave people no false assurance. The burden of their message was the good news of how faithful God is (see Romans 8:26-39, for example). Thus the people “received the atonement” (5:11). Man’s problem is alienation from God, separation from Him due to our guilt and distorted views of His character. Paul pleaded, “Be ye reconciled to God,” believe the truth about His character, and let your enmity be healed and your guilt taken away (2 Corinthians 5:20). Then faith can go to work, producing mighty works of righteousness in the life.

7. What was the burden of the 1888 message?

A very brief sampling of its spirit follows: “Let the weary, feeble, sin-oppressed souls take courage. Let them ‘come boldly unto the throne of grace,’ where they are sure to find grace to help in time of need, because that need is felt by our Saviour in the very time of need....The very temptation that presses you touches Him. His wounds are ever fresh, and He ever lives to make intercession for you.

“What wonderful possibilities there are for the Christian! To what heights of holiness he may attain! No matter how much Satan may war against him, assaulting him where the flesh is weakest, he may abide under the shadow of the Almighty, and be filled with the fullness of God’s strength” (Waggoner, *Christ and His Righteousness*, p. 30).

“Why is it that the sun does not slip out of his place?...The ‘powerful word’ of Jesus Christ hold the sun there, and causes him to go on in his course. And that same power is to hold up the *believer in Jesus*” (Jones, *General Conference Bulletin*, 1893, p. 218)

The messengers’ emphasis was not on what we must *do* in order to be saved, but on what we must *believe*. And what must we believe? Always, “Good News”!

8. What special good news is included in forgiveness? 1 John 1:9; 2:1,2; Matthew 26:28; Acts 2:38; 3:19.

“When Christ covers us with the robe of His own righteousness, He does not furnish a cloak for sin, but takes the sin away. And this shows that the forgiveness of sins is something more than a mere form, something more than a mere entry in the books of record in heaven, to the effect that the sin has been canceled. The forgiveness of sins is a reality...something that vitally affects the individual. It actually clears him from guilt; and if he is cleared from guilt, is justified, made righteous, he has certainly undergone a radical change” (Waggoner, *Christ and His Righteousness*, p. 66).

“God’s forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which He sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness *for* sin, but reclaiming *from* sin” (Ellen White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 114).

9. What true aspect of Adventism has been widely opposed in recent years? Titus 2:11-14, Revelation 14:1-5, 12, 14, 15.

Note: Not only has the nearness of Christ's second coming been muted; the very possibility of a people overcoming all sin so that they might be ready has also been muted and even denied. It has often been denounced as the heresy of "perfectionism." But Scripture teaches that those who look for "that blessed hope" will be redeemed "from all iniquity" and be purified, "without fault before the throne of God," a people who truly, not supposedly, "keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." The point of the 1888 message is that this glorious result will be accomplished through righteousness by faith, not through a self-centered works program.

"God manifest in the flesh, God manifest in sinful flesh, is the mystery of God—not God manifested in sinless flesh, but in *sinful* flesh. That is to say...God will so dwell yet in sinful flesh today that in spite of all the sinfulness of sinful flesh, his influence, his glory, his righteousness, his character, shall be manifested wherever that person goes....In Christ is shown the Father's purpose concerning us. All that was done in Christ was to show what will be done in us...Is it too much, then for us to think that sinful flesh, such as we; worthless dust and ashes, as are we—is it too much for us to think that such as we can manifest the glory of the Lord, which is refracted through Jesus Christ,---the glory of the Lord shining from the face of Jesus Christ?...It is our part to furnish a place for the glory to fall, that is may shine in the beautiful reflected rays of the glory of God" (Jones, *General conference Bulletin*, 1893, pp. 377-380).

10. What beautiful but uniquely Adventist truth shines throughout the 1888 message? Daniel 8:13, 14; Hebrews 7:25; 9:23-28; 10:35-39.

Note: Lutheran, Calvinist, Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostal, or any non-Adventist "righteousness by faith," knows nothing of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary, nothing of an antitypical Day of Atonement. The idea of a special heart-preparation for the return of Christ is dimly, if at all comprehended. Our 1888 message is radically different. It envisages a successful resolving of the "great controversy between Christ and Satan." The Lord finds a people willing to cooperate fully with Him in the last days. The Good News is that Christ, as heavenly High Priest, cleanses His sanctuary. It's not our job. Our part is to cooperate with Him, to *let Him do it*, and stop hindering Him.