

The Message
of the
Latter Rain

The Message of the Latter Rain

(REMOVING THE FOG THAT OBSCURES THE LOVE OF GOD)

**Kelvin M. Duncan
Earl D. Peters**

With a Foreword by
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Foreword

The reader ought not to judge this book by its small size. Far-reaching spiritual implications are found on nearly every page of this closely argued treatise on God's plan of salvation according to both Scripture and the writings of E. G. White. The subtext of this book is that Adventism is again at a crossroads similar to that of 1888, when two young pastors, students of Holy Writ, presented what they had learned about righteousness by faith to the leaders of the church. Like the early Adventists, the authors fear that our emphasis on Adventism's unique doctrines relating to the Sabbath and the Second Coming have taken the focus of our outreach and our in-reach away from the core of the Christian Adventist faith: God's generous and comprehensive love, as manifest through Christ's death "for all sinners" and His plan that this forgiveness should be transformative in the human life. The gift of forgiveness born of God's amazing grace is at the center of our faith, a fact that we neglect at our own eternal peril.

For the authors, God's forgiveness not only erased past, present, and future sins but also launches the process of justification by faith, which produces sanctification (victory over temptation) and leads ultimately to glorification. This is the heart of the message of the latter rain and of the entire plan of salvation. They approach their study by asking how it is that if Christ died for all sinners, a sinner should ever have to die for his/her own sin in the lake of fire. Their effort to resolve the problem of this version of "double jeopardy" takes them on a journey to understand salvation, focusing on what the death of Christ on the cross really meant in terms of God's forgiveness.

They begin by eschewing the Calvinist concept of the "elect" fore-ordained for salvation, as well as the Universalist conclusion that since Christ died for all, all are forgiven and eternally saved. More interestingly,

Duncan and Peters address what they call “Adventist Arminianism.” According to this understanding of the plan of salvation, Christ died for all humans, but His death is not equivalent to forgiveness, in any sense of the term. Thus, Adventists hold that only those who believe receive remission of sin. In other words, Jesus’ death on the cross was not really applicable to all humans; something more is required to produce forgiveness. Because of a failure to identify the two aspects of forgiveness, the Arminian premise leads to a legalistic understanding of salvation by the Adventists and a cheap grace understanding of salvation by the Universalists and many others. Citing Ellen White’s writings, the authors conclude that she refutes the concept of salvation partly by faith and partly by works. Salvation is entirely a divine gift. The gift of salvation is not to be received by a holy person but by a wholly undeserving one. Therefore, salvation is entirely and exclusively God’s prerogative to give. His love prompts Him to forgive “all,” without exception.

Do they suggest that good works are unrelated to our salvation? Hardly! But it is *where* in the process that works have a role that is important to understand. To address the question of the relationship between faith and works, the authors highlight two Greek words for “forgiveness” (*charizomai* and *aphiemi*) to make their case that God through Christ forgave (*charizomai*) “all,” even the ungodly. That phase of forgiveness is equivalent to what they call “corporate universal justification,” and it explains why Adam did not die immediately, despite the death sentence which was incurred when he sinned. The Son of God stepped into the gap with His grace and forgave Adam’s and, by extension, our sin, placing us under grace. Christ’s death on the cross represented this first phase of God’s unfathomable forgiveness.

On the other hand, citing 1 John 1:9, the authors show that there is a second phase to God’s forgiveness. Paraphrasing Ellen White, they write that God’s forgiveness is “both a judicial pardon and a reclaiming from sin” (106). In other words, God’s “*aphiemi*” includes deliverance from the power of sin. This phase is applicable only to the believer (107). What is important here is that both the gratuitous and comprehensive forgiveness of all humanity and the reclaiming from sin are initiated by God and provided through the death of Jesus Christ. The only role humans play in all this is to accept what has already been done for them. Some will, and some won’t.

Is distinguishing between these two meanings of divine forgiveness really that important? The answer is that we need more than judicial pardon to enter heaven. We need righteousness provided by the second phase of God’s forgiveness. In this phase, Christ’s righteousness is imputed and imparted to the believer by faith, for the purpose of character

transformation. Genuine obedience is not a *condition* for receiving salvation but the *fruit* of it. No inherent value is found in obedience if it does not arise out of the grateful and humble soul of one who understands him- or herself to be the object of an infinite, divine love gift.

What if a human chooses not to accept this gift? This, called the unpardonable sin, the authors take great pains to explain in relation to God’s forgiveness. Since all that we are asked to do is to accept the gift of God’s forgiveness, the only sin for which Christ did/could not die was the sin of rejecting Him. The authors’ explanation of this concept makes for an illuminating read.

Above all, this study paints the picture of a God whose unspeakable love for the human race is such that there is nothing He would not sacrifice to raise us all up and seat us “in high places” with Him. Ours is a God who will deny us nothing of the privileges of holiness that He Himself enjoys and embodies. This forms the core of the Gospel, say the authors, and it is what every sermon and every Bible study should focus on. To realize that we are all “born forgiven” will make the reader fall in love with Jesus all over again! Our salvation has been handed to us, undeservedly, by the hand and heart of an infinitely loving God. Yet, like Jacob and Esau, we all have a birthright to cherish or despise, as the authors conclude. In this sense, the only obstacle to our salvation is our unwillingness to receive it—our insisting on earning it.

You will be blessed by this opportunity to refocus your spiritual eyes on Jesus and rekindle your love and gratitude for what He has done and continues to do *for* you and *in* you. Truly, this is the message of the latter rain.

Lourdes Morales-Gudmundsson, Ph.D.
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The
Meaning of the
Gospel

Showers of Blessing Await

Through many decades, Seventh-day Adventists have been anticipating the glorious revival that is to accompany the great outpouring of the Holy Spirit called the “latter rain.” The second advent of Christ is our hope, so fundamental to our faith that it is articulated in our name. Yet before that hope can be realized, the outpouring of the Spirit must take place. We remember the record of the Day of Pentecost, and we recall the promise: “The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was the former rain, but the latter rain will be more abundant.”¹ Many recognize that the Great Commission can never be completed, apart from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in latter rain proportions. Before the gospel commission can be finished, we must have much more of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

While some recognize our great need for this outpouring,² few seem to have grasped two closely related events:

- ▶ The latter rain and loud cry began more than 120 years ago and were squelched by unbelief.
- ▶ A message associated with the latter rain was rejected, and it must be recovered.

1. E. G. White, *Christ Object Lessons*, 121.

2. See annual council action, *God’s Promised Gift*, voted 10/11/2010.

The time of these events was 1888. The place of this dubious beginning was Minneapolis, Minnesota. A relatively humble assembly had gathered for the General Conference session of Seventh-day Adventists. Only about ninety delegates were present to represent the worldwide membership of the church, yet the “loud cry” began to be proclaimed, and it was accompanied by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that is so desperately needed today. The reception of the Spirit and the message was the key to the success of the church back then, and it remains so today.

During those decisive early days, the servant of the Lord was alarmed by what was then taking place. She could see that the Spirit was hovering over the delegates, ready to bestow the blessings of God with mighty power. “But there was no reception.”³ To this day, this is the key to our dilemma. “The Spirit awaits our demand and reception.”⁴ Ellen White stood to alert the delegates with regard to the issues at stake in the crisis. She said, “God will withdraw His Spirit unless His truth is accepted.”⁵

Note what the servant of the Lord had written shortly before that crucial Minneapolis meeting:

God is raising up a class to give the loud cry of the third angel’s message. “Of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:30). It is Satan’s object now [1884] to get up new theories to divert the mind from the true work and genuine message for this time. He stirs up minds to give false interpretation of Scripture, a spurious loud cry, that the real message may not have its effect when it does come. This is one of the greatest evidences that *the loud cry will soon be heard* and the earth will be lightened with the glory of God.⁶

The Rain Begins

Heaven did not disappoint the prophet. She had indicated that the “loud cry” would “soon be heard.” In November of 1892, just eight years later, she was able to announce that the loud cry had indeed “already begun.” Again, note her words: “The time of test is just upon us, for the loud cry of the third angel has *already begun* in the revelation of the righteousness of Christ, the sin-pardoning Redeemer.”⁷

Exactly how did the “loud cry” begin? When did this “revelation of the

3. “Now, brethren, we want to have the simplicity of Christ. I know that He has a blessing for us. He had it at Minneapolis, and He had it for us at the time of the General Conference here. But there was no reception” (*Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 615).

4. E. G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 121.

5. E. G. White, Oct. 20, 1888, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 124.

6. E. G. White, Letter 20, July 27, 1884, to Uriah Smith (emphasis supplied).

7. E. G. White, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 1073 (emphasis supplied).

righteousness of Christ, the sin pardoning Redeemer” begin? We again turn to the inspired record.

The Lord in His great mercy sent a most precious message to His people through Elders Waggoner and Jones. This message was to bring more prominently before the world the uplifted Saviour, the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. It presented justification through faith in the Surety; it invited the people to receive *the righteousness of Christ*, which is made manifest in obedience to all the commandments of God.⁸

When Brother Waggoner brought out these ideas in Minneapolis, it was the *first clear teaching on this subject from any human lips* I had heard, excepting the conversations between myself and my husband. I have said to myself, It is because God has presented it to me in vision that I see it so clearly, and they cannot see it because they have *never had it presented to them as I have*. And when another presented it, *every fiber of my heart said, Amen*.⁹

Let us carefully consider the import of this statement. At Minneapolis, the servant of the Lord heard “the first clear teaching” on righteousness by faith among Seventh-day Adventists. This “most precious message” was “sent” to them/“us” by the “Lord.” They had “*never had it presented to them*” clearly before. We conclude that this first clear presentation in 1888 marked the “beginning” of the “loud cry.” It marked the descent of the mighty angel of Revelation 18. Since it is the “latter rain” which is to “give power”¹⁰ to the voice of the third angel, thereby producing the “loud cry,” *the “loud cry” could not have “begun” unless the “latter rain” had “begun.”* Therefore, it follows that 1888 also marked the “beginning” of the “latter rain.” This conclusion harmonizes perfectly with a statement that we find on page 377 of the 1893 General Conference Bulletin: “Sister White says that we have been in the time of the latter rain since the Minneapolis meeting.”¹¹

When the “latter rain” began, more than 100 years ago, there were some among us who did not realize that the time of the latter rain had come and were looking for it to come sometime in the future. For this reason, Ellen White would write, on March 2, 1897,

Unless we are daily advancing in the exemplification of the active Christian virtues, we shall not recognize the manifestations of the

8. Ibid.

9. E. G. White, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 348, Sermon, Rome, New York, June 19, 1889, emphasis supplied.

10. “At that time the ‘latter rain,’ or refreshing from the presence of the Lord, will come, to give power to the loud voice of the third angel.” E. G. White, *Early Writings*, 85.

11. A. T. Jones, *1893 General Conference Bulletin*, 377.

Holy Spirit in the latter rain. It may be falling on hearts all around us, but we shall not discern or receive it.¹²

Evidently, in this passage, Ellen White was not merely speaking of a danger which the people of God would face in the future. Although the warning would be applicable in the future, her primary concern was to warn her contemporaries of what was already transpiring *at that time*.

The “latter rain” had begun to fall. The “loud cry” had “already begun.” Yet there were those among “us” who did not “discern or receive it.” Ellen White lamented the fact that “some felt annoyed at this *outpouring*, and their own natural dispositions were manifested. They said, ‘This is only excitement; it is not the Holy Spirit, not *showers of the latter rain from heaven*.’”¹³

She was declaring that it *was* the latter rain. They said it was “*not* showers of the latter rain.” So she pleaded with the brethren: “Let us, with contrite hearts, pray most earnestly that *now, in the time of the latter rain*, the showers of grace may fall upon us.”¹⁴

The Rain Rejected

“We” had been given the warning right from the beginning. “God will withdraw His Spirit unless His truth is accepted.”¹⁵ The reception or rejection of the “truth,” which constituted the message of the latter rain, was the key that would shape the future of the movement. The opportunity to accept the “truth” lingered for several years following 1888, but we have been told that the responsible leadership, “stood *for years* resisting light and cherishing the spirit of opposition.”¹⁶ Ultimately, the servant of the Lord was constrained to write:

The true religion, the only religion of the Bible, that teaches forgiveness only through the merits of a crucified and risen Saviour, that advocates righteousness by the faith of the Son of God, has been slighted, spoken against, ridiculed, and *rejected*.¹⁷

An eschatological opportunity greater than Pentecost was squandered. By exciting opposition,

Satan succeeded in shutting away from our people, in a great measure, the *special power of the Holy Spirit* [i.e. the “latter rain”]

12. E. G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, 507.

13. E. G. White, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 1478, emphasis supplied.

14. E. G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, 509, emphasis supplied.

15. E. G. White, Oct 20, 1888, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 124.

16. *Ibid.*, 1341, emphasis supplied.

17. E. G. White, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 955.

that God longed to impart to them. The enemy prevented them from obtaining that *efficiency* which might have been theirs in carrying the truth to the world, as the apostles proclaimed it after the day of Pentecost. The light that is to lighten the whole earth with its glory was resisted, and by the action of our own brethren has been in a great degree kept away from the world.¹⁸

Our own people opposed the work of God by refusing the light on the righteousness of Christ by faith. This they should have received and should have imparted with heart and voice and pen, for *it is their only efficiency*. They should have labored under the Holy Spirit’s direction to give the light to others.¹⁹

The message which began at Minneapolis is still the “beginning” of the “loud cry” and is still our “only efficiency.” Its proclamation today is still accompanied by the “beginning” or initial outpouring of the “latter rain”—the only door which leads to power such as was manifested on the Day of Pentecost. That power alone can complete the Great Commission and usher in the second advent.

Ellen White’s warning words spoken to the delegates at Minneapolis are still full of meaning today: “God will withdraw His Spirit unless His truth is accepted.”²⁰ The reception of the Spirit in latter rain proportions is inseparably linked with the truth which began to be proclaimed in 1888. The specific truths embodied in the message which was recognized by inspiration as the “loud cry” are inseparably linked with the “latter rain.” We cannot have one without accepting the other, fasting and prayer notwithstanding. To seek the latter rain apart from seeking to understand that “most precious message” which had its “first clear” public presentation at Minneapolis is futile. The greatest need of the church is to truly receive both. A revival of true godliness cannot come to us apart from the gift of the Spirit, and the Spirit will not be poured out in latter rain proportions while “His truth” is not accepted.

The Return of the Latter Rain

For many centuries, the Jews have been praying to God, asking Him to send the long-expected Messiah. They pray in vain. God will not—indeed, He cannot—give them another Messiah. They must accept the One He has sent. Likewise, Seventh-day Adventists have been praying for many decades that God would send the long-expected outpouring of the latter rain, which is to produce the loud cry. Apart from genuine repen-

18. E. G. White, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 1575, emphasis supplied.

19. *Ibid.*, 1325.

20. *Ibid.*, 124.

tance and a willingness to receive the truth into which the Holy Spirit desires to guide us, we also pray in vain. God will not give us another latter rain or another message. We must accept that which God “in His great mercy” has already sent. The problem is *not* that God has been negligent in providing. “The Spirit awaits our demand and reception.”²¹

What will we do? Will we study with the objective of understanding that “most precious message” which was sent more than a century ago? Will we receive it and receive the Holy Spirit with it, in a special measure? Will we “labor under the Holy Spirit’s direction to give the light to others?”²² Not yet is it too late to prepare. As surely as Jesus has promised to return, the rain must come again.

In the remaining pages of this document we shall turn our attention to the message of the latter rain. We shall explore one of the core elements of that message in both the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. And we shall seek to demonstrate that it is the key to understanding the gospel which has eluded the Christian church for more than 400 years. Indeed, the world awaits the message of the latter rain.

21. E. G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 121.

22. E. G. White, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 1325.

The Unresolved Theological Dilemma

The message which was accompanied by the outpouring of the Spirit in 1888 has been referred to by Ellen White as “the gospel of His grace...in clear and distinct lines,”¹ sent to clarify and resolve our “mixed confused ideas of salvation.”² Some of this confusion is no doubt a residual of the long-standing debate between Calvinists and Arminians. This problem has certainly deeply impacted current presentations of the gospel. The message of the latter rain resolves this 400-year-old debate. The problem at the heart of this debate goes like this: The Bible teaches that Jesus died for our sins (see 1 Corinthians 15:3). At the same time, the Scriptures teach that the unbeliever will die for his or her own sin (see Ezekiel 18:4). How can both positions be correct and not involve a clear case of double jeopardy? We should note that this would in fact *be* a special case of double jeopardy. The same *person* is not literally tried or punished twice for the same offense. However, the same *sin* would be punished twice. Jesus died for it on the cross, and the sinner must also die for it in the lake of fire. If that were indeed how the plan of salvation works, it would certainly be an inequitable system of justice.

Several reasons exist for the death of Christ (see Herbert Douglass, ThD, *The Heartbeat of Adventism: The Great Controversy Theme in the*

1. E. G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, 92.

2. E. G. White, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 11.

Writings of Ellen White, 123–130, Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2010). In this work we shall focus on the reason for Christ’s death that is given in the gospel. “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3).

How is this to be understood? Did Jesus *really* die for our sins? What is the extent of the meaning of that expression?

If one considers the “in Christ” motif, the problem becomes even more perplexing. This biblical concept presents the idea that Jesus is a corporate man. The entire human race was, in a sense, “in Christ.” In the New Testament this is a major theme. The expression *in Christ* appears more than seventy times in the King James Version of the New Testament. When phrases such as *with Christ, by Christ, through Christ*, and other similar expressions are considered, the number of references swells to well more than 300.

For example, Paul wrote of our “being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). He also wrote, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ” (Romans 8:1). He continued by writing, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:2).

Being made free from the “law of sin and death” is indeed important. However, we must take note of the fact that it comes through another “law,” which is “in Christ.” Finally, Paul says that nothing can separate us “from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39).

From this brief survey of the New Testament we begin to see that the “in Christ” idea is central to the gospel. Jesus Himself introduced the concept, when He said, “Abide in me” (John 15:4).

When reading these words, few stop to consider the fact that one cannot abide “in Christ,” unless one is already “in Christ.” Considering the widespread unfamiliarity with this concept, it is refreshing to recognize the biblical evidence that indicates that everyone is already, in a certain sense, “in Christ.” Before we jump to the wrong conclusion, we need to examine what this means, and we also need to understand what it does not mean. The good news is that it does mean that all have the privilege of heeding the words of Christ, when He says, “Abide in me.” All who pick up a Bible and read those words of Christ may apply them to themselves and choose to abide in Christ. Yet, there is more than one sense of the expression *in Christ*. Everyone will not choose to “abide” in Christ. Therefore, everyone is not “in Christ,” in the most common sense of the New Testament use of the expression. Nevertheless, everyone *is* “in Christ,” in the sense that He was the representative of all at the cross. However, only the believer is “in Christ,” in the sense in which the expression is most commonly used in the New Testament.

Some protest by saying, “The ‘in Christ’ concept is never applied to the entire human race.” They argue that it applies *only* to believers. For example, Angel Rodriguez, former chairman of the Biblical Research Committee of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, says, “In order to be in Christ we have to make a personal decision. In fact the phrase ‘in Christ’ is often used as an equivalent to the noun Christian.”³ The last half of this statement is true. The expression *in Christ* is often used as an equivalent to the noun *Christian*. However, it is not *always* used in that manner. Thus, the first half of this statement is false. We note that there is considerable biblical evidence to the contrary. For example, the Bible says:

For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And *that* he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again (2 Corinthians 5:14, 15).

Notice that verse 14 contains the phrase, *if one died for all*. This leaves open the possibility that the “one” did not die for all. Yet the next verse excludes that conclusion by affirming, “And *that* he died for all.” Now notice that the word *that* is italicized in the KJV, indicating that it is not in the original text. The original text reads as it does in the NKJV, which simply states, “And he died for all.”

Backing up to the preceding verse, we see: “then were all dead”! Why is the death of the “one” counted as the death of “all”? We submit that this important text assumes the universal application of the “in Christ” idea. We freely admit that the universal application of the “in Christ” idea is not the most common New Testament use of the expression. Yet, it should be acknowledged that it is a valid and important use of the expression.

At the cross Jesus was the corporate representative of the entire human race. This is the essence of the “in Christ” idea. It means that Christ was our Representative. Thus, we see that, *because* He was our Representative, we were all, in a sense, “in Him.” “In Christ” is not usually intended to be understood literally—it is a metaphor. Therefore, we understand that what happened to Him, happened to us. When He died, we died.

In the book of Acts, Paul directly applies the “in Christ” concept to pagans, who certainly would not be considered to be “Christians” (see Acts 17:22–28).⁴

Thus, given the biblical evidence, we must conclude that God placed the entire human race “in Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:30), even though this

3. Angel Rodriguez, *comments on the “In Adam/In Christ” motifs*, <http://biblicalresearch.gc.adventist.org/documents/In%20Christ-Comments.htm>.

4. True, when the text is read in context, the passage teaches that we all live and move in God. But Christ was “in the Father,” and the “Father was in” Christ (John 14:10). Thus, to be “in God” and to be “in Christ” are synonymous expressions.

is not the most common use of the expression. Therefore, when Jesus died, “all died” (2 Corinthians 5:14, NKJV). Jesus “died for our sins” (1 Corinthians 15:3). Therefore, “in Christ,” we all died for our sins. The death of our Representative is counted as our death.

This is not meant to suggest that we get any credit or “merit” for what happened to us in Christ. All of the *credit* goes to Christ. The result is a free gift to us. Thus, the Samaritans were correct, when they referred to Jesus as “the Saviour of the world” (see John 4:42). The full penalty for sin (which is death, according to Romans 6:23) has been fully paid for every human soul (see Hebrews 2:9). Therefore, a way of escape has been made for every member of the human race. However, to deny the universal application of the “in Christ” idea is to deny that the possibility of salvation extends to every human being.

One of the reasons some are having problems accepting the “in Christ” idea is a failure to recognize the three phases of salvation. These three phases are important to understand and will be addressed more fully in Chapter 6. Necessary to understand now is that our eternal salvation is accomplished by our loving Creator and Redeemer in three phases—past, present, and future. Salvation in the past applies to all men. In the present it applies only to believers. In the future it applies to those who endure to the end and are then eternally saved. Likewise, the “in Christ” idea is applied in three phases. In the past tense (i.e., at the cross) it applies to all men. In the present it applies to believers. In the future it applies to those who endure to the end. Failure to recognize these distinct phases in the process of salvation will undoubtedly lead to misunderstanding of each other and misinterpretation of the teaching of Scripture.

Nevertheless, understanding this good news may leave us with a dilemma. If the price of our salvation has actually been fully paid at Calvary, and Christ has actually suffered the penalty which our sins have merited, how can we also suffer in the lake of fire for those same sins? Will this be a second penalty exacted for the same sins? Does the plan of salvation ultimately amount to double jeopardy—punishing the same sins twice? Even if one does not accept the “in Christ” idea as we have presented it, the double jeopardy problem remains unresolved.

We need to recover the message of the latter rain, in order to resolve this dilemma. That message presented an understanding of the gospel which united the grace of God, which saved us, with the justice of God, which requires the annihilation of the sinners.

Three Attempts at Resolution

Three theological schools of thought exist that each attempt to provide a unified understanding of the atonement. All three schools endeavor to present the plan of redemption in a way that reveals a God of uncompromised justice, while maintaining that He is also the personification of love and mercy. These schools of thought are known as Calvinism, Arminianism, and Universalism. Each of them presents a radically different description of “justice.”

Calvinist denominations include Presbyterians and various reformed churches, such as Dutch Reformed, Christian Reformed, and Reformed Baptists.

The Calvinist Reaction

The Calvinist solves the problem of double jeopardy with the doctrine of double predestination. The idea is that God predestined some people to be saved, and He also predestined some to be lost. Therefore, Calvinists believe that Jesus died only for those whom God foreordained to be saved. This group, they call the “elect.”

Calvin’s theory of double predestination further teaches that Jesus did not suffer and die for those who will be lost. Thus, in the Calvinist view, there is no double jeopardy. This teaching is referred to as “limited atonement.”

Since the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus “died for all” (2 Corinthians

5:14, 15; Hebrews 2:9; 1 Timothy 2:6), the Calvinist position fails to provide a satisfactory understanding of the atonement.

The Arminian Reaction

Arminianism arose as a reaction against Calvinism. Arminian denominations include most Baptist denominations, Wesleyans, Pentecostals, Catholics, and Seventh-day Adventists. The Arminian school of thought comes closer to the teaching of Scripture in some respects. This group teaches that Jesus died for everyone who was ever born and everyone who ever will be born. As noted above, this is truth which the Bible explicitly affirms. However, a close examination of the Arminian position uncovers serious problems.

The Five Articles of Arminianism are as follows:

1. God has decreed to save through Jesus Christ those of the fallen and sinful race who through the grace of the Holy Spirit believe in Him, but leaves in sin the incorrigible and unbelieving.
2. Christ died for all men (not just for the elect), but no one except the believer has remission of sin.
3. Man can neither of himself, nor of his free will, do anything truly good, until he is born again of God, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit.
4. All good deeds or movements in the regenerate must be ascribed to the grace of God, but His grace is not irresistible.
5. Those who are incorporated into Christ by a true faith have power given them, through the assisting grace of the Holy Spirit, to persevere in the faith. But it is possible for a believer to fall from grace.¹

Article 2 emphasizes that Christ died for every soul. However, according to the Arminian position, the death of Christ alone is not sufficient to justify or save anyone. In the Arminian view, the sinner must respond to the sacrifice of Christ by believing in Christ, then repenting of and confessing his or her sins, in order to be saved.

If the appropriate response is lacking, there is, in the Arminian view, no atonement for unconfessed sins. Thus (according to Arminianism) the death of Christ does the ignorant or unresponsive person no good at all. The Arminian believes that the death of Christ for the sins of the world is merely *provisional or potential*, not *actual*. This understanding has been referred to as “conditional atonement.” Although Adventism differs with

1. Lewis Lofton, *Arminianism, an Overview*, http://www.sullivan-county.com/id2/cal_arm.htm.

most Arminians on various points of doctrine, Seventh-day Adventists nevertheless affirm Arminianism.²

Articles 2 and 5 are problematic. We will examine Article 2 again later. That which Article 5 teaches is true, but the resulting position is false because of what it denies. Unfortunately, Article 5 does not recognize the different phases of the “in Christ” idea. It presents only the second phase (i.e., being “incorporated into Christ by genuine faith”).

The universal application of the “in Christ” idea maintains the scriptural position that Christ died for all (2 Corinthians 5:14, 15). He could not have died for *all*, unless *all* were “incorporated into Christ” at the incarnation. In other words, He had to be the Representative of all in order to die for the sins of all.

Another major problem with the Arminian proposal is that it does not resolve the “double jeopardy” dilemma. It actually complicates it. While the Arminian Christian may sing as fervently as anyone else, “Jesus paid it all,” his or her understanding of the gospel says, “Nothing was paid at all.” The payment was simply put into an “escrow” account—available, but not applied to the sinner’s account unless certain preconditions are fully met. This means no forgiveness, and perhaps more important, no probationary life. This, the Arminian often fails to realize. All men live because of the cross of Christ.

When it comes to the issue of salvation, the Arminian slogan is: “We have a part to play.” That we must perform *our part* satisfactorily, or the payment remains “in escrow,” is understood. Arminians typically state it this way: Those who fail to play their part (i.e., believe, repent, and confess) take their sins back upon themselves, and they will ultimately suffer for the *same sins* for which Jesus made “provision.”

A significant problem exists with this concept. The Scriptures never refer to the “atonement” as a mere “provision,” and for good reason. The atonement is not merely “provisional.” In reality, the atonement has pro-

2. Seventh-day Adventists share many basic beliefs held by most Christians. They accept the authority of the Old and New Testaments. Also, they are Arminian (emphasizing human choice and God’s election) rather than Calvinist (emphasizing God’s sovereignty) in their interpretation of Christ’s atonement, and they argue that His death was “*provisionally* and *potentially* for all men,” yet efficacious only for those who avail themselves of its benefits. “Adventist,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2004, <http://www.britannica.com/eb/print?tocId=9003814&fullArticle=true>.

QOD (Questions on Doctrine) did not depart from defending Adventism’s more distinctive doctrines, including the seventh-day Sabbath, the state of the dead, and the present ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. Also defended was the Wesleyan-Arminian theology held by Methodists, Nazarenes, and others, as well as by Adventists, in contrast to the Calvinism supported by Barnhouse, <http://www.adventistreview.org/2004-1502/news.html>.

foundly affected all of humanity, irrespective of personal belief or lack thereof. The Bible says, “Christ...has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10).

Notice the term *life*. Christ has brought two things by His death. He has brought “life,” and He has brought “immortality.” Payment for the sins of the world has been made. This payment, also called “atonement,” has had a profound effect upon all mankind. All of humanity has, or has had life because of the atonement.

The “escrow account” is not described in the Bible. The Scriptures teach that Jesus *actually* made atonement for sin (see Romans 5:11, KJV). Therefore, if the sinner dies for the same sin in the lake of fire for which Jesus atoned on the cross, the final judgment amounts to a form of double jeopardy, punishing the same sin twice. If this be the case, there is no good news here. The Arminian position falls far short of providing a unified view of the atonement. Therefore, it cannot be the message that must lighten the earth with God’s glory.

The Universalist Reaction

The Universalist believes that Christ actually died for everyone’s sins. The Bible affirms this premise:

For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And *that* he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again (2 Corinthians 5:14, 15).

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man (Hebrews 2:9).

The problem arises with a conclusion the Universalist draws based upon a valid premise. The Universalist concludes that all of the sins of the world have been atoned for and completely forgiven. Therefore, they believe every person will be eternally saved. This conclusion requires that we reject many other passages of Scripture. For example:

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat (Matthew 7:13).

And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth

(Matthew 8:11, 12).

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. . . . Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.... And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal (Matthew 25:31–46).

Some Universalists believe that even the devil himself will ultimately be eternally saved. But God has declared concerning him:

Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffick; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee. All they that know thee among the people shall be astonished at thee: thou shalt be a terror, and never *shalt* thou *be* any more (Ezekiel 28:18, 19).

The Universalist position that no one will be eternally lost has the smallest number of adherents amongst the three proposals—and justifiably so. The errors of Calvinism are somewhat subtle, and the errors of Arminianism are very subtle. On the other hand, the problems of the Universalist position stand out in bold relief. It *does* indeed resolve the issue of double jeopardy. However, it does so by blatantly rejecting significant portions of the Bible. Thus Universalism has no place in the message of the latter rain.

The Gospel in a “Nutshell”

In his first letter to the Corinthian church, Paul provided a cursory summary of the gospel. “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:1, 2). What is the essence of the “gospel” which the apostle “declared” to the Corinthian church? He continues: “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3). Here is the heart of the gospel: “Christ died for our sins.” The concept is simple. Yet when properly understood, it is profound. Often, it is *not* correctly understood. Christians have struggled for years with the meaning of this simple truth: “Christ died for our sins...” One question often goes unanswered: If Christ already died for our sins, why will the unbeliever also die?¹ A failure to address this question has led to much confusion.

The Wages of Sin

“The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Here is the essence of what God told our first parents way back in the Garden of Eden, when He

1. We should be clear that it is the “unbeliever” who will die and not necessarily the “non-believer” who has never heard the gospel. For evidence that “non-believers” can be saved, see Zech. 13:6.

said, “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof *thou shalt surely die*” (Genesis 2:17, emphasis supplied). James repeats the same message. “When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:15). Here, we find a simple, straightforward formula. Sin brings death. The final result of sin is death. Indeed, the legal penalty for sin is death. Why? Because the law of God, which represents the justice of God, demands the death of the sinner.

Notice the following: “The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law” (1 Corinthians 15:56). The demand of justice is: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4). This requirement of the law is just. The problem is that the Bible declares, “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). In other words, all have sinned in the past, and all are coming short of God’s standard in the present continuous tense. This begs the question: Why then are not “all” dead?

Before we can resolve the dilemma posed by the unbeliever who dies in the lake of fire, in spite of the substitutionary death of Christ, we must find the answer to a preliminary question: Considering the condition of humans, as stated in Romans 3:23, why is *anyone* still alive? Adam and Eve were told that they would die on the day that they sinned. Why, then, did they *not* die that day?

Some have reasoned that they *did* die, because they died spiritually. However, the wages of sin involves much more than *spiritual* death. As one considers the triune nature of mankind—which, incidentally, reflects the triune nature of the Godhead—this is more fully understood. We were indeed made in the image of God. This fact evidently includes the concept that we were made in the image of the triune Godhead.

Three primary aspects of human existence may be noted: the body, the soul, and the spirit. The Bible presents all three aspects: “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and *I pray God* your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

The term *body* refers to the physical aspect of man. The term *soul* refers to the emotional and/or intellectual nature. The term *spirit* refers to the spiritual nature of man. The “soul” and the “spirit” are not synonymous. The book of Hebrews makes this distinction.

“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

Through the Word of God, we are able to distinguish between that which comes from our own souls and that which comes from the Holy

Spirit speaking to our spirits. The fact that the Word is to separate (i.e., divide) between these lets us know that the “soul” and the “spirit” are not synonymous. Therefore, there are three distinct aspects of the human entity.

The Scriptures teach that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Not merely a “spiritual death” is noted here, but complete and eternal death of body, soul, and spirit. Scripture defines death as a complete absence of consciousness (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10). God did not say to Adam, “The day you sin, a *part* of you will die.” He said that “the day you eat of it, *you* will surely die” (Genesis 2:17, NKJV). The question is: Why did Adam continue to live? More to the point, we need to know why we are still alive, in spite of the fact that “all have sinned” (Romans 3:23).

Did God mean what He said, or was He only bluffing? How is it that God could declare that the result of sin would be death, that day, yet Adam continued to live on for hundreds of years? We need an understanding of the gospel which will reconcile the apparent discrepancy between the infallible word of God to Adam and the reality which we see today. God said, “Thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:17). Why then does life continue in this sin-cursed world? A discontinuity seems evident in the spiritual space-time continuum. One law applied before sin, but it appears to have been immediately set aside when Adam sinned.

The Gift of God

Only *one* solution to the sin problem is available. God Himself could not devise another plan. “For there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). We *must* be saved in this way, for there is no other way. The “wages of sin *is* death” (Romans 6:23). That fact cannot be changed—it is true for all time, because the law of God cannot be changed (see Psalm 111:7, 8; Matthew 5:17, 18).

Another *fact*, too, cannot be changed. God has given an “unspeakable gift” (see 2 Corinthians 9:15). “For God so loved the world, that He *gave* His only begotten Son...” (John 3:16, emphasis supplied). The good news does not end there. Not only did God give His Son, but the Son gave as well. He “gave Himself for our sins” (Galatians 1:4). By giving Himself for our sins, “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13). By His death for the sins of the whole world, He has redeemed us (i.e., the entire human race) from the curse of the law that Adam brought upon us, thus placing the entire human race under probationary grace.

The amazing good news of the gospel is this: The moment Adam sinned, there was a Saviour. Christ stepped in the very instant that Adam sinned. He is “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8).

THE MESSAGE OF THE LATTER RAIN

Jesus has died the eternal death that Adam should have suffered on the very day he sinned. The apostle Paul explains this wonderful truth in 2 Timothy 1:10: “But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ who has abolished death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

Pause to consider the fact that every sin has eternal death as its penalty. Each time any human being sins, the law of God condemns him or her to eternal death, that very day. Why does this death not happen to each sinner when he/she sins? By His death, Christ has “abolished death” (2 Timothy 1:10). This does not refer to the temporary death which Jesus referred to as “sleep” (Matthew 9:24). The eternal death which Adam merited the moment he sinned is the death which Christ has abolished. The “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8) is the only reason Adam lived to see another day. And this is also the reason we live today. In the gift of Christ, God has given us “life” and through that same gift we may have “immortality” (2 Timothy 1:10).

To the apostle Paul, Christ’s death was something very personal. He recognized it as the payment required to reverse his own condemnation. He speaks of Jesus as “the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). Here once again, we find the essence of the gospel. This gospel should be a very personal matter to each of us, as well. In fact, it should be the primary motivating factor of our lives.

For Whose Sins?

For whose sins did Jesus die?

We saw in Chapter 3 that some Christians (i.e., the Calvinists) would limit this good news, making it applicable to a favored group called “the elect.”

Another group of Christians, referred to as Arminians, unconsciously agree with the Calvinists. They argue that Christ’s death was only “provisional.” They believe that salvation was merely set in place or established, sort of like a trust fund. This trust would not be functional or effective unless certain conditions were first met. According to the Arminian, unless and until we respond appropriately, Christ’s death does us absolutely no good, as it relates to justification, forgiveness, and salvation. The Arminian may not be conscious of the fact, but he really believes Christ died *only* for the believers. Whether we call the favored group “the believers” or “the elect,” we still have a limited atonement.

The Bible says, “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3). Therefore, we must go to the Scriptures to find the answer to our question: For whose sins did Christ really die? We must look to the Scriptures to find the “limits” of the atonement, if such limits exist.

THE GOSPEL IN A “NUTSHELL”

When we go to the Scriptures, we find that Romans 5:6 contradicts the Arminian position. It states the exact opposite. “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6). Verse 8 of the same chapter repeats the same thought: “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

Apparently, Jesus did *not* die for believers. In the book of Romans the apostle takes pains to emphasize the point: Jesus died for sinners! We shall soon discover that His death is the atonement for all our sins. This atonement is equivalent to the forgiveness of *all* sins, in a limited sense. Since there are different aspects of atonement, there *must* also be different aspects of forgiveness. The Arminian perspective recognizes only one aspect of forgiveness—that which occurs when the sinner confesses and repents. This limited understanding leads the Arminian to conclude that Christ’s death is merely “provisional.” Although Christ’s death *is* in some respects provisional, that is by no means the full extent of the reality. The actual good news is much better than that allowed by the Arminian philosophy.

Upside-Down Theology

Paul's epistle to the Romans is written to believers. He assures these believers that Jesus did indeed die for every one of them. This much seems clear to almost every non-Calvinist commentator on the book of Romans. However, please note just where most commentators abandon Paul's clear statements and start speculating on what *they think* he must have meant: Paul *says*, in very clear language, that Jesus did not die for these believers *because* they believed, nor did He wait *until* they believed. On the contrary, Paul says, Jesus died for them *before* they believed. "While we were yet sinners [i.e., non-believers], Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

The gospel Paul preached and wrote about in the Bible shows both Calvinism and Arminianism to be in error. The Bible proclaims that the good news is for sinners! Paul could not have said it more clearly: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1 Timothy 1:15).

While it is true that some folks believed in Christ before He died on the cross, such is not true in the absolute sense. Christ is "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8), and this is why Adam did not die the day he sinned. Jesus stepped into the "gap." He willingly took His place on "death row." Long before Adam sinned, Christ had already covenanted to die for him, if he should fall. Because Christ stepped immediately into the gap—taking His place as the Mediator, the

Lamb slain, standing between the living and the dead—Adam continued to live after he disobeyed God’s explicit command. The law of God was *not* set aside to meet the emergency that resulted from the fall of mankind. God had a plan of salvation already prepared, which immediately and fully met all the demands of the law, while simultaneously granting justification/forgiveness for all mankind. No rift occurred in the space-time continuum.

A Legal Problem Solved

Sin produces a legal problem. “Sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). “The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law” (1 Corinthians 15:56). These verses highlight the legal ramifications of sin. The law of God demands the death of the sinner. Thus, when Adam sinned, all mankind came under the condemnation of the law. “For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation” (Romans 5:16).

Some find this difficult to accept. “How,” they ask, “could we have been condemned because of Adam’s sin, which took place when we were not yet born?”

The answer is simple. Although we were not yet born, we were “in Adam.” Consider the following logic:

Where would you be if your father had died a month before you were conceived? The answer is, *you would not be*. You would have died in your father. If your father had been condemned to death, you would have been condemned in your father. Now back up one generation. Where would you be if your grandfather had died a month before the conception of your father? Again, it is easy to see that you would not be. You would have died in your grandfather. Thus, if your grandfather had been condemned to death, you would have been eliminated by that condemnation. Now keep following the logic of this analysis until you get to Adam.

Where would *we* be, if Adam had died that fateful day in the Garden of Eden? If Adam had died, we all would have died in him. The condemnation which came upon Adam came upon all of us: “Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation...” (Romans 5:18a). That condemnation which came to Adam could be referred to as “corporate universal condemnation”—the condemnation of the entire human race.

This just penalty of eternal death is as immutable as the law of God, which is the foundation of His government. Legal satisfaction must be evidenced, before mankind can stand justified before the law.

Romans says, “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Thus, we see that sin results in legal condemnation—the

condemnation which flows from the law. Therefore, everyone has, or we should say *had*, a legal problem. We find the solution to that problem in the immediate context of the verse which announces the problem. “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Roman 3:23, 24).

Who is being “justified freely,” or gratuitously, “through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”? The action phrase presented in Romans 3:24 has no subject. The subject, which is the object of the “justification,” is found in the preceding verse. “All have sinned” and therefore, “all” are “justified freely.” Note exactly how the verse reads in the *New English Bible* (NEB). “For all alike have sinned, and are deprived of the divine splendor, and *all are justified* by God’s free grace alone” (Romans 3:23, 24, NEB, emphasis supplied).

The *New Jerusalem Bible* rendering is similar.¹ This verse refers to a corporate phase of justification which is applicable to the entire human race. This justification precedes faith on the part of the one who is justified. It may be referred to as “corporate universal justification,” and it solves the problem of “corporate universal condemnation” which came upon the entire human race in Adam.

Implications of Corporate Universal Justification

This “corporate” and “universal” phase of justification does not include justification by faith or its benefits, yet it has far-reaching ramifications. To be justified means to be set free of condemnation. It means, in some sense, to be absolved of condemnation for a crime or sin—a legal acquittal or a legal pardon. It means that sins which have been committed are nevertheless not “imputed” to the transgressor. Although one has in fact sinned, God does not treat him or her as “guilty.” See, for example, 2 Corinthians 5:19: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them” (2 Corinthians 5:19, NKJV). As we consider this verse of Scripture, we should begin to realize that Christ’s death for the sins of the world involved a universal pardon. If in fact one has sinned, yet the sin is not imputed to that person, is that not a form of forgiveness or pardon? If sin is “not imputed” to us, then to whom is it imputed? Clearly, our sins have been imputed to Christ. “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18, NKJV).

The New Living Translation expresses this thought in these words: “Christ also suffered when he died for our sins once for all time. He never

1. “And all are justified by the free gift of his grace...” (Romans 3:24, NJB)

sinned, but he died for sinners that he might bring us safely home to God” (1 Peter 3:18, NLT). The result of this transaction was the forgiveness of all sin. “And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses” (Colossians 2:13, NRSV). We shall explore this verse in its context in detail later.

The whole human race has been forgiven! This glorious yet often-overlooked result of the death of Christ *is why we live!* And this is the meaning of the gospel, which proclaims that “Christ died for our sins” (1 Corinthians 15:3). No one, therefore, is under condemnation. Corporate universal justification is effective for all. The condemnation brought upon the race in Adam has been fully reversed. All are under probationary grace. All have been redeemed from the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13) and justified unto probationary life (Romans 5:18b).² “Justification of life” resulted in a probationary grace period granted to the world so that all may accept Jesus Christ and be *justified by faith*, which is justification unto eternal life.

Please consider carefully the implications of this justification unto probationary life. It means that the whole world is under grace and therefore, not under condemnation. For one to be under grace and under condemnation simultaneously is a logical impossibility. Only after probation closes for the individual or the world will the wicked fall under condemnation. This will be a second condemnation. Christ has redeemed us from the first condemnation.

By taking human nature and thus joining the human family, Christ took upon Himself the first condemnation; that is, the corporate universal condemnation which Adam brought upon the entire human race. Thus, an important result of corporate universal justification, or “justification of life” (Romans 5:18b) is the good news that even though we are born “sinners” (see Romans 5:19), we are born under grace—born forgiven. Furthermore, we do not fall back under condemnation every time we sin. When the plan of salvation is clearly understood, we see that we remain under grace until the unpardonable sin is committed. This will become much clearer in another portion of our study, as we consider the proper motivation for the confession of sin.

The good news that “sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Romans 6:14) is a direct result of

2. This is indeed justification unto probationary life, to which Romans 5:18 is referring. Some argue that the use of *zoē* in the original text demands that the verse is speaking of eternal life. However, the Greek word *zoē*, which is translated “life,” can refer to temporal or eternal life (see 1 Corinthians 15:19; James 4:14; 1 John 5:11, 12). The context determines whether the text is referring to probationary life or to eternal life. Clearly, Romans 5:18 refers to justification unto probationary life.

corporate universal justification. We have all been placed under probationary grace. If we believe that we are born under the condemnation of the law, it is difficult, if not impossible to receive victory over sin, no matter how sincerely we confess and try to forsake sin. As long as we see only one condemnation—that under which we believe we were born—we will be forever seeking to free ourselves from it. Fear will plague our minds, and sin will continue to have dominion (see Hebrews 2:14, 15). The gift of character perfection becomes impossible to receive, when it is believed that condemnation is only temporarily lifted by confession and repentance and that it falls upon us again every time we stumble. Only by believing the good news of the gospel—that Christ has died for our sins and redeemed us from the curse of the law—will we be free from the fear of condemnation and the dominion that sin has over us.

Does the repentant sinner fall under condemnation every time he sins, and does he remain there until he repents? If not, why not? If so, then clearly sin will continue to have dominion, for he is not under grace but under the law. This view produces a dysfunctional understanding of the gospel which effectively prevents a functional relationship with Christ. The message of the latter rain was sent to resolve this problem and free us from this theological nightmare.

Why Confess Your Sins?

In light of the pardon which is already ours through the cross of Jesus Christ, two questions come to mind:

- 1) Why is a record of sins kept in heaven?
- 2) Why do we need to confess our sins?

As we understand the broader implications of the plan of redemption, we shall realize that it involves much more than the salvation of man. We are merely “pawns” in the great controversy. Satan’s real gripe is with God. Therefore, God must be vindicated. When the redeemed are home in heaven at last, they will still have questions. God will not suppress these questions by asserting His authority. The sins of those who rejected Christ will remain on record to demonstrate to the redeemed, as well as the watching universe, that these were lost because they committed the unpardonable sin. The record will clearly show that they had ample opportunity to accept the good news of Jesus Christ, and it will show that they hardened their hearts and deliberately rejected Christ and His salvation.

Question 2 is perhaps the more common concern. If our sins have been pardoned, why do we need to confess them? We will further address this question in chapters 15 and 23. But for now we need to consider

whether we confess because we are afraid to sleep at night, lest we should die with some unconfessed sin on the record and thereby guarantee ourselves a place in the second resurrection. Is our repentance for sin and confession of sin self-centered? We need to consider whether our understanding of the plan of salvation amounts to a belief in the false concept of salvation by confession.

Confession of sin which is motivated by the good news of the gospel is inspired by the amazing love revealed at the cross. Not self-centered, it is rather Christ-centered. Also, it is not a legalistic attempt to win heaven simply by avoiding hell. When we know Jesus as He really is, we will confess sin because we love the Saviour who died for our sins. We shall finally forsake sin because we understand something of the sacrifice that Christ is making for us in the heavenly sanctuary (see Hebrews 5:1, 8:3).

A realization that every sin augments the sufferings of Christ prompts the repentance that need not be regretted (2 Corinthians 7:9). A deep understanding of the present reality of the cross—the continual sacrifice of costly and painful intercession on our behalf—wings from the tempted soul that heart-wrenching cry, “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God” (Genesis 39:9)?

One of the Arminians’ favorite texts is 1 John 1:9. To some, it is absolute “*proof*” that the death of Christ *was* merely provisional and that no one was in any sense forgiven simply because Jesus died. The text says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

To the Arminian, that little word *if* is huge! The logic is simple: If you confess, you are forgiven. If you do not confess, you are not forgiven. In other words, the cross of Christ makes absolutely no difference to you unless you invoke the efficacy of the atonement via an appropriate response. Because of this line of reasoning, the Arminian reads into 2 Corinthians 5:19 what is not there: “God was in Christ reconciling the [*confessors*] unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” The message of the latter rain reconciles 2 Corinthians 5:19 and Colossians 2:13 with 1 John 1:9.

Three Phases of Salvation

The thought that any individual was forgiven before he or she believed in Christ and made confession of sin is indeed very difficult for some to grasp. Unfortunately, the thought that everyone has already been saved or redeemed from the curse of the law is considered almost blasphemous to a staunch Arminian. This attitude arises out of an ignorance of the three phases of salvation, or a failure to see the significance of the distinct phases.

The Bible speaks of salvation in three verb tenses—past, present, and future. We shall take a look at a few examples.

Future Tense

And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end *shall be saved* (Matthew 10:22, emphasis supplied).

And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that endures to the end *shall be saved* (Matthew 24:13, emphasis supplied).

He that believeth and is baptized *shall be saved* (Mark 16:16, emphasis supplied).

Many additional texts use the future tense in reference to the plan of salvation. In fact, in most cases where the KJV uses the term *saved*, it is

preceded by the words *shall be*, which puts the term in the future tense. Perhaps because of this, many have generally failed to recognize the other two phases of the plan of salvation.

Present Tense

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are *being saved* it is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18, NKJV, emphasis supplied).

For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are *being saved* and among those who are perishing (2 Corinthians 2:15, NKJV, emphasis supplied).

These renderings may come as a surprise to those accustomed to using the Authorized King James Version. That translation tends to obscure verb tenses. Thus, it fails to make clear that the term *saved*, in the two verses cited above, is in the present continuous tense. However, a review of the original Greek text reveals that the New King James Version is accurate.

The second phase of salvation is also spoken of without using the term *save* in other passage of the Bible. For example:

Now unto him that is able to keep [save] you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy (Jude 1:24).

The Lord knoweth how to deliver [save] the godly out of temptations (2 Peter 2:9).

These verses refer to what is involved in the second phase of salvation—salvation from sinning. This concept is consistent with Matthew 1:21: “Thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins.”

Past Tense

Now we need to take a look at examples of the phase of salvation which has proven to be the most controversial among those who promote a provisional view of the atonement. The Bible clearly teaches salvation in the past tense as an already accomplished reality. For example:

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has *saved us* and called us with a holy calling...who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Timothy 1:8–10, NKJV, emphasis supplied).

Even when we were dead in trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been *saved*) (Ephesians 2:5, NKJV, emphasis supplied).

These two passages clearly show that salvation from the curse is an already accomplished reality. The Greek tense is aorist. It refers to an event which happened once for all at a specific point in time, *in the past*. Internal evidence suggests that these two passages of Scripture apply to the believer, as well as to the non-believer. Note, for example, that 2 Timothy 1:8–10 first says God “saved us,” then it says He “called us.” Who does He call? Is it not unbelievers—those not already followers of Christ? When He abolished death, He saved the world, believers and non-believers alike. This does not mean that everyone will be saved, in the future tense. The salvation was accomplished for all, and all are therefore “called.” “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17). We have all been saved from the first condemnation. A second condemnation also exists—condemnation to eternal death in the lake of fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. Jesus did not redeem mankind from that condemnation.

Identifying the Three Phases

Salvation in the past is referred to by the expression *justification of life* (Romans 5:18). That means corporate universal justification, which is applicable to all. All “have been saved” from the curse. Salvation in the present is referred to as “justification by faith” (Galatians 2:16). Justification by faith is the process which produces sanctification and victory over temptation. This present salvation is only applicable to those who have faith and are therefore “sanctified by faith” (Acts 26:10). Salvation in the future is called “glorification” (Romans 8:17, 30). This will only be applicable to those who “keep...the faith” (Revelation 14:12).

This third phase of salvation is the final and irrevocable phase of salvation which most Arminians have in mind when they use the term *saved*. A more accurate use of terms would be to use the expression *eternally saved* in referring to the third phase, since the Bible uses the term *saved* in all three verb tenses. Here we find that Arminianism is not fully in harmony with Scripture.

That one come to grips with the three phases of salvation is absolutely imperative. One must also be clear that these are three phases of salvation and *not* three phases of the gospel. In Christ, we “have been saved” from the penalty of sin (Ephesians 2:5)—an historical fact. All of humanity has been redeemed from the curse of the law. The first phase of salvation, which God has already accomplished “in Christ,” constitutes the root of the gospel. The second phase of salvation is in the present—“justification

by faith,” which is unto eternal life. This produces sanctification, which is called the *fruit* of the gospel. Paul referred to it as “the fruit of the spirit” (see Galatians 5:22). The third phase of salvation is yet future—“glorification,” which is the *hope* of the gospel. Paul referred to that phase of salvation as “the blessed hope” (Titus 2:13).

So the complete plan of salvation includes three phases: the gospel, the fruit of the gospel, and the hope of the gospel. The Arminian generally has no problem with the concept of salvation in the present—with justification by faith which produces sanctification. Arminians also have no objection to the concept of salvation in the future—glorification at the coming of Christ. However, there is strong objection to the idea of salvation in the past—“justification of life,” or corporate universal justification, which constitutes the root the gospel.¹

Thus, the most unfortunate of all possible outcomes has developed: Arminian Christians are willing to preach the possibility of salvation in the present and the possibility of salvation in the future, but they are not willing to preach salvation in the past tense, which is the very *foundation* of the gospel. All that follows this first phase of salvation is the inevitable outflow of believing in what happened in the first phase. We have nothing, apart from believing that we were justified by the blood of Christ at Calvary, and that phase of salvation took place for all men before we believed.

This development is indeed terrible. Without a clear understanding of this aspect of the plan of redemption, the genuine fruit of the gospel cannot appear in the present, and we cannot have a “lively hope” in Christ (1 Peter 1:3) for the future. Without this understanding, we continue to remain in bondage, under a sense of condemnation, because we have not fully realized that “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law” (Galatians 3:13). Or worse, we are deceived into a false sense of security believing our performance is good enough to meet God’s requirement and free us of condemnation.

We must come to grips with the meaning of the gospel as clarified by the message of the latter rain, if authentic Christian character is to be developed and real progress is to be made.

The Sanctuary Presents Three Phases

The sanctuary and its services, given to Israel in the wilderness, is the master model of the plan of salvation. It provides the most detailed representation of all that would be accomplished by Christ as our Redeemer, High Priest, and conquering King. The earthly sanctuary was the type.

1. To deny this is to render the gospel completely dysfunctional and ineffective and to provide no foundation for the other two phases.

The actual plan of salvation, involving the cross of Calvary and the heavenly sanctuary, is the antitype. The term used to refer to God’s saving activity in the sanctuary model is *atonement*. In harmony with the three phases of salvation presented throughout the Scriptures, there are three phases of atonement represented in the earthly sanctuary service. The sanctuary calendar, its rituals and services, and its major architectural features were all designed to bring into focus three distinct phases of the process of salvation.

The sacrifice which occurred in the first phase was the most essential element of the sanctuary model. A symbolic representation of the sacrifice of Christ, it became the focal point not only of the sanctuary service but of the entire Bible.² Abel, Job, and Abraham offered sacrifices long before the sanctuary model was given to Israel. Although there were various types of sacrifices presented in the sanctuary, with but one exception, this ceremonial ritual was *always* conducted in the outer court.³

The shedding of blood and its application to the horns of the altar in either the outer court or the first apartment of the tabernacle (see Leviticus 4:2, 25) symbolically represented the first phase of atonement. The application of blood in the outer court or in the first apartment of the tabernacle took place throughout the year.

The second major symbolic representation brought to view in the sanctuary service was the application of the blood within the second apartment on the Day of Atonement. On only one day each year, called Yom Kippur—the Day of Atonement—was the high priest instructed to minister in the second apartment. This constituted the second phase of atonement.

Finally, the third and last division of the sanctuary service (representing the third phase of the plan of salvation), involved the symbolic representation of atonement on the head of the scapegoat. This ceremony also took place only on the Day of Atonement. The final phase of atonement was unique, in that it was not a blood atonement, because it did *not* represent the sacrifice of Christ. The scapegoat represented the adversary—the enemy of God and man. Since this phase of atonement does not provide forgiveness, the scapegoat was not killed. The atonement on the head of the scapegoat was designed to show that Lucifer bears responsibility for sin.

2. “The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster. In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light that streams from the cross of Calvary” (E. G. White, *Evangelism*, 190).

3. The ritual sacrifice of the red heifer, apparently a very rare ceremony, was conducted outside of the camp of Israel.

Thus we see three major divisions in the process of atonement in the typical service. They represented three distinct phases of atonement. These three phases of atonement, symbolically represented in the earthly/typical service (daily atonement, Most Holy Place atonement, and atonement via the scapegoat) represented the three phases of actual atonement in the antitypical sanctuary service, which has its fulfillment from A.D. 31 to 1844, from 1844 to the second advent, and from the second advent to the third advent. These three phases of atonement form the foundation for the three phases of salvation. That one understand the three phases of atonement presented in the sanctuary service is essential, if one is to fully comprehend the three phases of salvation. This more complete understanding of the plan of salvation is essential to understanding the gospel clearly. Ultimately, it is to be God's last message to the world through the Seventh-day Adventist Church—Adventism's "raison d'être."

For centuries, the Jewish nation had been praying for the Messiah to come. They expected Him to come as a conquering king, not as a "man of sorrows" (Isaiah 53:3). Their failure as a nation to identify the three phases of the Messiah's coming led to their national rejection of Him. At His first appearing, He was to come as a babe. Then at His second appearing, He is to come as a King, and finally, at His third appearing, He is to come as the Judge of all the earth. We face a danger similar to that which overtook the Jews. A failure to recognize the three distinct phases of the Messiah's plan of redemption will result in a final rejection of Him. Understanding the three phases of the plan of salvation is essential to understanding the message of the latter rain.

Refocusing the Fundamental Dilemma

A reason exists for the difficulty many have in accepting the true meaning of the gospel. Those who believe must realize that for many, this truth appears to represent a perplexing inconsistency, possibly even a flaw, in the justice of God. As the reasoning goes, if Jesus actually died for my sins, then I should not have to die for them. If Jesus died for the sins of all, as the Bible plainly teaches, then none have to die for their sins. If nobody dies, then everyone will ultimately be eternally saved—the Universalist position.

Immediately, they know that this is not the case. Therefore, some conclude, Jesus could not have exhausted the penalty for everyone's sins, and salvation cannot truly be a free gift. Perhaps they would never articulate their concern so candidly. But we should realize that it is this honest and logical thought process that leads many to affirm the Arminian conclusion that the atonement was merely provisional and that its efficacy must be invoked by man's response in order to be effective. Other honest souls are more comfortable with the Calvinist conclusion that Christ only died for the elect.

In Romans 3:25 this acute problem comes into clear focus. "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God" (Romans 3:25). This verse of Scripture requires some careful study to properly understand its meaning. As it is translated

in the King James Version, the meaning is somewhat obscure. To review other translations is helpful.

Whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed (Romans 3:25, NKJV).

God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood. He did this to demonstrate His justice, because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished (Romans 3:25, NIV).

Here we discover that all of the sins committed up until the cross had been “passed over.” In other words, God had forgiven them out of sheer mercy to the sinner, but His mercy appeared to be at the expense of justice. He had left the sins “unpunished.” Up until the cross, God had not addressed the legal imperatives of justice: “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). However, at the cross, all the sins of the world were punished in Christ. The full legal penalty for every sin ever committed was fully discharged. “Christ died for our sins” (1 Corinthians 15:3). Thus, God’s justice was “demonstrated” (Romans 3:25). For the first time since the dawn of the sin problem, God was clearly seen to be not only merciful but just.

For some human observers, however, this demonstration of “justice” (Romans 3:25), as we have explained it, appears to lead to injustice. The problem is: If God “punished” all of our sins, believer and unbeliever alike, in Christ, at the cross, how can He punish *anyone* in the final judgment? When those who are finally and eternally lost shall suffer the penalty for their sin, will God be exacting a second penalty for the same sins already paid for by the death of Christ? If Christ *actually*, not merely, *provisionally* or *selectively*, “died for our sins,” why will the unbeliever die? Does the plan of salvation really amount to a form of double jeopardy? Is God’s system of justice ultimately unjust? Dr. Jon Paulien, Dean of the School of Religion at Loma Linda University, has framed the question well in his book, *Meet God Again for the First Time*.

Would it be fair for any penal system to execute a person twice for the same murder (assuming that were somehow an option)?¹

That question frames the issue that some have when considering the Arminian understanding of the gospel. They see a system in which God is said to punish the same sins twice. Jesus has already died for the sins

1. Jon Paulien, PhD, *Meet God Again for the First Time* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1993), 128, 129.

of the world. Yet, they perceive that those who do not believe in Jesus die for the same sins again. Could Jesus have actually paid the full penalty for sin, if people later suffer the penalty again for the same sin in the final judgment? Dr. Paulien suggests that would not be fair. He answers the question succinctly.

No. Remember what happened when Jesus died on the cross. Heaven placed all the sins of the human race on Him there. When Jesus perished at Calvary His death fully atoned for your sins and for mine. The cross broke the chains of sin and dysfunction.

If your sins are atoned for in Jesus Christ, if He exhausted the curses of the covenant, if He died as the Second Adam, the new Israel, the new Moses—then that means that your sin has already been taken care of.²

Now the dilemma, which has divided Christianity primarily into two major groups (Calvinist and Arminians) for centuries, has come clearly into focus. We must admit that the Arminians *and* the Calvinists *both* have a valid point. The justice of God is at stake, depending on the position one takes in this matter. The integrity of the plan of salvation is on the line. How can people believe that Christ *actually* died for their sins, if we tell them, in nearly the same breath, that they will also die for those same sins, apart from repentance and faith in Christ? Does the final judgment nullify the gospel? That would clearly be an unacceptable conclusion. Dr. Paulien agrees:

Phase three of the judgment again involves the entire human race. But the final judgment is not different in character, nor is it some kind of double jeopardy.³

We must demonstrate that the gospel really is good news. If this cannot be demonstrated, we shall have to concede that the Calvinists must be right after all—that Jesus died for a select group. While the Arminians use a different term to refer to that select group, the logic of their position is in essence the same.

Clearly, we need a better understanding of the gospel, in order to resolve this dilemma. We believe that just such an understanding is provided by the message of the latter rain.

No Respector of Persons

Peter articulated a far-reaching and profound principle, when he said, “God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34). This principle forms the

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., 110.

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foundation of the entire plan of salvation. Intuitively obvious, at least to the Arminian, is that if God did play favorites, He would be unjust. The greatest injustice of all would have been to have arbitrarily saved *some* folk, while leaving others to perish.

Jesus came to earth “that He [God the Father] might be just” (Romans 3:26). In a sense, Jesus died to justify God! Therefore, in view of Acts 10:34, His sacrifice must be equally applicable to every human soul. Otherwise, Jesus failed in His mission, and God still needs to be justified.

This tenet is one of the most fundamental of all the gospel: “One died for all” (2 Corinthians 5:14). How then do we maintain the integrity of this fundamental principle and at the same time avoid the unbiblical conclusion that everyone will ultimately be eternally saved? The solution must lie in the definition of the unpardonable sin.

PART TWO

The Unpardonable Sin

The Unpardonable Sin: An Introduction

If one subject has brought fear to a multitude of hearts, it is the unpardonable sin. Many lie awake at night troubled and sincerely perplexed, wondering if they have committed that sin. Because they do not understand what constitutes the unpardonable sin, they fear that perhaps any and every error, mistake, or act of presumption could constitute the sin which no one wants to commit. Interpreting the unpardonable sin in the light of the law, rather than the light of the gospel, has led some to unwarranted conclusions about the nature of this sin. Indeed, there *is* a sin which is unpardonable—a sin which Jesus said “shall not be forgiven..., neither in this world, neither in the *world* to come” (Matthew 12:32). Can this be the key to explaining why many will be lost, in spite of the sacrifice of Christ?

Several Scriptural passages mention the unpardonable sin. Matthew chapter 12, Mark chapter 3, and Luke chapter 12 are among them. The unpardonable sin is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. That much is clear. What does it *mean* to blaspheme the Holy Spirit? Why is this sin “unpardonable?” How does this sin relate to the good news of the gospel: “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3)?

Toward answering these questions, let us examine the official work of the Holy Spirit. In John chapter 16 Jesus described the work of the Comforter. “Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you” (John 16:7). If one pauses to

consider them, one realizes that these are rather strange expressions. Why did Jesus say, “If I go not away, the Comforter will not come”? Was not the Spirit already here? Many passages tell us that He was already here (see Matthew 3:16, Matthew 4:1, Matthew 12:28, Luke 2:27, Luke 4:1). So, why did Jesus say that He needed to leave so that the Spirit could come? Could they not both be here together? Why did Jesus say that it was expedient for us that He go away? Most of us would rather have had Him stay. Our initial thoughts are, “These are rather mysterious statements.” They most certainly were perplexing to the disciples.

What If Jesus Were Here?

Yet this all becomes rather logical, if we stop to consider what would happen if Jesus were here. Yes, the Holy Spirit *was* here while Christ was here. Jesus said the Father gave Him the Spirit without measure (see John 3:34). Yet the question is: What would we do if Jesus were still physically present on earth today? Would we not want to see Jesus? Of course, we would! Everyone would *need* to “see” Jesus, whether they recognized that need or not, and many multitudes of people would *want* to see Him. Therein lies the problem. With millions, perhaps billions of people on the waiting list to see Jesus, we could not have the access that we need.

Jesus is one with the human family (see 1 Timothy 2:5). Before He ascended, He made this fact very clear. He said to Mary, “Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God” (John 20:17). He is still Immanuel, “God with us.” That means He can only be in one place at a time. He can only converse with one person at a time. Even if only one million people wanted to see Him for one hour each, if you were the last person on the waiting list, it would take 114 years before you could see Him. That is assuming He never slept, or stopped to eat, or took a break.

It *was* expedient for *us* that He go away. If Jesus were here, who would avail themselves of the Holy Spirit? Our one desire would be to see Jesus face to face, when we could have access to the Spirit, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Could the Holy Spirit really work with power while the whole world waited in line to see Jesus? His office would have been ignored and neglected even more than it is today, while Jesus is in the heavenly sanctuary. This is why Jesus said the Spirit would not come *unless* He went away.

The Spirit’s Primary Work

Now that the Comforter has come, what is His primary work? We must understand His mission, if we are to understand what it means to

sin against Him. Jesus said, “And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8). Notice that Jesus said the Comforter, will “reprove” or “convince” the world concerning three issues: “sin,” “righteousness,” and “judgment.” Every Bible student thinks he or she knows what sin, righteousness, and judgment are about. However, the definitions that we have in mind may not coincide with the definitions Jesus had in mind. If we are going to understand the work of the Holy Ghost, we must accept the definitions Jesus gave for these terms, in the context in which the description of the Holy Spirit’s work appears.

Jesus continued, “Of sin, because they believe not on me” (John 16:9). First John 3:4 says, “Sin is the transgression of the law;” but this is *not* the definition of sin which Jesus gives in the context of His description of the work of the Holy Spirit. Here is one of the places where our preoccupation with the law has not served us well. He says that the world will be convinced of sin by the Holy Ghost, “because they believe not on me.” Here we find the first clue to understanding the unpardonable sin correctly. It must be understood in the light of the gospel.

Next, He addresses the subject of righteousness. “Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more” (John 16:10). At first glance, one must wonder what Jesus’ going to the Father has to do with the definition of righteousness.

Finally, Jesus enlightens us concerning judgment. “Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged” (John 16:11).

We must understand the descriptions that Jesus gave for “sin,” “righteousness,” and “judgment,” if we are to understand the work of the Comforter and what it means to commit the unpardonable sin. First, Jesus says, the world will be convinced of sin, “because they believe not on me.” Here we have the most important description of the work of the Holy Spirit. We will examine this concept last.

Let us take a look at righteousness first. Jesus said, “Of righteousness, because I go to the Father.” What does Jesus’ going to the Father have to do with righteousness?

Defining “Righteousness”

In Romans 3:10 we are told, “There is none righteous, no not one.” This is why we need a Savior—because we are not righteous. Righteousness is perfect obedience to God’s law from the day of birth. None of us has this to offer. Jesus came to earth to be our righteousness. When Jesus went to John the Baptist to be baptized of him in the Jordan River, initially John tried to prevent Him. He said, “I need to be baptized by You, and are you coming to me?” (Matthew 3:14, NKJV). Jesus said to him, “Suffer *it to be*

so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him” (Matthew 3:15).

Here we discover one of the primary purposes of Christ’s coming to earth. He came to earth, “to fulfill all righteousness.” He had to do this in order to be our righteousness. “This *is* the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness *is* of me, saith the LORD” (Isaiah 54:17). We have no righteousness of our own. “There is none righteous. No not one” (Romans 3:10). That is one of the primary reasons for His coming to this world. He truly took human nature, and thus taking humanity into Himself, He became our representative, that He might become our righteousness. “And this *is* His name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jeremiah 23:6, emphasis original). Therefore, while we recognize that Jesus came to earth to die for us, we must also understand that He came to live for us. He is our righteousness.

Since one of Christ’s primary missions was to fulfill all righteousness, He could not go back to the Father until He had accomplished that mission. Thus, He said, “I must work the works of him that sent me” (John 9:4). When He came to the end of His life on earth, He said to His Father, “I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do” (John 17:4). Finally, upon the cross, He cried, “It is finished and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost” (John 19:30).

At that moment, the righteousness which He came to “fulfill” was perfect and complete. Jesus did not die, and He could not go back to the Father, until His mission, to fulfill all righteousness, was “finished.” That is why He said, the Spirit of truth will convince the world of righteousness, “because I go to the Father” (John 16:10). The very fact that He has returned to the Father is conclusive evidence that “all righteousness” has been “fulfilled.”

This is good news. It means that all of the righteousness that will be required in order for us to have a home in heaven, has been produced. We could not produce it—that was the work of God. Nevertheless, the work is “finished.” Christ has become “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.” All that is left to be done is for us to demonstrate this truth to the world by receiving the robe of His righteousness and revealing that to the waiting universe. “For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God” (Romans 8:19).

Jesus once said to the Jews, “Unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20, NKJV). In Christ we now have righteousness that meets the law’s requirement. It far “exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees,” for it is the very righteousness of God which was revealed in Jesus Christ.

Defining “Judgment”

Now concerning judgment, Jesus said, “Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged” (John 16:11). Just as there are three major divisions of the plan of salvation, there are also three phases of “judgment” in that plan.

The first phase of judgment culminated at the cross. The second phase began in the heavenly sanctuary and culminates at the second advent of Christ. The third phase will begin at the second advent of Christ, continue during the millennium, and culminate at Christ’s third advent, at the close of the millennium. To be more precise, there are actually three phases of investigative judgment and three phases of executive judgment.

First Phase of Investigation

The first phase of investigative judgment took place in the Garden of Eden, when—in response to the corporate failure of humanity “in Adam”—God asked a series of questions. The Hebrew term *Adam* actually means, “mankind.” Therefore, we must not miss the universal implications of the events that were transpiring in the Garden. God asked a series of questions during this first phase of investigation. He asked:

“Adam...where are you?” (Genesis 3:9, NKJV)

“Who told you that you were naked?” (Genesis 3:11, NKJV)

“Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?” (Genesis 3:11, NKJV)

And to the woman, God said:

“What is this you have done?” (Genesis 3:13, NKJV)

After the investigation came the verdict in God’s words to the serpent: “I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise His heel” (Genesis 3:15, NKJV). God already knew the answers to the questions He was asking. He knew where Adam and Eve were hiding. He knew why they were hiding. The investigation was for our benefit. They were for the benefit of Adam (mankind) and the watching universe. We should also see that God’s words, spoken apparently to the serpent, are far-reaching in their implications and much more than a rebuke to a mere serpent. Rather, they were God’s verdict and sentence upon mankind and his enemy, that old serpent called the devil and Satan.

Second Phase of Investigation

The second phase of investigative judgment began in 1844, when the 2300 days of Daniel 8:14 concluded and the thrones mentioned in Daniel 7:9 were put in place.

God appointed a day of judgment which was also spoken of in the book of Acts.

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by *that* man whom he hath ordained; *whereof* he hath given assurance unto all *men*, in that he hath raised him from the dead (Acts 17:30, 31).

In 1844 “The court was seated. And the books were opened” (Daniel 7:10, NKJV). John the Revelator tells us, “The hour of His judgment is come” (Revelation 14:7). We now live in the time of the second phase of investigative judgment. One more phase of judgment is yet to come.

Third Phase of Investigation

During the millennium, we shall together with Christ review the records and determine the fate of the wicked. Paul spoke of this phase of the investigative judgment in his first letter to the Corinthian believers.

Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life (1 Corinthians 6:2, 3)?

This phase of judgment is also mentioned in the book of Revelation.

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and *I saw* the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received *his* mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years (Revelation 20:4).

First Executive Judgment

Each phase of investigative judgment has a corresponding phase of execution. The sentence or reward having been determined during the investigation and announced at its conclusion, the judgment must be executed.

The first phase of executive judgment took place at the cross. Jesus' heel was bruised, and the serpent's head was also bruised.

Second Executive Judgment

The second phase of execution concerns the reward of the righteous. This phase of investigative judgment is conducted for the sake of the saints. Daniel tells us the verdict.

I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them, until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made *in favor* of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom (Daniel 7:21, 22, NKJV).

The pre-advent investigative judgment concludes “in *favor* of the saints...” (Daniel 7:22, NKJV). Christ is not in the process of searching for something or someone to condemn. He is in the process of vindicating the saints and determining the reward they shall receive. When that work is completed, He will return to take them to heaven with Him. The execution of this phase of judgment takes place at the Second Coming of Christ. Just before He comes, Christ will say:

He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold I come quickly, and my reward *is* with me, to give every man according as his work shall be (Revelation 22:11, 12).

Third Executive Judgment

The third and final phase of executive judgment takes place at the third advent of Christ, after the millennium. At that time the Holy City comes down from God out of heaven (see Revelation 21:2). The wicked are raised to life (see Revelation 20:5). The books are opened, and the wicked receive the verdict of the 1,000-year investigative judgment (Revelation 20:12). Then they will surround the city, determined to destroy the saints and take the city, as the executive judgment will proceed. Concerning that time, the Bible says:

And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them (Revelation 20:9).

Satan and his followers were not destroyed at the time of the rebellion in heaven, when there was war in heaven and they sought to overthrow the government of God but were defeated. And they were not destroyed after Satan had revealed His desire to murder the Son of God at the cross. Nevertheless, when they shall seek to destroy all who remain loyal to Christ, the time of their final judgment shall have come. Then, they will finally be seen by the entire watching universe to be unfit to live. Only then will God destroy them and all who join with them.

Thus, we see that there are three phases of investigative judgment and three phases of executive judgment, corresponding to the three phases of

the plan of salvation. All of the issues of the contest between Christ and Satan will not be made clear until the third phase of the plan.

Now we can clearly answer the question which opened our discussion of “judgment”: What did Jesus mean when He said, “Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged” (John 16:11)? From our discussion of the three phases of executive judgment, it should be clear that the prince of this world is Satan and that he was judged at the cross of Christ. When Christ was crucified, the world was also judged at the cross. We were judged in the person of our Representative. However, neither Satan nor the world has yet faced the final phase of the judgment. The outcome of the final judgment was assured at the cross. Nevertheless, the final phase of executive judgment awaits the explanation of the issues of the great controversy. These issues have not yet been sufficiently defined, and thus the controversy continues.

Two events will ultimately unfold simultaneously—the revealing of the sons of God, and the revelation of the children of the devil. These events are what the final proclamation of the gospel is all about. “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations” (Matthew 24:14). When this final “witness” is given, via a demonstration of the power of the gospel, then the end will come. That final “witness” awaits an understanding of the message of the latter rain. Temporarily, God has withdrawn His Spirit, because His truth was not accepted. When His truth is received, the latter rain outpouring of the Spirit will come, but we do not need the Spirit to produce the “loud cry,” as long as we do not have the message of the latter rain.

Defining Sin

Thus far, we have seen that the work of the Holy Spirit is to convince the world of righteousness, as it relates to Jesus. He is also to convince the world of judgment, as it relates to Jesus. Now, we return to the first aspect of the Spirit’s work. It also relates to Christ. Jesus said that the Comforter would convince the world of sin “because they believe not on me” (John 16:9).

In the Bible we find two categories of sin defined: sins which can be forgiven, and a sin which cannot be forgiven. Both categories are explicitly described in 1 John: “If any man see his brother sin a sin *which is* not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death” (1 John 5:16, 17).

The question is: Which sin did Jesus have in mind, when He said, “Of sin, because they believe not in me”? What is the sin which is “unto

death”? In Mark chapter 16, Jesus spelled it out. “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15, 16). Here, Jesus identified the sin which causes one to be lost—the sin “which leads to death.” He said, “He that believeth not shall be damned.” The sin of refusing to believe is the one that leads to death. Refusing to believe what? Jesus did not speak those words in an information vacuum. He prefaced His statement with the command to “Go...and preach the gospel.” Therefore, He must have meant that whoever hears the gospel and then refuses to believe it, that person “shall be damned.”

What is the gospel? We saw the essence of the gospel in chapter 3. That is, “Christ died for our sins.” In Romans chapter 1 Paul describes the gospel outline in a little more detail. We shall skip verse 2, since it is a parenthetical clause.

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God...concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared *to be* the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:1–4).

Here, we are told that the gospel “concerns” Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus’ incarnation, genetic inheritance, divinity, life, death, and resurrection are the essential elements of the gospel. In other words, Jesus *is* the Gospel. Therefore, to refuse to believe the gospel means simply to refuse to believe in Jesus. “He that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). This is the sin which is unto death, the unpardonable sin, the sin against the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit’s primary purpose is to convince the world concerning “sin,” as it relates to Jesus. The Spirit is also to convince the world of “righteousness,” as it relates to Jesus. Finally, the Spirit is to convince the world of “judgment,” as it relates to Jesus. In other words, the Holy Spirit’s work is to convince the world concerning Jesus. Jesus is “the truth” (see John 14:6). That is why He said, “Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself... He shall glorify me” (John 16:13–15). Thus, to reject Jesus, who is “the truth,” is to sin against the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of truth. His primary work is to convince us concerning the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is the unpardonable sin. Therefore, we now must consider the question: How does a refusal to believe in Jesus result in a charge of “blasphemy”?

What Is Blasphemy?

Several passages of the Bible mention “blasphemy.” It is described in terms which suggest that it is a terrible sin, a great calamity, an enormous disaster. The first mention of the term *blasphemy* is found in 2 Kings. When Sennacherib, king of Assyria, was approaching Israel and sent a message defying the God of heaven and demanding immediate surrender, Hezekiah described that terrible day in these words: “This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and blasphemy: for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth” (2 Kings 19:3).

Here, the king of Israel describes a great reversal of fortunes—a day of great potential turned completely upside down, an opportunity not only forfeited but replaced with the greatest possible loss. Can one think of a greater calamity, before the age of modern medicine and the C-section, than for the children to have “come to the birth” when “there is not strength to bring forth”? Such is the nature of the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. It involves taking that which is most sacred, most precious, and most highly respected (such as a newborn babe) and treating it with the greatest possible disdain, resulting in the greatest possible loss.

To blaspheme an entity means to treat it with scorn, reproach, violent contempt, absolute disrespect. In Old Testament times, the penalty for blaspheming the name of God was death (see Leviticus 24:16). Although “the law was given by Moses” and “grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17), Jesus did not suggest that one who is guilty of blasphemy

against the Holy Ghost should receive grace. Jesus made clear that the penalty for blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is the most severe that could possibly be suffered. He said, “Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men...whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come” (Matthew 12:31, 32). Even in the New Testament, where the grace of God is most fully revealed, blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is described as unpardonable. It results in the irrevocable curse of God.

As we have seen, the Holy Spirit is the One who convicts us concerning the gospel of Jesus Christ. Salvation comes only through Christ. We cannot comprehend or even perceive the truth of the gospel, apart from the work of the Holy Ghost, because “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). We are completely dependent upon the Holy Spirit to reveal to us every spiritual truth. If we refuse to believe in Christ, we are showing violent contempt and complete disrespect to the third Person of the Godhead. His primary mission is to convict us concerning Christ. Therefore, if we refuse to believe in Jesus, we are dishonoring the Holy Spirit’s primary work.

This type of violent contempt and utter disrespect of that which deserves the highest regard is the essence of “blasphemy.” To reject the work of the Spirit is to nullify the great gift of salvation, which is already given to us in Christ, and to bring upon oneself a *second* condemnation. As we saw in chapter 5, we were all condemned in Adam. We were all corporately justified in Christ, but we can come into condemnation again. “He that believeth not *shall* be condemned” (Mark 16:16, emphasis supplied). In this verse, Jesus is not referring to the condemnation which came upon the whole human race in Adam. Adam did not commit the unpardonable sin. This verse (Mark 16:16) refers to another condemnation, which results from blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. This condemnation can never be reversed.

Other Examples Defining Blasphemy

John records that Jesus said to the Jews,

I and my Father are one. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shown you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? The Jews answered Him, saying, for a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God (John 10:30–33).

Why did the Jews accuse Christ of blasphemy? He had only told them the truth. He is God. However, they did not believe that He was the divine Son of the Father. Anyone who claims to be God (except Christ and the Holy Ghost) shows the highest possible disrespect for God. Such a claim is tantamount to saying, “The true God does not exist.” No greater insult is possible. Therefore, it constitutes violent contempt and utter disrespect, which is blasphemy.

In Matthew chapter 12, Jesus cast a devil out of a man, and the Pharisees accused Him of casting out devils by the prince of devils. They were attributing this mighty miracle of God to the devil. This was violent contempt and utter disrespect for that which should have commanded the highest respect. Therefore, this was also blasphemy. The power of the Holy Ghost had performed the miracle. The purpose of the miracle was to authenticate the claims of Jesus Christ. Since it was for the purpose of rejecting Jesus that the Pharisees rejected the miracle, this was actually a case of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. We already saw in chapter 8 that to reject Jesus is the sin against the Holy Ghost—the unpardonable sin. That is why Jesus responded to the Pharisees, saying, “I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men” (Matthew 12:31). Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is unpardonable. We shall discover the reason that this is true in our next chapter.

Why the Unpardonable Sin Cannot Be Forgiven

Most Christians of a non-Calvinist background understand that Jesus died for all people and for all sins, but if you ask them whether or not rejecting Jesus is a sin, they will immediately answer, “Yes.” If you follow that question with, “Did Jesus die for *that* sin?” They will usually answer, “No.” It seems intuitively obvious to almost everyone that Christ did not die for the sin of rejecting Him. But “without shedding of blood is no remission” of sins (Hebrews 9:22). Blood atonement must occur in order for a sin to be forgiven. Since “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4), only the blood of Christ will suffice (see Acts 4:12). Therefore, this sin *cannot* be forgiven, because Jesus did not die for it. Now, that is a logical argument. We need to see it more explicitly stated in the Scriptures.

In Hebrews chapter 10, we are warned that to “insult” the “Spirit” is a “sin,” and for that sin, there “no longer remains a sacrifice.”

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how

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much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace (Hebrews 10:26–29, NKJV)?

Here, the sin against the Spirit is clearly described. We see it defined as a “willful” sin, not an accident—an intelligent sin, not a sin of ignorance. It can only be committed “after” having “received the knowledge of the truth.” It involves deliberately trampling “under foot the Son of God.” It includes a rejection of the atonement—“the blood of the covenant”—and ultimately, it involves disrespect or contempt for the Holy Ghost (i.e., “the Spirit of grace”) who enables us to “discern” all spiritual realities. In other words, it involves insulting “the Spirit.” The scriptural passage under consideration (Heb. 10:26-29) tells us that for that sin, “there no longer remains a sacrifice.” The sacrifice of Christ does not extend to this sin. Jesus did not die for this offence. Therefore, it “shall not be forgiven unto men” (Matthew 12:31). In fact, it *cannot* be forgiven.

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, it needs to be clear, is a deliberate, intelligent, persistent, ultimate, and final rejection of the gospel. Every “willful” sin does not constitute the unpardonable sin. That would be bad news indeed. Probably it is safe to say that we have all sinned “willfully” and perhaps even “presumptuously,” as did Adam in the Garden of Eden.¹ Yet we have not all “willfully” rejected the gospel of Jesus Christ. The unpardonable sin is a unique and specific offense.

When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming to be baptized in the Jordan, he cried out, “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). The gospel of Jesus Christ proclaims the good news that God the Father has pardoned the human race. The penalty for our sins has been paid in full by the death of the Lamb. Thus, Christ took away “the sin of the world” (John 1:29). By the death of Christ, our condemnation has been fully reversed. The penalty for all of the sins which are associated with the fall of Adam has been paid in full, and they can now be removed from our hearts through faith in Jesus Christ. However, the act of ultimate refusal to believe in Christ constitutes the sin which cannot be forgiven. Indications of this sin or the precursors to it may be manifested in different forms. Yet it is this sin and not the various acts of its manifestation that cannot be forgiven. This type of rebellion is not of the same category as the “sin of this world,” which was taken away by Christ. This sin originated in the heart of Lucifer, in heaven, and this sin is unpardonable. Imagine that Jesus had died

1. “One presumptuous act, one deed in disregard of God’s expressed will, lost for Adam his beautiful Eden home, and opened the floodgates of iniquity and woe upon our world” (E. G. White, *Signs of the Times*, December 15, 1887).

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for this sin. Then Lucifer and his followers could be forgiven for their rejection of the authority and government of God. Rebellion would continue. Sin would be immortalized. The universe would be in chaos. Righteousness would no longer be the standard, but sin. Thank God that this sin cannot be forgiven in this life or the life to come. Thank God that Jesus did not die for this sin.

Why Different Punishments?

By now we should see that the reason people will be lost is *not* because they were never “saved.”² Their being lost is *not* because Jesus did not exhaust the full penalty for their sins—and it is *not* because Christ’s death was merely provisional. The reason many will be punished in the lake of fire and suffer the second death is because they committed a sin for which Jesus did not die. They intelligently and deliberately rejected the gift of salvation in Christ. They will suffer and die, because they have blasphemed the Holy Ghost—they have rejected God’s authority and the government of God, which is based on the principle of love. When one accepts this understanding of the atonement, another important question arises. Why will there be differing lengths of suffering in hell before unbelievers die? If all are dying for one and the same sin—blasphemy against the Holy Ghost—why do they not all suffer for the same length of time and all die at the same time?

No such thing as a “small” sin exists. No sin could ever be forgiven, apart from the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Yet, there *are* differing degrees of guilt. Punishment is proportional to guilt. Jesus said:

And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more (Luke 12:47, 48).

These verses clearly articulate the principle of differing degrees of guilt. In times of ignorance, God “winks” (see Acts 17:30). God does not impute sin to those who are ignorant. However, when one sins against light and knowledge, guilt is either incurred or aggravated. The greater the light one has, the greater the guilt one can incur.

Now, the Scriptures present clearly that all will be judged “according to their works” (see Revelation 20:12, 13), and all will be rewarded

2. All mankind has been saved from eternal death which they should have experienced “in Adam” the day that he sinned. Everyone has been redeemed from the curse (Galatians 3:13).

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“according to...works” (see Revelation 22:12). This would appear to be inconsistent with the understanding that all are punished because of the sin of unbelief—the one sin for which Jesus did not make atonement. We should note, however, that all who are lost will be punished “according to” works, not *for* their works. Nevertheless, the two—faith and works—are directly related. Do you remember Paul’s prayer request?

Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith (2 Thessalonians 3:1, 2, NKJV).

Paul prayed for deliverance from “wicked men,” but notice that it is those who do not have faith who are “unreasonable and wicked.” The Bible teaches that we are “sanctified by faith” (Acts 26:18). Therefore, the greater our lack of faith, the greater will be our lack of sanctification. In other words, the less faith one has, the more “wicked” one will be. The more wicked one is, the more wicked acts one will commit, and thus the greater the punishment. The punishment will be “according to works,” but the reason is *not* because we are saved or lost by works. We are saved by grace through faith, and one is lost because of unbelief (see Mark 16:16). Yet, because our faith determines the nature of our works, punishment will be in proportion to the hardness of the heart. The book of Romans brings this out a little more concisely:

And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God (Romans 2:3–5).

Notice that the unbeliever is treasuring up “wrath against the day of wrath.” This is done “after,” or according to, the “hardness” of an “impenitent heart.” Hardness of heart is a euphemism which means “unbelief.” In other words, the wrath will be according to the depth of the unbelief. “He that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). He that believeth not will also suffer “wrath” in proportion to the unbelief, which is also in proportion to the wicked works. For this reason, the next verse of Romans says, “Who will render to every man according to his deeds” (Romans 2:6). Clearly, there is a direct correlation between the deeds and the “impenitent heart” of unbelief.

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Limits of the Atonement

Not a man, woman, boy or girl has ever been conceived on earth, for whom Christ did not die. Over and over, the Bible assures us that Christ “died for all” (see 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15, Hebrews 2:9, 1 John 2:2). “God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34). Therefore, there is not a single person for whom Christ did not die. Nevertheless, there *is* a sin for which Christ did not die—the sin of unrelenting unbelief, which is blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. Thus, we must conclude that the atonement *is* limited—not limited with respect to persons but limited with respect to sins. Jesus Himself clearly articulated the limitation:

Wherefore I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come (Matthew 12:31, 32).

Jesus said, “All manner of sin and blasphemy *shall* be forgiven” (Matthew 13:31, emphasis supplied). The Arminian tends to read into this text that which is not there. Jesus did *not* say all manner of sin *can* be forgiven. He said, all manner of sin “*shall* be forgiven.” When He said this, He was looking forward to the cross, where He would exhaust the penalty for “all manner of sin and blasphemy.” When the penalty was paid, the sin of the world was judicially pardoned—forgiven. Every sin was forgiven, every sin, that is, except for one. A limit to the atonement *does* exist. Christ made it abundantly clear that at the cross, there would be no atonement made for the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.

Two Phases of Forgiveness

Having come to grips with the nature of the unpardonable sin, we are prepared to understand the meaning of 1 John 1:9 more clearly. An isolated, superficial reading of the verse seems to contradict the concept of atonement as we have explained it thus far, but the Scriptures cannot contradict themselves. In a very real sense, all men have been forgiven for all of their sins, with the possibility of one exception. The sin of rejecting the gospel of Jesus Christ cannot be forgiven. We have observed that this is a “legal forgiveness”—also called a “judicial pardon.” What do we mean by “legal forgiveness?”

In the Scriptures we actually find three phases of forgiveness correlating to the three phases of salvation. However, before one can comprehend the three phases of forgiveness, one must come to grips with the idea that there is more than one phase. In this chapter we will demonstrate the first two phases. Thus far, we have focused on the first phase of salvation, involving the legal ramifications of sin, forgiveness, and justification. At the cross, the whole human race was granted a judicial pardon. The significance of this pardon is that all mankind was justified to probationary life. All of us are under the umbrella of corporate, universal justification. All have been redeemed from the curse of the law. This phase of justification pertains to the first condemnation, which came upon the whole human race in Adam.

In Isaiah we find one of the earliest biblical references to the first phase of forgiveness. It comes as the word of the Lord to Israel, during a time of apostasy and needed reform. In the midst of their backslidings and their terrible sins, the Lord spoke words of comfort and hope. He said, “Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou *art* my servant: I have formed thee; thou *art* my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me. I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee” (Isaiah 44:21, 22). These words are amazing. They allude to a phase of forgiveness taking place *before* what many would consider the prerequisite repentance.

The Lord said, “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions.” Notice that the forgiveness comes first! Then comes the call to repentance, in the words, “Return unto me; for I have redeemed thee.” God’s pardoning love is truly amazing! Many have been taught that before we can be forgiven, we must *first* repent! An aspect of truth is found in that concept, but that is not the *whole truth* on this subject. One labors in vain to reconcile all of the biblical data to that position. The Bible teaches more than one aspect of forgiveness. An aspect or phase of forgiveness exists which takes place *before* the sinner repents—and another phase takes place only after repentance. An accurate understanding of God’s forgiveness requires the recognition of these different phases, or aspects.

In 2 Corinthians, chapter 5, we find two aspects of forgiveness.

And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:18–20).

This can be a perplexing passage to one who only understands one aspect of God’s forgiveness. First, the text highlights the legal aspect of forgiveness/reconciliation which was accomplished at the cross: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them” (2 Corinthians 5:19). If in fact one has committed sins, but those sins are not imputed to him, is that not an aspect of forgiveness? This text tells us that God has refrained from imputing trespasses to the whole world. This idea is related to corporate, universal justification. The first condemnation is removed, and our sins are not counted against us but against Christ, our Representative.

Next, the passage highlights the experiential aspect of the process: “We implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20, NKJV). The first half of the passage says that God *already*

reconciled us to Himself. However, that is a legal forgiveness/reconciliation—the first phase of the process. In that phase of salvation, God charged all our sins upon Jesus. Thus, He forgave us and granted us corporate, universal justification, which is unto probationary life.

As wonderful as that may be, until we respond to what God has done, we continue to have a “heart problem” which needs to be addressed. The second half of this passage highlights the invitation to respond to what God has already done. The response involves an experiential reconciliation, a change of heart, and it brings “peace with God” (see Romans 5:1). First John 1:9 focuses on the second phase of the process of forgiveness and reconciliation. It must not be used to justify a denial of the first phase, which is the foundation for and should be the motivation to seek the second phase.

The Language of the New Testament

This two-phased understanding of the process of forgiveness is clearly supported by the original text of the New Testament. The New Testament writers primarily used two different Greek words, which are translated by the English word *forgive*.¹ In Colossians, chapter 2, we read:

In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with *him* through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross (Colossians 2:11–14).

As we study this passage, it is very important to recognize that the apostle Paul is speaking to the Colossian believers about corporate events, not personal experiences. This fact is apparent in the use of several expressions found in the passage.

First, notice that he says, “Ye are circumcised” (v. 11). Clearly, he is *not* speaking of their individual physical circumcision, nor is he speaking of their personal spiritual circumcision. He says, “Ye are circumcised... by the circumcision of Christ” (v. 11). This was a corporate event. All humanity was circumcised when Christ was “cut off” in fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy (see Daniel 9:26).

Next, Paul speaks of “baptism” (v. 12), but this is not the personal

1. A third word is used in the New Testament for forgiveness—*apoloio*. It appears to be related to *aphiemi*, but it only appears in one verse of Scripture—Luke 6:37.

baptism of the believer. It refers to the corporate baptism of the human race. This fact is evident, when Paul says you are “risen with Him” (v. 12). When did they rise? When the pastor raised them from the water? No, they were “buried with Him,” and they were raised when God raised Christ from the dead.

Next, Paul speaks of the “quickenings” (v. 13). When were they quickened? The Bible says they were “quickenings together with Him” (v. 13). Again, we see that this was a corporate event and not an individual experience that is being spoken of by the passage.

Finally, Paul puts all of these events in the context of the “blotting out” of “the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us” (v. 14). What was this “handwriting” that was against us? That handwriting was our sin, with the resulting sentence of death—the curse of the law or the condemnation that Adam brought upon the human race, which we have also endorsed and embraced through our own personal sins. Our sin was nailed to His cross. In Scripture we find several references to the expression *blotted out* (see Neh. 4:5, Ps. 109:14, Isa. 44:22, Acts 3:19). In most cases, it is sin which is “blotted out.”

When was the “handwriting” blotted out? When the Colossians believed the gospel? No, it was a corporate event which took place when Christ nailed “it to His cross” (v. 14).

Thus, it is very clear that Paul is speaking of corporate realities and not personal experiences. He is speaking of events which took place once for all mankind. An examination of the original text strengthens this interpretation. The verbs are in the aorist tense. They refer to events which took place at a specific point in time in the past. The context of the passage reveals that these events all took place at the cross.

Charizomai and Aphiemi

Now that we have reviewed the context, we need to see a wonderful event connected with the events of this passage. In verse 13 we read:

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses (Colossians 2:13).

Here, the Bible explicitly states that God has “forgiven...all trespasses.” When did this occur? It occurred *before* we were “quickenings together with Him.” When Christ was quickened (at the resurrection), “all trespasses” were all already “forgiven.”

To whom does this apply? Whose trespasses were already forgiven? These words were written to the Colossian believers. Do they only apply to the Colossians? We ask again: When did this forgiveness take place?

The timing is the key to understanding to whom the forgiveness applies. This statement about forgiveness occurs right in the middle of a passage which has been shown to be speaking of corporate realities that occurred at the cross. When God blotted out the “handwriting,” He did not merely blot it out for the Colossian church or for all believers. He blotted it out for all mankind—all those for whom Christ died.

Thus, when He granted forgiveness of sins at the cross, it was not merely the sins of believers which were forgiven. This act of forgiveness was a corporate event, and it was effective for all mankind. Thus, this passage of Scripture teaches the forgiveness of all sins (except the unpardonable sin) for all who have ever sinned—believers and unbelievers alike. The question is: How does this event relate to 1 John 1:9?

The Greek term used in Colossians 2:13, which is translated “forgiven,” is *charizomai* in the original text. However, the word translated “forgive” in 1 John 1:9 is an entirely different word in the original text—*aphiemi*. The term *charizomai* is based in part upon the root word *charis*, which means “grace.” *The Complete Word Study Dictionary* provides this insight into the meaning of *charizomai*: “The most common meaning peculiar to the New Testament is to pardon, to graciously remit a person’s sin.”² *The Strong’s Greek Dictionary of the New Testament* provides additional insight into the meaning and usage of this word. “Charizomai, as a verb means to bestow a favor unconditionally, is used of the act of forgiveness, whether divine or human.”³

These insights are good news, but the word translated “forgive” in 1 John 1:9 (*aphiemi*) does not mean unconditional pardon. It comes from two root words—*apo*, and *hiemi*. *Apo* means “from,” and *hiemi* means “send forth,” or “send away.” Thus *aphiemi* has the meaning of sending forth from, or sending away from. It conveys the concept of two entities being separated. We see it used in Matthew 13:36: “Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house.” The word *sent* is “aphiemi” in the original text. In 1 Corinthians 7:11 Paul says, “Let not the husband put away his wife.” The words *put away* are translated from *aphiemi*. With this background, we can see that 1 John 1:9 could more accurately be translated, “If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to put away [or separate us from] our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Thus, a proper exegetical approach to the two texts reveals that there is no conflict at all. Two different aspects of forgiveness are highlighted by these two verses of Scripture. One text is speaking of pardon. The other is speaking of cleansing. First John 1:9 does not contradict Colos-

2. Spiros Zodhiates, Th.D., *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, 1468.

3. *The New Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Red-Letter edition, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers), 270.

sians 2:13, nor does it contradict 2 Corinthians 5:19.

As with all Scripture, 1 John 1:9 must be understood in harmony with the preponderance of biblical evidence. A fundamental principle of hermeneutics is that any verse of Scripture which appears to give a minority, conflicting viewpoint, must be interpreted in light of the majority of the texts on the subject, which usually provide a clear, harmonious viewpoint.

We should never suppress or ignore the majority viewpoint in an attempt to accommodate the viewpoint of an isolated or unclear minority reference. We have seen many texts which support the conclusion that all mankind were forgiven, saved, reconciled, and justified at the cross (see, for example: Luke 7:41, 42; Galatians 3:13, 14; Galatians 4:4, 5; 1 Corinthians 15:4; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 3:23, 24; Romans 5:6, 8, 18; 1 Timothy 4:10; Ephesians 2:5; Colossians 1:14, Colossians 2:13; Titus 2:11).

The majority viewpoint presented in the Bible is very clear. The cross was a corporate event. It accomplished something for every human soul. Therefore, it would be a gross violation of the principles of biblical interpretation to attempt to use one verse of Scripture (1 John 1:9) to in effect veto the overwhelming testimony of the Bible.

That we understand and embrace the meaning of these two aspects of forgiveness is essential. If we teach only *aphiemi*, as is the tendency within Arminian denominations, we tend to produce legalism and a lack of security. If we teach only *charizomai*, we will tend to produce antinomianism and a low standard of Christian behavior. Both *charizomai* and *aphiemi* must be presented as they are in the Bible. We must actively resist the temptation or inclination to teach one and ignore the other. Both are essential to an accurate understanding of the gospel.

Charizomai in the Sanctuary

Although many find it difficult to accept the idea that there is an aspect of forgiveness which precedes repentance, these two distinct aspects of forgiveness were also illustrated in the typical sanctuary service. In order to perceive this reality, one must understand what was represented by the tabernacle, in distinction from what was represented by the outer court. The Spirit of Prophecy provides the following insight:

The church of God below is one with the church of God above. Believers on the earth and the beings in heaven who have never fallen constitute one church. Every heavenly intelligence is interested in the assemblies of the saints who on earth meet to worship God. In the inner court of heaven they listen to the testimony of the witnesses for Christ in the outer court on earth, and the praise and thanksgiving from the worshipers below is taken up in the heavenly anthem, and praise and rejoicing sound through the heavenly courts because Christ has not died in vain for the fallen sons of Adam.¹

Here, we find that the “inner court” represented heaven. The “outer court” represented earth. This reference is clearly to the typical sanctuary. All activities which took place in the outer court of the sanctuary in ancient Israel represented activities of the antitype which would take place on earth. All activities which took place in the inner court or

¹ E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, 367.

THE MESSAGE OF THE LATTER RAIN

tabernacle of the earthly sanctuary represented activities that would take place in heaven. Thus, the ministry of the priests in the tabernacle represented the activities of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. The activities such as the slaughter of the lambs, which always took place outside the tabernacle, represented the fact that Christ, the Lamb of God, would die on earth for the sins of all humanity.

The morning and evening sacrifice, which took place daily in the ancient Israelite sanctuary, represents an often-overlooked aspect of atonement. The requirement for these sacrifices is described in the book of Exodus:

Now this *is that* which thou shalt offer upon the altar; two lambs of the first year day by day continually. The one lamb thou shalt offer in the morning; and the other lamb thou shalt offer at even (Exodus 29:38, 39).

The book of Numbers describes the same offerings.

And thou shalt say unto them, this *is* the offering made by fire which ye shall offer unto the LORD; two lambs of the first year without spot day by day, *for* a continual burnt offering. The one lamb shalt thou offer in the morning, and the other lamb shalt thou offer at even (Numbers 28:3, 4).

The morning sacrifice remained on the altar and burned all day. The evening sacrifice also remained upon the altar, and it burned all night. Thus, there was a continual sacrifice of atonement on the altar. One of the unique aspects of this sacrifice is the fact that it was not presented or sacrificed by the common people. Daily, members of the Israelite community brought their sacrifices to the temple to receive individual atonement, resulting in forgiveness of known sins. However, the priests selected the morning and evening sacrifices and presented them on behalf of the entire nation. It may also be argued that they were presented on behalf of the world, because the outer court represented the earth, and it was an area of the earthly sanctuary where even Gentiles could enter. Thus, when the morning and evening sacrifices were presented in the outer court, they were sacrificed on behalf of all mankind. This sacrifice most clearly represented the cross of Christ.

These sacrifices symbolically revealed the profound truth that the cross of Christ would be a corporate event and that it would be applicable to the whole world, Jews and Gentiles, believers and non-believers alike. The corporate dimensions of the atonement of Calvary are the basis of the charizomai which God has given to the whole world.

Light From the Most Holy Place

The sanctuary reveals the structure and principles of God's government.

CHARIZOMAI IN THE SANCTUARY

In its most holy apartment we find the throne of God, represented by the mercy seat. We are invited to "come boldly unto the throne of grace" (Hebrews 4:16). Under the throne (mercy seat) is the law, in the form of Ten Commandments. The foundation of God's government is His law. This arrangement (the mercy seat above the law) reveals the nature of God Himself. He *is* both just and merciful. Yet, we meet His mercy at the seat of His government *before* we encounter His justice in the tables of stone. The blending of these two attributes is the most beautiful artifact in the universe.

Calvary was the unveiling of a preexisting reality. God is just and merciful at the same time (see Exodus 34:6, 7). At the cross, "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psalm 85:10). Although history has unveiled this truth, these two qualities of God's nature enjoyed their first public embrace in the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve first encountered God's forgiveness before encountering His justice.

The justice of God required that our first parents be banished from the Garden, while the blood of the Lamb, "slain from the foundation of the world," required that their forfeited lives be spared. Thus "mercy and truth" met in Eden. Their appearance was somewhat obscured, yet it was a real meeting. The ultimate "kiss" would wait another 4,000 years until the sacrifice on Calvary.

Pardon Precedes Confession

Forgiveness preceding repentance is shown throughout the Scriptures. From Old Testament to New Testament the sacred record is frequently punctuated with evidence of this truth. Adam and Eve were not destroyed, as they should have been. Instead, they were pardoned. The children of Israel—on the borders of the Canaan land, with stones in their hands ready to stone Joshua and Caleb—enjoyed the benefits of Moses’ intercession.

Moses earnestly pleaded on their behalf,

“The LORD *is* longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation*. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now” (Numbers 14:18, 19).

Can you imagine the Lord answering Moses, “Oh, no, my friend. I cannot pardon them until they repent!” The record is clear. God did not demand repentance first. The next words we read are, “And the LORD said, I have pardoned according to thy word” (Numbers 14:20).

Amazing, yet true! God pardoned the Israelites before they repented. The biblical evidence does not fit some of our popular theological theories. Many are well aware of 1 John 1:9, and it is the heart of their understanding of the

gospel. Thus, they cling to the Arminian principle: “God’s grace and forgiveness and shed blood is *only* provisional”—available only in the event one should take the steps required (believe, confess, and repent) to make it applicable to their individual case. However, when one stops to consider this concept, one realizes that this constitutes a man-centered view of the plan of redemption—and that is problematic.

The plan of redemption *should* be God-centered! Numerous times, we find the expression, “God our Saviour” in the Scriptures (see 1 Timothy 1:1, 1 Timothy 2:3, Titus 1:3, Titus 2:10, Titus 3:4, Jude 1:25). God in Christ has already taken the initiative in our salvation, and therefore, everything we do should be a grateful response to what He has *already* done. Anything less than this is legalism—mankind’s futile efforts to save self. We must come to the realization that we cannot save ourselves. Only then will we truly appreciate the fact that we have a Saviour, and of this, we can be certain, for He is the “Saviour of the world” (see John 4:42, 1 Timothy 4:10, 1 John 4:14).

Despite the hang-ups produced by a lack of clarity in understanding the gospel, frigid attitudes immediately begin to thaw when we are asked to consider our own interpersonal relationships. For example, if you are married, consider the question: Have you ever forgiven your spouse for an offense without their having to confess it and ask for your forgiveness? If you are not married, consider the question: Have you ever forgiven a sibling or a parent without their confession of the wrong and request for your forgiveness?

Surely, we have all had the experience of forgiving, without receiving a confession or a request for forgiveness. We forgive, because we love. Living in a fallen world with our fallen fellow human beings, we all occasionally need to receive and to give the gift of forgiveness. To truly love a sinner is impossible, without exercising forgiveness. Forgiveness is essential in a fallen world. We readily recognize this fact, but we need to realize that the same principle applies to God, and His love is much greater than ours. Therefore, His unrequested, unilateral, unconditional exercise of forgiveness is proportionally greater than ours. “Christ tells us that we must forgive the erring even seventy times seven, and how infinitely greater is the love of God than is our love.”¹

We have been forgiven so that we might be forgiving. We should learn to forgive as our Heavenly Father forgives. Through the recognition of His love and forgiveness our hard hearts should be softened and made receptive to the cleansing power of the Spirit of God. The first phase of forgiveness should lead us to seek the second phase. Perhaps a familiar Bible story can help us comprehend this important truth.

1. E. G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 19, 349.

Forgiveness Illustrated

She just knew that she was doomed. No doubt existed as to her guilt, when the scribes and Pharisee dragged her from her lover’s arms, hurried her through the streets to the temple, and thrust her into the audience of the Savior. Then they said to the Master, “This woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou” (John 8:4, 5)? This woman had no hope of reprieve. These hypocritical church leaders, hiding behind the force of the law, thought they had Jesus in a bind from which He could not escape. They knew He preached the gospel of peace. They seemed to know that He desired mercy and not sacrifice. Yet they despised and resisted this attribute of God’s nature. Thus, they brought this woman to Him, and they thought they had Him cornered. They thought they had devised a perfect stratagem and that neither He nor this woman could escape. With her head bowed in shame and despair, she waited for the stones to fall. She had not a flicker of hope.

This incident in the life of Christ provides a profound insight into the struggle going on behind the scenes. The casual observer sees a plot fomented by a few temple legalists to make life miserable for a weak and susceptible woman, but the real issues are much more profound. This apparently simple incident was in fact a significant chapter in the struggle between the Prince of Life and the prince of darkness. In this apparently simple but legalistic sparring match the most fundamental issues of the great controversy between Christ and Satan were being arbitrated. The enemy of souls had claimed that God could not be just and merciful at the same time. He had sought to set at variance the very elements of God’s nature. Thus, the accuser charged this woman with violating the law of both God and Moses. The question was a simple one to understand. Yet it posited a profound dilemma. Is it possible for Christ to uphold the law and at the same time save the sinner, the transgressor of the law?

Jesus apparently ignored the scribes and Pharisees. The Bible says that He stooped down and began writing in the sand, “as though He heard them not.” What a scene of grace! The accusers are demanding “justice”—demanding that this woman receive what she deserves, what the law demands, but Jesus begins writing in the sand as though He does not hear. He writes in the sand as though He does not care. He writes in the sand as though He does not understand. The accusers wait, and the woman also waits—breathless, nerveless, and hopeless.

In each of our experiences are times when we seek the Lord in prayer. We call upon Him to honor the promises recorded in the Word, and it seems that He ignores us as He stoops to write in the sand. It seems He is writing in the sands of time, as though He does not hear, but He hears.

It seems that He is writing in the sands of time, as though He does not care, but He cares. It seems sometimes that He is writing in the sand as though He does not understand, but He understands! “No one understands like Jesus.” These moments of divine silence, these moments of apparent neglect, these moments of celestial apathy—these are moments of mercy. Sometimes, no doubt, the accuser demands that we be destroyed according to the letter of the law, and heaven is mercifully silent, seemingly inattentive, apparently uninterested. Yet the purposes of grace are steadily being fulfilled.

The biblical narrative continues: “So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her” (John 8:7).

These words of Jesus came to this poor woman as a death sentence. If there had been any hope up to this point, all was surely banished now. Then Jesus stooped and continued to write in the sand. The scribes and Pharisees grew curious about the writing. They wondered why He seemed so unconcerned, so nonchalant, so preoccupied with His writing project. They pressed in close to read the writing, and when they had read it, being convicted in their hearts, they “went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, *even* unto the last” (John 8:9).

So when they were all gone, Jesus ceased writing and addressed the woman, saying, “Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee” (John 8:10)? Finally, this poor woman found the courage to raise her head and look around. She was amazed! They were all gone! Every one of her accusers had taken leave of the place. She responded to Jesus’ question in utter amazement and disbelief, “No man, Lord.” Then Jesus said to her, “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more” (John 8:11).

What deliverance! What a promise! What a Saviour! The part that troubles some about this story, if they ever stop to think it through, is that it clearly illustrates forgiveness preceding the “requisite” repentance and confession. In fact, the Bible provides no evidence of a confession. Yet it does provide evidence of justification. The woman was guilty. Of that, there is no doubt. The law condemned her. That is equally certain. Yet Jesus justified her. He lifted the condemnation flowing inevitably from the law and pointed her to the future, with the hopeful admonition, “Go, and sin no more” (John 8:11).

Can you imagine what she must have thought? Is it really possible? Can she really be not only pardoned but cleansed? Is it possible she can actually go and sin no more? Her heart seems to perceive the promise inherent in the Lord’s command. Surely, after having shown her such marvelous grace, He would not mock her with an impossible imperative. This

must be the announcement of a mind-boggling but very real possibility. She perceives it, and she wants it. She wants to be cleansed. She wants to go and sin no more.

The servant of the Lord describes what happened next:

The woman had stood before Jesus, cowering with fear. His words, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone,” had come to her as a death sentence. She dared not lift her eyes to the Saviour’s face, but silently awaited her doom. In astonishment she saw her accusers depart speechless and confounded; then those words of hope fell upon her ear, “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.” Her heart was melted, and, casting herself at the feet of Jesus, she sobbed out her grateful love *and with bitter tears confessed her sins*.²

Only after the woman had been assured that the condemnation had been lifted, did she fall at Jesus’ feet and, “with bitter tears confessed her sins.”³ In this beautiful illustration of how the process of redemption works, we see that the first phase of forgiveness led directly to a desire for the second phase. Pardon led to a desire for cleansing, and this sinner was cleansed. “This was to her the beginning of a new life, a life of purity and peace, devoted to God.”⁴ Some find it hard to believe, but the facts are there before us in plain language. The woman was pardoned *before* she confessed, and the pardon led to repentance, confession, and cleansing. Thus, we should understand that God’s charizomai (unconditional pardon) leads to aphiemi (cleansing).

2. E. G. White, *Ministry of Healing*, 89, emphasis supplied.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

Jesus Explains Forgiveness

Mary Magdalene grew up in Bethany. Evidently, all went as well as expected for her, until one day, something terrible happened. The Bible provides very little detail. So we do not know if it was rape or seduction, but we do know that someone violated her. That “someone” was her uncle Simon, the Pharisee.¹

As a result of this terrible experience, Mary was devastated. She lost all sense of self-respect and with it, all hope of ever amounting to anything. It appears that she may have run away from her home town and wound up in Magdala—a town several miles away. Thus, she became known as Mary Magdalene. Here, the Bible indicates that she became possessed of seven devils (Luke 8:2).

Seven is the number for completion,² and we gather from the description that Mary was a “basket case.” She was absolutely helpless and hopeless, until she happened to meet Jesus.

The Bible record concerning Mary Magdalene is sparse, and we are not given a lot of help putting the story together, but we do know that Jesus prayed for Mary. Now, one might be inclined to believe that Jesus prayed for her only once. We assume that was it. We are inclined to be-

1. See E. G. White, *Conflict and Courage*, p. 308

2. There were seven days of creation. In the book of Revelation there are seven churches, seven trumpets, seven spirits of God, seven angels, seven horsemen, seven last plagues. The seventh is always the last. It is the number indicating completion.

lieve that His prayer was so powerful, so effective, so able to reach the ear of God the Father, that Mary was completely cured in a moment, but not all agree with this assessment. The servant of the Lord gives us a different perspective.

Mary had been looked upon as a great sinner, but Christ knew the circumstances that had shaped her life. He might have extinguished every spark of hope in her soul, but He did not. It was He who had lifted her from despair and ruin. Seven times she had heard His rebuke of the demons that controlled her heart and mind. She had heard His strong cries to the Father in her behalf. She knew how offensive is sin to His unsullied purity, and in His strength she had overcome.³

Seven times, Jesus rebuked the demons that had controlled Mary's life. Seven times, she heard His prayers to the Father, and it made a difference, because Jesus did not pray the way we are accustomed to praying. The Bible says that He prayed with "strong crying and tears" (Hebrews 5:7).

Can you imagine the scenario? Mary runs away and becomes, in the euphemistic language of the Jews, a "sinner"—the common reference to a prostitute. However, she is no ordinary case, as bad as that would be. She becomes demon possessed. In other words, she loses control of her faculties. A demon controls and drives her to extraordinary depths of degradation. But one day, by and by, Jesus happens to come her way, and Jesus prays for Mary.

The demon is cast out, and Mary feels a sense of relief. It would appear that perhaps she is whole again. Hope revives in her young heart like the budding of flowers in the springtime, but by and by, she discovers that her problem is not entirely a thing of the past. Soon, Mary falls again. And with that fall, another demon takes up residence in her soul. And with that fall, she is forced to the realization that she is still a "sinner" in need of God's grace. It must have been devastating. Almost like the feelings of failure and despair which came over her when that awful event had first taken place so long ago. No fall hurts quite so much as the fall which occurs after one *thinks* he or she has been converted.

However, it happens again. Jesus comes her way, and He prays for Mary again. Perhaps, with strong crying and tears, she again hears His vehement cries to the Father on her behalf. Again, He rebukes the demon that possesses her. And again, a demon is cast out. Again, Mary feels a sense of peace. Again, she recovers a measure of hope. Yet, once again, she falls. Perhaps she returned to her old surroundings—to old and familiar company and to old familiar thoughts. We can only imagine the

3. E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 568.

details. Another demon takes up residence in her soul.

So once again, Jesus finds her, and He prays, and once again, she senses a measure of healing. We really do not know. The Scriptures are silent on the exact details. Perhaps it was like the prayers of Elijah on Mount Carmel, when his servant reported back to him seven times, "There is nothing" (1 Kings 18:43). Or perhaps it occurred like the experience of Naaman dipping in the dirty waters of the Jordan seven times before the miracle took place. We do not know if Jesus prayed for Mary seven times in one day, or if it was over a period of weeks or months, as she fell and recovered and fell again, but we do know that Jesus cast out seven demons, evidently one by one, before Mary was finally fully and permanently restored.

When that struggle with the demons of her past was finally over, Mary was so happy. Her long, dark, and desperate nightmare was finally over. She was completely healed, and she knew it, and she felt that she must somehow say, "Thank You," to Jesus. The question was—how? What could she do for the Master? She had no reputation, so she could not speak on His behalf. She had no position in society, no power, no influence, no ability to do anything for His cause—but she has heard Him speak of His death. All of the disciples had, but Mary also heard it, and the difference was that Mary believed. So she goes to the apothecary to get some special ointment to anoint His body before the burial.

Can you hear Mary negotiating with the shop-keeper?

"Is this the best that you have?"

"Well, no. I have this bottle. It's a little more expensive, but worth it."

"I'll take it," said Mary. "Now, is this the very best...that you have?"

"Well..." says the merchant. "I do have one more that's even better. It's the best that money can buy—very expensive!"

"That's what I need!" exclaims Mary.

"Oh no," replies the shop-keeper. "You don't want this one. It will cost you three hundred pence!" (That was the working wage of a man for an entire year.)

"That's it. I'll take it!" says Mary. And with that, she paid the price and departed for home.

By and by, she has a change of heart. "If I anoint His dead body, He will never know how grateful I am," thought Mary. "He will never know how much I appreciate His persistence and determination to deliver me from a living hell. I know what I'll do," thought Mary. "I will anoint Him *before* His death at a party or a feast. Then perhaps He will understand at least a little of how much I really do appreciate what He has done for me."

Meanwhile, Uncle Simon is having a problem. Can you imagine him waking in the middle of the night in a cold sweat? He has ruined a young lady's life. By day, he is all smiles, as he jokes with his fellow Pharisees, but

he is harboring a terrible secret that is slowly tearing him apart. Eventually, as is often the case, the stress imposed by his terrible guilt gets the better of him, and Simon becomes very ill. He has leprosy, and the worst part is that he feels that he is bearing the irrevocable curse of God. He believes it is very likely that *his* sin is unpardonable.

One day, however, it was also his good fortune to meet Jesus, and Jesus loved him just as He has loved every other sinner that He has ever met. Realizing his great need of forgiveness, Jesus extracts no promise from Simon. He demands no preconditions, no payment, and no contract. He just heals him and sends him home, as He has done with so many other hopeless lepers who have shared his plight. This was His tangible way of allowing Simon to sense the forgiveness of God.

So it was that evidently the day came when Simon decided that he *too* must say “Thank You” to Jesus. The Bible tells us that there was a feast at Simon’s house. Jesus and His disciples were invited. Christ was the guest of honor, and evidently, somehow, Mary heard about it. Surely, she was not on the guest list, but Mary “crashed” the party. “This is fantastic,” thought Mary. “Uncle Simon is having a feast in His honor. This is the perfect time to anoint Him with the precious ointment that I have purchased. Then He will have some idea of how much I really do appreciate His kindness.”

And so it was that Mary found herself kneeling before the feet of Jesus. Having anointed His head with “precious ointment,” she notices His unwashed feet. Simon has not performed the normal attentions which were customarily paid to any guest, much less a guest of honor. Looking upon Jesus’ unwashed feet, suddenly a fountain of tears bursts open, and Mary washed His feet with tears, showering them with her kisses. She had not planned for things to turn out quite this way. No mere mortal could have ever planned such a beautiful deed. She has no towel with which to dry His feet. So she lets down her long flowing hair and dries the Master’s feet with the locks of her head.

This was without doubt the most beautiful deed ever performed by a fallen member of the human family. Mary knew that she had been forgiven and healed, and she was eternally grateful. That much was evident, but there were some who would deny this truth. They seem to believe, “Once a sinner always a sinner.” They continued to look down upon Mary. Some were present who would even dare to criticize this most beautiful expression of gratitude. Luke describes what happened.

Jesus’ Parable of Forgiveness

And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that *Jesus* sat at the table in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind *Him*

weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped *them* with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed *them* with the fragrant oil. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw *this*, he spoke to himself, saying, “This man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman *this is* who is touching Him, for she is a sinner.” And Jesus answered and said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” So he said, “Teacher, say it.” “There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, Therefore, which of them will love him more?” Simon answered and said, “I suppose the *one* whom he forgave more.” And He said to him, “You have rightly judged.” Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped *them* with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore, I say to you, her sins, *which are* many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, *the same* loves little” (Luke 7:37–47, NKJV).

Please do not miss the powerful theology packed into Jesus’ words to Simon. He does not imply that the woman is forgiven *because* she loves. She loves *because* she is forgiven. Her love is the grateful response of a heart that appreciates that she has already been forgiven. The intensity of that love is proportional to the magnitude of the forgiveness that her heart has perceived. In other words, as long as we think that we have only been forgiven little, we are doomed forever to love but little. “We love Him because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19), and “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). He died in order to forgive our sins. Love and forgiveness are inextricably linked together in the gospel.⁴

A Story of Love and Forgiveness

The Bible is a love story. It begins with the marriage of our first parents, and when the story of redemption is finally complete, it will end with the “marriage supper of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:9).

Interestingly, the Spirit of Prophecy seems to capture this same dynamic. The story is told in the five volumes of the *Conflict of the Ages*

4. The expression “pardoning love” may be found on the E. G. White CD 133 times.

series. Have you ever noticed how the series opens and ends? The first three words of the first volume, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, read, “God is love.” Some 3,600 pages follow before the end of the series, and the last three words of the last chapter of the last volume read, “God is love.”

The conflict of the ages is the story of God’s love. It begins with God’s love expressed in the creation of a home for mankind. It continues with the devastation of that home by the ravages of sin—a manifestation of man’s failure to love God in return. It will finally conclude with the restoration of that home *after* the restoration of the love relationship between God and His special creation, mankind.

So in essence, God’s side of the story could be told in the words, “I loved you. I lost you, and I’m going to move heaven and earth to get you back.”

Jesus alluded to this aspect of the intended relation between God and mankind, when He said, “Therefore, I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little” (Luke 7:47, NKJV). God’s love and forgiveness are the essence of the gospel. One cannot love a sinner without exercising forgiveness.

In recording this parable of forgiveness, the Bible writer used a specific word for “forgiveness.” We love God because of His unilateral, unconditional forgiveness, which is expressed by the term *charizomai*. In this parable concerning two debtors we see the intended effect of God’s forgiveness, “To whom little is forgiven the same loves but little.” When we understand and appreciate the *charizomai* of God, our lives will be transformed by His *aphiemi*.

Why Christians Confess Sins

Now that we have seen that, indeed, our sins have already been pardoned, the question is: What motivates genuine confession and repentance? Is more involved than our need to experience restoration from the ruin that sin has caused? We opened this discussion in Part One. Now we need some concrete answers.

If we believe the gospel, we know that forgiveness did not come without great expense. God could not legally forgive us for even one sin, apart from the shed blood of His dear Son. Thus, *every sin* was directly implicated at Calvary.

More than that, Jesus continues to intercede in the heavenly sanctuary on our behalf, because of our sins. Pause and consider how He must feel. Consider what Satan must say. Can you imagine the conversation? Every time we sin, the adversary is there to “rub it in.” “Look at them,” he says, “You gave up heaven for them. They must really appreciate it.” Can you hear the sarcasm? “Just look at how they behave. You stooped to take their nature and live as a man among men and die in their place. Now, just look at them. You were willing to die forever, that they might be saved. Yet they continue to sin. I told you they weren’t worth it.”

No, we do not know the exact words that are used. We can only imagine how the conversation goes, but we do know that the Bible says that Satan accuses us before God “day and night” (Revelation 12:10).

How does Jesus feel every time we sin? Do you suppose He is embarrassed,

not only before Satan, but before the heavenly angels? He said, “Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed” (Luke 9:26). Yes, He is at times embarrassed, not only before the heavenly hosts but before all the unfallen worlds. Hebrews says, “We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Hebrews 4:15). Do you suppose He is hurt? Do you suppose His experience is like being crucified afresh?

“What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear.” His love is incomprehensible. His grace is indeed amazing. He did not deserve the cross, and He certainly does not deserve to ever be hurt again. So when we sin, if we truly understand the gospel, we should go on our knees and ask for forgiveness. We do not ask because of some self-centered motivation, but we *do* ask, because we are genuinely sorry for hurting the One who loves us most. Genuine sorrow can only be realized through an understanding that the condemnation has been removed at the cross, and thus we are free to serve the Lord instead of self interest. “If we confess our sins,” we give evidence that we believe the gospel and we have the assurance, that we shall be cleansed of “all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

In light of the fact that Jesus has already forgiven us, He does not need to die for our sins every time we ask for forgiveness. In His death He pardoned all of our sins. Since He has already pardoned our sins, and yet sin remains in our hearts, two issues remain to be addressed. By continued sin, we are hurting Him and giving a poor witness to the world. Therefore, we confess so that He can remove sin from our hearts. We confess so that God can cleanse us. Yet this is not a self-centered desire. We confess so that His righteousness can be imputed and imparted in our hearts and we can give an effective witness to the world.

More than that, the important issue in our cleansing is the vindication of God—and not merely our own salvation. True, we must have both the “title to heaven,” as well as a “fitness for heaven.” Yet our desire for the fitness for heaven is not born of selfishness. Our fitness is needed—yes, even required—in order to answer the charges of the enemy against the government of God. These charges are perhaps best seen and understood through a study of the story of Job. In the book of Job, Satan’s argument was that all mankind had chosen him as their leader, and he implies that none were loyal to God. Therefore, God responded by asking, in essence, “What about Job?” Even though the majority of those on earth may have by their lives denied God, there was one whose life and character showed perfect loyalty to God in the midst of a world of corruption. Satan responded by suggesting that Job was merely serving self (see Job 1:9, 10, 2:4), just like all the rest. However, in the unfolding of the story, Satan was proven wrong by the life that Job lived in spite of all his afflictions.

These same charges against the government of God will be the issue in the last days. “Nobody really serves God. They have all chosen Satan as their leader.” God was proven right in the case of Job. Nevertheless, it must be conceded that Job was just one man. However, at some point, God will have to be able to say, “Here is the patience of the saints. Here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12). At that time, the “saints” will be a representative group from “every nation and kindred and tongue and people” (Revelation 14:6). That group will be sufficient to settle the issue for all eternity. “When the Son of man cometh, will He find [the] faith on the earth” (Luke 18:8)? Will there be a representative group of people who have an unshakable faith? The watching universe will not be able to look inside the hearts of the final generation to examine their faith. Only God can do that. How will the watching inhabitants of the universe be able to see the evidence (faith is the “evidence”—Hebrews 11:1)? James explained how faith is revealed. “I will show you my faith by my works” (James 2:18).

This is why Christians need cleansing. Our desire for cleansing is not a manifestation of a self-centered desire for something that is necessary in order to save our own skins. We understand that the condemnation has been lifted, and we will have another concern upon our hearts. The evidence that will settle the questions of the great controversy must be revealed in our lives. This will demonstrate the power of the gospel, vindicate the character of God, and allow Him to finally bring the great controversy to an end. If our hearts are in any degree still plagued with self-concern, we cannot have the victory. Without victory, God will not be vindicated. Yet the Holy Spirit will not minister a victory over sin which is sought in contradiction of the most fundamental principle of the gospel—salvation by grace through faith. Thus, self-concern must die, and it can only die when it is buried in the love of God (see 1 John 4:18).

The final generation will understand these issues clearly. Thus, although pardon precedes repentance and confession, nevertheless, true believers repent and confess their sins. We find that there are two important reasons for confession, and neither is rooted in a self-centered desire for salvation. We confess, when we understand that our sins hurt the One who loves us most, and we also desire cleansing, because it is necessary to God’s final victory in the great controversy.

What Does the
Spirit of Prophecy
Say?

Does Ellen White Agree?

As has been demonstrated in Parts One and Two, an accurate understanding of the unpardonable sin is essential to an accurate understanding of the gospel. In Part Three we shall explore the definition of the “unpardonable sin” in the writings of Ellen G. White.

In this portion of our study, it is *not* our objective to make the Spirit of Prophecy the source of doctrines or beliefs. To do so would be to contradict the Spirit of Prophecy itself, which says, “The Bible is the only rule of faith and doctrine.”¹ Ellen White would not approve of us using her writings to determine what is truth. She said her writings are a lesser light intended to lead men to the greater light, which is the Word of God. She frequently referred our pioneers to the Bible when doctrinal questions were in dispute.

In harmony with the instructions given in the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, we have first searched the Scriptures and sought to understand its teaching on this subject, and then drawn our conclusions. Now, we shall test our understanding of the Bible evidence by reviewing the Spirit of Prophecy writings on the same subject. In order to define the unpardonable sin correctly, it is our conviction that the concept must be defined in the light of the gospel. After all, it is the gospel that points out the way of salvation. Those who commit the unpardonable sin cannot be

¹ E. G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, 126.

saved. Thus, it is logical that the relationship between the unpardonable sin and the gospel must be clearly understood. Therefore, it is necessary that gospel concepts are again explored, in an attempt to discover the definition of the unpardonable sin in the Spirit of Prophecy.

If it can be shown that our interpretations of the Bible evidence are also presented in the Spirit of Prophecy, we shall have more confidence that our biblical exegesis is sound and our conclusions are correct. However, if it can be shown that any of these interpretations contradict the explicit teachings of the Spirit of Prophecy, those concepts must be abandoned, since one inspired reference will not contradict another.

We do not attempt a comprehensive overview of all that the Spirit of Prophecy has said about every verse of Scripture that has been used to present the subject.

There are many verses of Scripture for which there are literally hundreds of references in the writings of Ellen White. An exhaustive treatise would be a formidable undertaking. Therefore, the scope of this work is necessarily limited to determining if the Spirit of Prophecy supports the concepts which have been discovered in the Bible. Silence of the Spirit of Prophecy on any text used or any concept presented shall not be deemed condemnation of the position taken or an argument for its legitimacy. It may be best viewed as a call to further study.

The Unpardonable Sin in a “Nutshell”

In Part One we saw that the Bible teaches us that “Christ died for our sins” (1 Corinthians 15:3). The cross of Christ is the heart of the gospel. However, at the same time, the Bible seems to teach that the unbeliever will die for his/her own sins. For example: “The soul that sinneth it shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4). If both of these texts are speaking of the same “sin,” we have a special case of “double jeopardy.” The same sin is penalized twice. Christ paid the penalty, and the sinner pays the penalty. The penalty was paid at the cross, and it is paid again in the lake of fire. However, if we take the position that Christ died for all sins except for one (the unpardonable sin), the dilemma is resolved. Those who commit that sin will be lost. They will suffer the “second death,” because they have committed the one sin for which Jesus did not die. Thus, when the plan of salvation is clearly understood, there is no “double jeopardy,” and God is seen to be just and fair. He can mercifully punish the sins of the world “in Christ,” yet justly punish the unbeliever.

Having searched the Scriptures for the definition of the unpardonable sin, the question remains: Do we find support for such a concept in the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy?

E. G. White on the “In Christ” Motif

Christ was a corporate man. The entire human race was “in Christ.”

But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:30, 31).

As was seen in chapter 2, the “in Christ” motif holds major implications for the definition of the unpardonable sin. Now our objective is to determine if the “in Christ” motif is presented by the Spirit of Prophecy.

Note the following:

By His obedience to all the commandments of God, Christ wrought out a redemption for man. This was not done by going out of Himself to another, but by taking humanity *into Himself*. Thus Christ gave to humanity an existence out of Himself. To bring humanity *into Christ*, to bring the fallen race into oneness with divinity, is the work of redemption. Christ took human nature that men might be one with Him as He is one with the Father; that God may love man as He loves His only-begotten Son, that men may be partakers of the divine nature, and be complete *in Him*.²

This statement regarding the “in Christ” motif is significant and comprehensive. It comprehends and expresses both phases of the “in Christ” concept. First, it makes reference to the first phase of the concept, when it speaks of Christ taking “humanity into Himself.” This reference is to Christ taking the entire human race into Himself. Thus, Christ became the representative of the human race, in order to die for every human soul.

The statement then shifts to the second phase of the “in Christ” idea, by referring to the possibility of our becoming “one with Him.” In the second phase of the “in Christ” idea, we become “partakers of the divine nature.” This second aspect of the “in Christ” motif only applies to the believer.

The “in Christ” concept is presented again in *The Desire of Ages*:

Ever since Adam’s sin, the human race had been cut off from direct communion with God; the intercourse between heaven and earth had been through Christ; but now that Jesus had come “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Romans 8:3), the Father Himself spoke. He had before communicated with humanity through Christ; now He communicated with humanity *in Christ*. Satan had hoped that God’s abhorrence of evil would bring an eternal separation between

2. *S.D.A Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, 927, emphasis supplied.

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Arminianism

heaven and earth. But now it was manifest that the connection between God and man had been restored.³

The concept is presented again in *Christ's Object Lessons*:

Christ, the heavenly merchantman seeking goodly pearls, saw in lost humanity the pearl of price. In man, defiled and ruined by sin, He saw the possibilities of redemption. Hearts that have been the battleground of the conflict with Satan, and that have been rescued by the power of love, are more precious to the Redeemer than are those who have never fallen. God looked upon humanity, not as vile and worthless; He looked upon it *in Christ*, saw it as it might become through redeeming love. He collected all the riches of the universe, and laid them down in order to buy the pearl.⁴

We find two additional explicit Spirit of Prophecy references to the “in Christ” motif: “Blessed is the soul who can say...I am lost in Adam, but restored *in Christ*.”⁵

“In ourselves we are sinners; but *in Christ* we are righteous.”⁶

Clearly, Ellen White did articulate the “in Christ” motif. She saw redemption as an event which took place “in Christ.” In order to redeem mankind, Christ took “humanity into Himself.” His doing so was essential to the plan of salvation. If we were not there “in Him,” His death would mean nothing to us.

Taking humanity into Himself in order to redeem humanity is one of the primary purposes of the incarnation. For this reason, Ellen White wrote, “The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us.”⁷ By taking our humanity, He became our representative and our substitute. Without this vital connection to the corporate humanity that needed redeeming, His earthly life and sacrificial death would have availed nothing.

Now God sees us—but not as we are, with all of our weakness and failures. He already sees us as we may become, “in Christ.” The entire human race, from Adam to the last soul who shall be born, are “in Christ,” in the fundamental sense of being represented by Him at Calvary, but those who believe in Him are especially in Him. So we see there are two aspects of this concept.

In the next two chapters we shall consider the concept of Arminianism, in the light of the Spirit of Prophecy. We shall recognize that Arminianism’s failure to comprehend the two phases of the “in Christ” idea cripples its understanding of the gospel.

3. E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 116, emphasis supplied.

4. E. G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 118.

5. E. G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, 120, emphasis supplied.

6. E. G. White, *God's Amazing Grace*, 181, emphasis supplied.

7. E. G. White, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, 904.

Since Christ was and still remains a corporate personality, and all of humanity was taken into Him, when He died, we “all died” “in Him.” This thought, Paul presented to the Corinthian believers: “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died” (2 Corinthians 5:14, NKJV).

All of humanity was there “in Christ,” when He suffered and died—He was the Representative and Substitute for all mankind. Therefore, His death is counted as the death of all humanity. He could die *for all*, *because* all were represented “in Him.” The Spirit of Prophecy clearly presents this concept. “Christ would have us realize that our interests are one. A divine Saviour *died for all*, that all might find *in Him* their divine source. *In Christ* Jesus we are one.”¹

This quotation brings together two important concepts—that Christ died for all, and the “in Christ” idea. By linking them together, it lends support to the thought that by virtue of the fact that all were “in Christ,” He could and did die for all. All are indebted to Christ. This reality rules out Calvinist theories of limited atonement and double predestination. However, we shall soon see that the Spirit of Prophecy, which recognizes the full implications of the “in Christ” idea, also transcends Arminianism.

1. E. G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, 288, emphasis supplied.

Arminianism: A Working Definition

Traditionally, most Seventh-day Adventists have considered themselves to be Arminians. In fact, if one peruses the description of the term *Adventist*, in the online *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the following entry may be found:

Seventh-day Adventists share many basic beliefs held by most Christians. They accept the authority of the Old and New Testaments. They are Arminian (emphasizing human choice and God's election) rather than Calvinist (emphasizing God's sovereignty) in their interpretation of Christ's atonement, and they argue that his death was "provisionally and potentially for all men," yet efficacious only for those who avail themselves of its benefits.²

A recent *Adventist Review* "Newsbreak" carried an article regarding the republication of the book *Questions on Doctrine*, which included the following statement:

QOD [*Questions on Doctrine*] did not depart from defending Adventism's more distinctive doctrines, including the seventh-day Sabbath, the state of the dead, and the present ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. Also defended was the Wesleyan-Arminian theology held by Methodists, Nazarenes, and others as well as by Adventists, in contrast to the Calvinism supported by Barnhouse.³

Historical, as well as contemporary mainstream Seventh-day Adventist doctrine follows Arminian theology. What is Arminianism?

The creed of the Arminians was set forth in the Five Articles of the Remonstrance addressed in 1610 to the State-General of Holland and West Friesland, from which fact its adherents received the name of Remonstrants.⁴

At this point it may be helpful to review the Articles of Arminianism presented in chapter 3. Articles one and two are of interest:

God has decreed to save through Jesus Christ those of the fallen and sinful race who through the grace of the Holy Spirit believe in him, but leaves in sin the incorrigible and unbelieving.

Christ died for all men (not just for the elect), but no one except

the believer has remission of sin.⁵

As we consider these "official" statements of Arminianism, the question is: Does the Spirit of Prophecy present a view of the gospel which transcends Arminianism, as it is summarized in the statements cited above? We shall focus especially on articles number one and two.

1) "God decreed to save...those...who...believe."

2) "No one except the believer has remission of sin."

The Spirit of Prophecy Transcends Arminianism

As was noted in chapter 3, there are three major schools of thought on the atonement: the Calvinist, the Arminian, and the Universalist. Neither the Calvinist nor the Universalist schools of thought result in the "double jeopardy" dilemma. However, their solutions to the problem are clearly unacceptable. While Arminianism avoids some of the weakness of the other two perspectives, it is the *one* perspective which embraces "double jeopardy" and ultimately presents a view of the gospel which fails to produce assurance of salvation for the believer. Perhaps more significantly, Arminianism also fails to vindicate the justice of God. If God's plan of salvation ultimately concludes in "double jeopardy," God's justice will be compromised. Such a plan cannot result in a successful denouement of the great controversy.

Our conviction is that the gospel of the Bible is neither Calvinist nor Arminian. In Romans, Paul presents a view of the gospel which embraces the truths of both systems, while rejecting the errors. "Therefore, as by the offence of one *judgment came* upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one *the free gift came* upon all men unto justification of life" (Romans 5:18).

This verse of Scripture transcends Calvinism, by including "all men." Calvinism restricts the "gift" to the elect. Romans 5:18 also transcends Arminianism by declaring that "all" have been "justified." Does the Spirit of Prophecy present a view of the atonement, which is in harmony with our interpretations of Romans 5:18 and which also transcends both Calvinism and Arminianism?

Did God "decree" that Christ should "save" *only* the believers?

Christ was tempted by Satan in a hundredfold severer manner than was Adam, and under circumstances in every way more trying. The deceiver presented himself as an angel of light, but Christ withstood his temptations. He redeemed Adam's disgraceful fall,

5. Lewis Loflin, "Arminianism, an Overview." http://www.sullivan-county.com/id2/cal_arm.htm.

2. "Adventist," *Encyclopedia Britannica* 2004. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/print?tocId=9003814&fullArticle=true>.

3. <http://www.adventistreview.org/2004-1502/news.html>.

4. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, 53.

and *saved the world*.⁶

He took in His grasp the world over which Satan claimed to preside as his lawful territory, and by His wonderful work in giving His life, *He restored the whole race of men to favor with God*.⁷

Jesus knows the circumstances of every soul. The greater the sinner's guilt, the more he needs the Saviour. His heart of divine love and sympathy is drawn out most of all for the one who is the most hopelessly entangled in the snares of the enemy. With His own blood *He has signed the emancipation papers of the race*.⁸

A ransom has been provided at infinite cost, and it is not because there is any flaw in *the title which has been purchased for lost souls* that they do not accept it. It is not because the mercy, the grace, the love of the Father and the Son are not ample, and have not been freely bestowed, that they do not rejoice in pardoning love, but it is because of their unbelief, because of their choice of the world, that they are not comforted with the grace of God.⁹

For every human being, Christ has paid the election price. No one need be lost. *All have been redeemed*.¹⁰

The Spirit of Prophecy teaches that Christ has “saved the world,” not just the believers, as argued by Arminianism. In the writings of Ellen White we find many strong affirmations of this truth. She says that Christ “saved the world.” He “restored the whole race...to favor with God.” “He has signed the emancipation papers of the race.” He “purchased” a “title” for “lost souls,” including those who “do not accept it.” “All have been redeemed.” That means everyone has already been redeemed from the curse of the law. Were it not for this aspect of redemption, we would not have seen the light of day. The day that Adam sinned, he would have died, and we would have died with him. However, Christ stepped in and saved the entire race from the premature annihilation which it deserved. Clearly, the teachings of the Spirit of Prophecy transcend Arminianism.

Note that most of these expressions are legal expressions. The terms *redeemed*, *title*, and *emancipation* are all legal terms. Thus, we conclude that there was a legal aspect of salvation accomplished for every-

6. E. G. White, *Youth Instructor*, June 2, 1898, emphasis supplied.

7. E. G. White, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7A, 485, emphasis supplied.

8. E. G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, 89, emphasis supplied.

9. E. G. White, *Signs of the Times*, June 6, 1895, emphasis supplied.

10. E. G. White, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, 944, emphasis supplied.

one, believer and unbeliever alike, at the cross. This idea transcends the conditional or “provisional and potential” concepts of salvation which dominate the Arminian perspective of the gospel. In the quotations cited above we see explicitly presented the idea that everyone has *already* been “saved.” The problem is that some will not believe in salvation. The unbeliever needs to appreciate that God has already saved him/her from the penalty of his/her sins.

The expression *legal justification* is used by some to refer to what we have called “corporate universal justification.” By this terminology, we attempt to communicate more clearly the same corporate dimension of the plan of salvation. It must be freely acknowledged that the expression *corporate universal justification* does not appear in the Bible. However, the terms *millennium*, *state of the dead*, and *remnant church* do not appear in the Bible, either. These are terms which Adventists and other Christians have coined in order to more easily refer to concepts which are presented in the Bible. Likewise, we have used the expression *corporate universal justification* to refer to a biblical concept and to distinguish it from the Bible concept of *justification by faith*. Ellen White also taught this distinction, although she used different terms to express it.

The Reason There Is Life

Were it not for corporate justification via the “Lamb” that was “slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8), none of us would be alive. The basis of this assertion is our understanding of the penalty for disobedience, which was clearly expressed to Adam. “The day you eat of it you will surely die” (Genesis 2:17, NKJV). This truth has been obscured by the teaching that Adam *did* die that day. He died spiritually, or so the idea goes. However, Adam should have died body, soul, and spirit, on the day he ate of the forbidden fruit. Thus, the penalty was *not* executed. Adam did not die. The Spirit of Prophecy presents the same idea.

Adam listened to the words of the tempter, and yielding to his insinuations, fell into sin. *Why was not the death penalty at once enforced in his case?—Because a ransom was found.* God's only begotten Son volunteered to take the sin of man upon Himself, and to make an atonement for the fallen race. There could have been no pardon for sin had this atonement not been made.¹¹

That the thought could be expressed any more clearly is doubtful. The “penalty” was not “at once enforced.” Adam continued to live, only because of Christ, who immediately became his and our Saviour. Please

11. E. G. White, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, 1082, emphasis supplied.

note that this quotation addresses the penalty for sin, not the consequences, which affected Adam during and at the end of his 930 years. Further note that the *implication* of this statement is that Adam received an immediate “pardon.” The Spirit of Prophecy uses the term *pardon* in different ways, as does the Bible. The reference cited above is a reference to the first phase of pardon. Throughout this work, we use the term *pardon* to refer to the first phase of pardon, and we cite Spirit of Prophecy references which refer to that phase.

The world has been committed to Christ, and through Him has come every blessing from God to the fallen race. *He was the Redeemer before as after His incarnation. As soon as there was sin, there was a Saviour.* He has given light and life to all, and according to the measure of light given, each is to be judged.¹²

Notice that “every blessing,” that everyone born on this planet has ever experienced, has come through Christ our “Saviour.” The believer, as well as the unbeliever, has been redeemed and saved¹³ and blessed, through Christ. Most never come to accept this fact or appreciate and receive *all* that was included in it.

As soon as there was sin, there was a Saviour. Christ knew that He would have to suffer, yet He became man’s substitute. As soon as Adam sinned, the Son of God presented Himself as surety for the human race, with just as much power to avert the doom pronounced upon the guilty as when He died upon the cross of Calvary.¹⁴

Our Lord has said, “Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you.... For My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.” John 6:53–55. This is true of our physical nature. *To the death of Christ we owe even this earthly life.* The bread we eat is the purchase of His broken body. The water we drink is bought by His spilled blood. *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.¹⁵

From these statements and other similar expressions, we understand that the Spirit of Prophecy does teach a corporate aspect of salvation.¹⁶

12. E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 210.

13. That is, they have been “saved” from the penalty of immediate death which we should have experienced in Adam.

14. E. G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, 75, emphasis supplied.

15. E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 660, emphasis supplied.

16. The corporate aspect of salvation has also been referred to as “objective salvation.”

The Spirit of Prophecy clearly teaches that everyone who has ever lived on earth did so only because of the corporate aspect of salvation which Christ unconditionally accomplished for the whole “world.” The death “penalty” was “not enforced.” The day Adam sinned—yes, even that “instant”—he should have died, and we should have died in him.¹⁷ We all should have been dead before sunset. However, at that instant, Christ stepped in and saved every human soul from the annihilation which we justly deserved in Adam. This truth is fundamental to the gospel, whether we ever come to believe and accept the fact or not.

17. “The moment the workmanship of God refused obedience to the laws of God’s kingdom, that moment he became disloyal to the government of God and he made himself entirely unworthy of all the blessings wherewith God had favored him.

“This was the position of the human race after man divorced himself from God by transgression. Then he was no longer entitled to a breath of air, a ray of sunshine, or a particle of food. And the reason why man was not annihilated was because God so loved him that He made the gift of His dear Son that He should suffer the penalty of his transgression” E. G. White, *Faith and Works*, 21.

The Significance of Corporate Salvation

A correct understanding of what happened when Adam sinned is of more than academic interest. Because of the Arminian theory, the common emphasis—in fact, the overwhelming emphasis—of many is placed on what man must do in order to get God to do something (i.e., grant pardon or forgiveness). As a result of this misplaced emphasis, what is commonly understood as “faith” is actually a mere self-centered grasping for personal security. This idea is not what the Spirit of Prophecy presents as “faith,” or believing in Jesus. The Spirit of Prophecy says: “You may say that you believe in Jesus, when you have an appreciation of the cost of salvation.”¹

Faith includes trusting in God’s pardon, forgiveness, and the gift of eternal life, but faith is more than “trust.” The Spirit of Prophecy says, “You may say that you believe...when you have an appreciation of the cost.” Therefore, authentic faith must include *appreciating* the *cost* of the forgiveness. We need to comprehend and appreciate what God has already done in order to forgive our sin. If we do not understand that Jesus died that we might have both “life” and “immortality” (2 Timothy 1:9, 10), then we tend to think salvation depends primarily upon man’s initiative. If this is our perspective, we have not yet apprehended genuine faith. Genuine faith is not “self seeking”—not even if what we are “seeking”

1. E. G. White, *Review and Herald*, July 7, 1888.

is eternal life. Our motive for desiring eternal life should mature into a desire to see Christ receive *His* reward and God glorified. Our desire is not motivated by a fear of punishment, nor is it motivated by the hope of personal reward. Some Bible characters, who apprehended authentic faith, were even willing to be lost, if that should be required to vindicate God's name (see Moses, in Exodus 32:32, and Paul, in Romans 9:3).

It is not the fear of punishment, or the hope of everlasting reward, that leads the disciples of Christ to follow Him. They behold the Saviour's matchless love, revealed throughout His pilgrimage on earth, from the manger of Bethlehem to Calvary's cross, and the sight of Him attracts, it softens and subdues the soul. Love awakens in the heart of the beholders. They hear His voice, and they follow Him.²

After presenting the goodness of God toward Israel, Joshua called upon the people, in the name of Jehovah, to choose whom they would serve. . . . Joshua desired to lead them to serve God, not by compulsion, but willingly. Love to God is the very foundation of religion. To engage in His service merely from the hope of reward or the fear of punishment would avail nothing. Open apostasy would not be more offensive to God than hypocrisy and mere formal worship.³

True faith must include appreciating the great goodness of God to all mankind, both to "the just and the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). It involves understanding that God's agape *always* takes the initiative in the process of salvation, even on behalf of those who will never believe and be eternally saved. In other words, mature faith is Christ-centered, not self-centered. This vital understanding is difficult to see and grasp if we take the position that "God has decreed to save through Jesus Christ those of the fallen and sinful race who through the grace of the Holy Spirit believe in Him, but leaves in sin the incorrigible and unbelieving" (First Article of Arminianism).

Both the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy teach that God sent Jesus to save *all* mankind, whether they would accept the gift of salvation or not (see John 3:16, 17, John 4:42, John 12:47, 1 Timothy 4:10, 1 John 4:14). All have been redeemed from the penalty of their sin—the curse of the law (see Galatians 3:13). All have been justified unto probationary life (see Romans 5:18). Yet only the believers will be eternally saved (see 1 John 5:11, 12). Thus, an accurate understanding of the plan of salva-

2. E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 480.

3. E. G. White, *Manuscript 135*, 1899 (*Youth's Instructor*, June 13, 1901; June 20, 1901).

tion produces genuine faith. The Arminian concept tends to produce a counterfeit faith, which is very difficult to distinguish from the true and, therefore, all the more dangerous. This is what makes the Laodicean condition so difficult to cure.

Forgiveness in the Spirit of Prophecy

What is the meaning and significance of corporate justification? It means that the sins of the world have been pardoned. We have already seen that the Spirit of Prophecy does transcend Arminianism with respect to the scope of salvation. Article number one of our summary of Arminianism says, "God decreed...to save...those who believe." The Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy teach that God has decreed and accomplished the salvation of every human soul. The whole world has been redeemed from the curse. Can we equate this aspect of salvation with the forgiveness of sins? Were we all, in a sense, "born forgiven?" If this can be shown, we shall conclude that the gospel presented in the Spirit of Prophecy also transcends Article No. 2 of Arminianism.

In the inspired writings we find the following important statements regarding forgiveness:

But forgiveness has a broader meaning than many suppose. When God gives the promise that He "will abundantly pardon," He adds, as if the meaning of that promise exceeded all that we could comprehend: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." Isaiah 55:7-9. 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. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart. David had the true conception of forgiveness when he prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." Psalm 51:10. And again he says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us" Psalm 103:12.⁴

Mere forgiveness of sin is not the sole result of the death of Jesus. He made the infinite sacrifice not only that sin might be removed, but that human nature might be restored, rebeautified, reconstructed from its ruins, and made fit for the presence of God.⁵

In these two quotations we see that the Spirit of Prophecy teaches two distinct aspects of forgiveness. These aspects are also referred to as two

4. E. G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, 114.

5. E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk 3, 154.

phases of justification—“corporate universal justification” and “justification by faith.” Ellen White does not use all of these expressions. Yet we see her struggling to convey the same thought. We keenly sense her difficulty, when she uses the term *forgiveness* to define “forgiveness.” She wrote, “God’s forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which He sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness...” In short, she said, “forgiveness...is not only forgiveness...” Although with this observation, we sense her struggle to express the concept without the convenient theological terms (*corporate justification* and *justification by faith*), the concept nevertheless comes through!

The first Spirit of Prophecy statement regarding forgiveness cited above says, “God’s forgiveness is not merely a judicial act.” The second statement says, “Mere forgiveness of sin is not the sole result of the death of Jesus.”⁶ In these two statements she does *not* deny that forgiveness is a “judicial act” which took place at “the death of Jesus.” It *is* a “judicial act,” but the point she wants to make is that it is not *only* (merely) that. More is included in the concept. A second aspect to God’s forgiveness exists. For it *is* a judicial pardon, but it is also “reclaiming from sin”—cleansing from the defilement caused by sin. It includes the removal of sin from the heart. The expression *judicial act* corresponds to *corporate universal justification*. That portion of the process called “forgiveness” has been accomplished for the whole world. In one sense, we were born forgiven. When Christ “restored the whole race of men to favor with God,” He placed the blanket of corporate universal justification (i.e., judicial pardon) over the entire world.

This idea is also alluded to in another quotation, which was cited in chapter 17:

It is not because the mercy, the grace, the love of the Father and the Son are not ample, and have not been freely bestowed, that they do not rejoice in pardoning love, but it is because of their unbelief, because of their choice of the world, that they are not comforted with the grace of God.⁷

Notice that the whole world should be rejoicing “in pardoning love.” Why? Because our sins have been “pardoned,” or, in other words, forgiven, as a “result of the death of Jesus.”⁸ The only reason some do not rejoice is “because of their unbelief.”⁹ In order to rejoice in the truth, one must first believe the truth.

6. Ibid.
7. E. G. White, *Signs of the Times*, June 6, 1995.
8. E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk 3, 154.
9. E. G. White, *Signs of the Times*, June 6, 1995.

Several more statements convey the thought of a pardon for the whole world.

To every nation, kindred, tongue, and people the tidings of pardon through Christ are to be carried. Not with tame, lifeless utterances is the message to be given, but with clear, decided, stirring utterances.¹⁰

The Lord saw us in a sad condition, and sent to our world the only messenger that He could trust with His great treasure of pardon and grace. Christ, the only begotten Son of God, was the delegated Messenger.¹¹

As God made Christ His messenger to the world, Christ has made all who claim Him as their Redeemer, to represent Christ in mercy, forgiveness, and pardon, to the world.¹²

In the preceding quotation Ellen White uses two related but distinct terms—*forgiveness* and *pardon*. These terms are not redundant. She is referring to the two distinct aspects of forgiveness.

Justification By Faith: The Second Phase

While it is clear that Ellen White sees a judicial pardon that has been extended to the whole world, she also sees and takes pains to emphasize the second phase of forgiveness (this correlates with the second phase of salvation), also referred to as “justification by faith.” This phase of salvation includes deliverance from the power of sin and is applicable *only* to the believer. Ellen White also presents this concept in many passages, such as the following:

There are backslidden church-members and backslidden ministers who need re-converting, who need the softening, subduing influence of the baptism of the Spirit, that they may rise in newness of life and make thorough work for eternity. I have seen the irreligion and the self-sufficiency cherished, and I have heard the words spoken, “Except ye repent and be converted, ye shall never see the kingdom of heaven.” There are many who will need re-baptizing, but let them never go down into the water until they are dead to sin, cured of selfishness and self-exaltation until they can come up out of the water to live a new life unto God. *Faith and repentance are conditions, essential to the forgiveness of sin.*¹³

10. E. G. White, *Christian Service*, 23.
11. E. G. White, *Review and Herald*, February 15, 1898.
12. E. G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 16, 193.
13. E. G. White, *Bible Training School*, April 1, 1906.

Here, Ellen Whites clearly states that “faith and repentance are conditions, *essential* to the forgiveness of sins.” A superficial reading of this statement would lead one to conclude that sin is in no sense “forgiven” until “faith and repentance” are manifest. However, if we read that statement in context, it is clear that the servant of the Lord is not speaking of the *judicial* aspect of forgiveness. She is speaking of rising in “newness of life” and being “cured of selfishness.” This is the second phase of forgiveness. It involves cleansing sin from the heart. This is what is involved in “justification by faith.” Again, she wrote: “Faith is the only condition upon which justification can be obtained, and faith includes not only belief but trust.”¹⁴ In this statement the servant of the Lord is referring to “justification by faith.” The passage continues,

Many have a nominal faith in Christ, but they know nothing of that vital dependence upon Him which appropriates the merits of a crucified and risen Saviour. Of this nominal faith James says: “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?” (James 2:19, 20). Many concede that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world, but at the same time they hold themselves away from Him, and fail to repent of their sins, fail to accept of Jesus as their personal Saviour. Their faith is simply the assent of the mind and judgment to the truth; but *the truth is not brought into the heart, that it might sanctify the soul and transform the character.*

In this statement we can see that justification can come “only” through “faith.” However, this statement does not negate the idea that corporate justification has been accomplished for all, because once again, it is clear that Ellen White is speaking of the second phase of the process and not the first. The second phase includes “repentance,” “transformation of character,” and “good works.” This is what is involved in being saved from the power of sin (i.e., experiential sanctification). Note that the term *sanctify* is used in a manner that lends support to the idea that “justification by faith” is the process that produces “sanctification.”

14. E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, 389.

Charizomai Produces True Obedience

Many hold to an understanding of the gospel which is tantamount to the conclusion that forgiveness or pardon means a person is ready for heaven. This understanding is why some unconsciously hold the belief that salvation comes through confession. The idea is that we keep confessing our sins, thus making certain of forgiveness and thereby maintaining a “saved” status. This idea—that mere pardon means eternal salvation—is not the idea presented in the Spirit of Prophecy or the Bible. The first phase of forgiveness, judicial pardon (*charizomai*), as wonderful as it is, only cancels out our bad deeds—and is thus a negative act. It involves removing or taking something away. It does *not* provide what is required to replace that which is taken away, although it is the true motive for obedience.

In order to enter heaven, we must also have righteousness! Therefore, we should understand that we need more than mere judicial forgiveness or pardon in order to enter heaven. We need righteousness. While we are “born forgiven,” so far as the judicial pardon is concerned, we still need righteousness. This is provided in the second phase of forgiveness, *aphemi*, which is also referred to as “justification by faith.” In this phase of salvation the righteousness of Christ is imputed and imparted to the believer. The evidence of the experience of justification by faith is revealed in “obedience to all the commandments of God.”¹

1. E. G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, 91.

Genuine obedience is not simply obeying the “rules.” It goes much deeper than merely “doing the right thing” and “abstaining from doing the wrong things.”

The eye of the Lord is upon all the work, all the plans, all the imaginings of every mind; He sees beneath the surface of things, discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart. There is not a deed of darkness, not a plan, not an imagination of the heart, not a thought of the mind, but that He reads it as an open book. Every act, every word, every motive, is faithfully chronicled in the records of the great Heart-searcher, who said, “I know thy works.”²

Here, we are informed that more than our “works” are “chronicled in the records.” Commonly understood is that everything that we “do” is written in the books of heaven. But there is something more important than *what* we do. The greater concern is *why* we do what we do. The books of heaven record “every motive.” Why is that the case? “Every action of their lives is judged, not by the external appearance, but from the motive which dictated the action.”³

Could this be why the apostle Paul wrote, “Love [agape] is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:10)? Righteousness is more than “doing the right thing”—it is doing the right thing for the right reason, and the right reason is that “the love [agape] of Christ compels us” (2 Corinthians 5:14, NKJV). In other words, unless there is agape in the heart, there is no righteousness in the life. “The sinner loves Christ, because Christ has first loved him, and love is the fulfilling of the law.”⁴

We need righteousness in order to enter heaven, and this can only be received when “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost” (Romans 5:5). Righteousness is agape. The agape of God is “shed abroad in our hearts;” when we “appreciate” (i.e., have genuine faith in) the love of God which was demonstrated at the cross in the forgiveness of our sins. When we believe that He loves us and that He has forgiven us at the cross, this understanding produces love in our hearts and makes the manifestation of authentic righteousness possible.

The world’s Redeemer was treated as we deserve to be treated, in order that we might be treated as He deserved to be treated. He came to our world and took our sins upon His own divine soul, that we might receive His imputed righteousness. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. The world’s Redeemer

2. E. G. White, *Life Sketches*, 15.

3. E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, 507.

4. E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, 374.

gave Himself for us. Who was He?—The Majesty of heaven, pouring out His blood upon the altar of justice for the sins of guilty man. We should know our relationship to Christ and His relationship to us. We are to trust God fully, and ask Him to supply the least as well as the greatest want. The Lord encourages our confidence; and the great proof of our union with Christ, and the best manifestation of our love to Him, is in yielding obedience to His claims. If you have love to Jesus Christ, which is an expression of the life of Christ in the soul, then you will do what He commands you. This is practical religion. *Redeemed by the ransom money paid for your souls, you will go forth and show how much you love Jesus by obedience to His commandments.* You are to bring forth fruit by doing His commandments, because you are branches of the living Vine. It is His prayer that His joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.⁵

Obedience Not Meritorious

True obedience, the “right doing” which is a manifestation of agape, constitutes true Christian life. However, we should now hasten to add that this aspect of righteousness is the “fruit of faith,” and it is *not* meritorious. Many statements throughout Ellen White’s writings emphasize the fact that the obedient, sanctified life is the “fruit of faith.” “The faith that justifies always produces first true repentance, and then *good works, which are the fruit of that faith.* There is no saving faith that does not produce good fruit.”⁶ “Sanctification is *the fruit of faith*, whose renewing power transforms the soul into the image of Christ.”⁷ Note that the first statement says that “the faith that justifies” produces “the fruit of faith,” which is good works, and “sanctification is the fruit of faith.” Therefore, sanctification is the fruit of justification by faith. This also is the point of James 2:14. Now, please notice that these works are *not* meritorious.

Let the subject be made distinct and plain that it is not possible to effect anything in our standing before God or in the gift of God to us through creature merit. Should faith and works purchase the gift of salvation for anyone, then the Creator is under obligation to the creature. Here is an opportunity for falsehood to be accepted as truth. If any man can merit salvation by anything he may do, then he is in the same position as the Catholic to do penance for his sins. Salvation, then, is partly of debt, that may be earned as wages. *If*

5. E. G. White, *Review and Herald*, March 21, 1893, emphasis supplied.

6. E. G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 8, 357, emphasis supplied.

7. E. G. White, *Signs of the Times*, June 7, 1883, emphasis supplied.

THE MESSAGE OF THE LATTER RAIN

*man cannot, by any of his good works, merit salvation, then it must be wholly of grace, received by man as a sinner because he receives and believes in Jesus. It is wholly a free gift.*⁸

Please note that in this passage Ellen White does not argue against the concept of salvation by works. She is refuting the concept of salvation *partly* by faith and *partly* by works. In this passage she stresses the point that salvation is *entirely* a “free gift.” Even the true believer, who will always do many good works, still has *no* merit to present before God. This “free gift” of salvation is *not* to be received by man as a good, righteous, or reformed person and not even a sanctified person. Rather, it is to be received by man as an undeserving “sinner!”

Ellen White’s statements on this subject continue:

*Although we have no merit in ourselves, in the great goodness and love of God we are rewarded as if the merit were our own. When we have done all the good we can possibly do, we are still unprofitable servants. We have done only what was our duty. What we have accomplished has been wrought solely through the grace of Christ, and no reward is due to us from God on the ground of our merit. But through the merit of our Saviour, every promise that God has made will be fulfilled, and every man will be rewarded according to his deeds. The precious rewards of the future will be proportioned to the work of faith and labor of love in the present life.*⁹

The glory of the gospel of grace through the imputed righteousness of Christ, provides *no other way of salvation than through obedience to the law of God in the person of Jesus Christ*, the divine substitute.¹⁰

Please take note that the only way to salvation is through obedience to the law of God, but it is the obedience of Christ to the law of God that merits salvation, not ours.

The question of merit is directly related to the subject of corporate justification and atonement for all sin. When the redemption that was accomplished at the cross is not clearly understood, we are vulnerable to legalistic thinking. We are naturally inclined to think we get what we earn. The whole world is set up after this order. The gospel overturns this design. The gospel reveals a Saviour whose works have already delivered us from condemnation and earned the title to heaven for every human soul, including even those who “do not accept it.”¹¹ In this redemption

8. E. G. White, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 812, emphasis supplied.

9. E. G. White, *Review and Herald*, June 6, 1893, emphasis supplied.

10. E. G. White, *Signs of the Times*, September 9, 1882, emphasis supplied.

11. *Ibid.*, June 6, 1895.

CHARIZOMAI PRODUCES TRUE OBEDIENCE

our works have no place at all. Charizomai brought to us the “title” to heaven; aphiemi produces the “fitness” for heaven. The “fitness” and the “title” should never be confused.¹²

When we allow the charizomai of God to enter our hearts and minds, we find that “Nothing reaches so fully down to the deepest motives of conduct as a sense of the pardoning love of Christ.”¹³ This is true obedience. And this reveals why the message of the latter rain is so essential.

12. “The righteousness by which we are justified is imputed; the righteousness by which we are sanctified is imparted. The first is our title to heaven, the second is our fitness for heaven.” E. G. White, *Review and Herald*, June 4, 1895.

13. E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 493.

The Cross: An Atonement Completed

The Scriptures teach that Jesus made atonement for sin at the cross (see Romans 5:11, KJV). This phase of atonement was revealed in the typical sanctuary service given to Israel in the wilderness. In that service were several cases in which the blood of the sacrificial animal was *not* taken into the tabernacle (see Leviticus 4:18–35). Yet atonement took place outside of the tabernacle, in the outer court. This symbolic representation of the plan of salvation shows us that a phase of atonement could and did take place without the entrance of the priest into the tabernacle. Yet many Seventh-day Adventists will take issue with this concept, due to an incomplete knowledge of the typical sanctuary service.

The prevailing understanding is that Jesus only *began* to make atonement for sin at the cross and that the atonement is in *no sense* complete until Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary is completed and probation closes. However, it should be recognized that the most important phase of the atonement was completed at the cross. Understanding this phase of atonement is *essential* to a clear understanding of the gospel. The prevailing concept which claims that the atonement only *began* at the cross leads to the conclusion that nothing was *completed* at the cross. This erroneous conclusion precludes an understanding of corporate universal justification for all, which was accomplished at Calvary.

While this *must* be clarified, it is not intended to deny that there is a cosmic "Day of Atonement" which began in 1844. This aspect of Christ's

ministry is also essential to the plan of salvation. Just as there are three phases to the plan of salvation—past, present, and future—there are three tenses in which salvation can be spoken of—past, present, and future. It logically follows that there must also be three phases to the process of atonement—past, present, and future. Each phase is distinct, and each phase is essential.

The Spirit of Prophecy clearly and explicitly teaches that Christ has made an atonement for sin and that this atonement was “complete,” at the cross. For example:

He [Christ] planted the cross between Heaven and earth, and when the Father beheld the sacrifice of His Son, He bowed before it in recognition of its perfection. “It is enough,” He said. “The Atonement is complete.”¹

You will never find a more authoritative statement than one from God the Father. He said, “The atonement is complete.” To many Seventh-day Adventists, that is an astonishing pronouncement, but it should not be. The Bible clearly states this same truth:

For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement (Romans 5:10, 11).

Many more Spirit of Prophecy quotations could be cited. We cite only a few.

Christ’s death on the cross paid the ransom for every human being. All may overcome, because *Christ has made an atonement for the sins of the whole world.*²

The atonement of Christ sealed forever the everlasting covenant of grace. It was the fulfilling of every condition upon which God suspended the free communication of grace to the human family. Every barrier was then broken down which intercepted the freest fullness of the exercise of grace, mercy, peace and love to the most guilty of Adam’s race.³

The seal of Heaven has been affixed to Christ’s atonement. His sacrifice is in every way satisfactory.⁴

1. E. G. White, *Review and Herald*, Sept. 24, 1901 (*Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, 459).

2. E. G. White, Manuscript 140, 1903 (*Lift Him Up*, 235, emphasis supplied).

3. E. G. White, Manuscript 92, 1899 (*Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, 65, emphasis supplied).

4. E. G. White, *Signs of the Times*, Aug. 16, 1899 (*Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, 460, emphasis supplied).

Beyond the statements which appear in this small volume, there are many more statements from the pen of inspiration regarding this phase of atonement. The term *atonement* appears more than 1,000 times on the E. G. White CD-ROM. The few quotations cited above will suffice to show that an atonement for sin has been completed on behalf of all mankind, believers and unbelievers alike. This atonement is the means by which mercy has been granted to the entire human race. We believe in the great antitypical Day of Atonement. We should also believe that “we have now received the atonement” (Romans 5:11). “Christ made a full atonement, giving His life as a ransom for us.”⁵ This aspect of atonement, which was completed at Calvary, is already effective for all mankind. It forms the basis for the judicial pardon (corporate universal justification) which has been granted to the entire human race, and it is the means through which we have probationary life and all of the blessings of this life.

Why Some Will Be Lost

Clearly, Christ has “made atonement” “for the sins of the world.”⁶ This begs the questions as to why everyone will not be eternally saved and why many will suffer for their own sin. Is “double jeopardy” the ultimate conclusion of the plan of redemption? Is an inconsistency found here in the teachings of the Spirit of Prophecy?

The Spirit of Prophecy is internally consistent. The root cause for the failure of the plan of salvation in accomplishing all that God desires has already been cited above.

It is not because the mercy, the grace, the love of the Father and the Son are not ample, and have not been freely bestowed, that they do not rejoice in pardoning love, but it is because of their unbelief.⁷

Here, Ellen White makes clear that the “mercy,” “grace,” and “love” of the Father have been “freely bestowed.” What type of “love” is this? The statement goes on to refer to it as “pardoning love.” Thus, we see that the “pardon” has been “freely bestowed.” We were indeed, in a sense, born forgiven. Even the past, present, and future of all believers has already been addressed by this “pardoning love.” All of their sins have been “pardoned.” Unbelievers, too, were also, in a sense, born forgiven. Therefore, they *should* be rejoicing! (By the way, this is what the story of Jacob and Esau and the “birthright” are really all about. We all have a “birthright” to cherish or despise.) Before we were born, Jesus had already suffered and

5. E. G. White, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, 925.

6. E. G. White, *Evangelism*, 187.

7. E. G. White, *Signs of the Times*, June 6, 1895.

died and thereby paid the penalty for every sin we could ever commit.⁸ He is the Lamb “slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). All of our sins have been forgiven—every sin, that is, except for one.

No sin can be committed by man for which satisfaction has not been met on Calvary. Thus the cross, in earnest appeals, continually proffers to the sinner a thorough expiation.⁹

This statement clearly teaches that all sin was punished at the cross. But it also seems to say that *every* sin was punished at the cross, precluding the exception we have taken for the unpardonable sin. However, when the context of this statement is examined, it is clear that the presupposition for this statement assumes that one does not reject the gift of salvation.

Since everyone’s sins have been forgiven, all should be rejoicing. The only reason some do not rejoice is “because of their unbelief.” This “unbelief” is the same reason that Jesus gave to explain why some will be lost, when He said, “He that believeth not shall be condemned” (Mark 16:16). This must also be why the Spirit of Prophecy speaks so strongly against the sin of “unbelief.” The servant of the Lord wrote, “There is no sin greater than unbelief.”¹⁰ “The greatest sin we can cherish is the sin of unbelief.”¹¹

We may expect large things, even the deep movings of the Spirit of God, if we have faith in His promises. *Our greatest sin is unbelief in God.* Has He not shown us how precious we are in His sight, and with what value He regards our souls, by giving us Jesus.¹²

It was sin that caused Christ to suffer an ignominious death on Calvary. But while we should understand that sin is a terrible thing, we should not listen to the voice of our adversary, who says, “You have sinned, and you have no right to claim the promises of God.” You should say to the adversary, It is written, “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” I am so glad that God has made a provision whereby we may know that he does pardon our transgressions! *We do not believe in God as we should, and I have thought that this unbelief is our greatest sin.*¹³

Several times, the pen of inspiration identified “unbelief” as the “greatest

sin.” Some consider doubting a mark of intelligence and prudence. Some even regard it as the basis for learning. God regards it very differently. When the truth is spoken, it is not a mark of high intelligence to disbelieve it. Especially is this the case, when it comes to the truth about God’s forgiveness of our sins. He wants us to believe that we are forgiven (judicial pardon). He wants us to believe that Christ has died for our sins and that His death has accomplished something. To refuse to believe this is the “greatest sin.”

8. One exception exists—the unpardonable sin.

9. E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, 343.

10. E. G. White, *My Life Today*, 14.

11. E. G. White, *Signs of the Times*, October 4, 1899.

12. E. G. White, *Testimonies to Southern Africa*, 67, emphasis supplied.

13. E. G. White, *Review and Herald*, May 19, 1896, emphasis supplied.

The Unpardonable Sin

While “unbelief” is clearly described as “the greatest sin,” the question still remains: Is this the unpardonable sin? How does the pen of inspiration define the unpardonable sin? In the first reference that we shall examine, a “Brother P” is concerned that he may have committed this sin. Notice Ellen White’s response:

Brother P, you ask if you have committed the sin which has no forgiveness in this life or in the life to come. I answer: I do not see the slightest evidence that this is the case. What constitutes the sin against the Holy Ghost? It is willfully attributing to Satan the work of the Holy Spirit.¹

Here, we find a very clear definition of the unpardonable sin. The sin against the Holy Ghost is “willfully attributing to Satan the work of the Holy Spirit.” However, sometimes even a brief and simple definition is subject to misunderstanding. Given this definition, some may believe that as long as they don’t attribute anything to Satan, they cannot commit the unpardonable sin. Just how do people go about attributing the work of God to Satan? Perhaps a more important question is *why* would this be done? Do people tend to arbitrarily attribute some works to God and other works to Satan—and thereby endanger their souls? In Matthew chapter 12 we have an example of this very thing.

1. E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, 634.

Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" Now when the Pharisees heard *it* they said, "This *fellow* does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons" (Matthew 12:22–24, NKJV).

Jesus had healed a poor man who was both blind and mute, and immediately the Pharisees responded by saying that the miracle was not done by the power of the Holy Spirit—that it was of Beelzebub. Deliberately, they were attributing the work of God to the devil. The important question is: Why? If we knew nothing about the Pharisees, we might wonder what was going on, but such is not the case. Throughout the gospels we find plenty of evidence upon which to base an understanding of their motive. They do not want to accept the miracle as being of God, *because* they do not want to accept the fact that Jesus is from God. Their purpose is not to reject the miracle "per se." Their real objective, it is painfully obvious, is to reject Christ. Knowing this, Jesus then explained to them the concept of the unpardonable sin. The Bible narrative continues:

But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? Therefore, they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.

Therefore, I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy *against* the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the *age* to come (Matthew 12:25–32, NKJV).

Connecting the act of attributing the work of God to the devil, to the unpardonable sin, without taking cognizance of the motive behind the act, is to miss the point. We must remember: "Every action of their lives is judged, not by the external appearance, but from the motive which

dictated the action."² Correct interpretation of the action requires that the motive be taken into account.

Another very important consideration, in seeking to understand this truth and all other truths in God's Word, is that we must understand truth in relationship to the gospel.

The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth *around which all other truths cluster*. In order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the Word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light which streams from the cross of Calvary, and in connection with the wondrous, central truth of the Saviour's atonement.³

The idea that the unpardonable sin is attributing the work of God to the devil is a "truth" presented "in the word of God." "In order to be rightly understood and appreciated...[this]...truth...must be studied in the light which streams from the cross of Calvary."⁴ In other words, it must be interpreted in the light of the gospel. The Spirit of Prophecy quotation cited above clearly presents the definition of this sin in harmony with the passage in Matthew chapter 12, which is also quoted above. Now, in order to "rightly understand and appreciate" this truth, we need to see how the Spirit of Prophecy applies it in the light of the gospel. "In rejecting Christ the Jewish people committed the unpardonable sin; and by refusing the invitation of mercy, we may commit the same error."⁵ In 1897 the servant of the Lord provided additional light on this issue.

The Pharisees sinned against the Holy Ghost. Their talent of speech was used to abuse the world's Redeemer, and the recording angel wrote their words in the books of heaven. They attributed to satanic agencies the holy power of God, manifested in the works of Christ. They could not evade His wonderful works, or attribute them to natural causes, so they said, "They are the works of the devil." In unbelief they spoke of the Son of God as a human being. The works of healing done before them, works which no man had done or could do, were a manifestation of the power of God, but they charged Christ with being in league with hell. Stubborn, sullen, ironhearted, they determined to close their eyes to all evidence, and thus they committed the unpardonable sin.⁶

In *The Desire of Ages*, we find additional light.

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2. E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, 507.
 3. E. G. White, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, 1137.
 4. Ibid.
 5. E. G. White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 324
 6. E. G. White, "Our Words," Manuscript 73, July 2, 1897, 4, 5.

There are none so hardened as those who have slighted the invitation of mercy, and done despite to the Spirit of grace. The most common manifestation of the sin against the Holy Spirit is in persistently slighting Heaven's invitation to repent. *Every step in the rejection of Christ is a step toward the rejection of salvation, and toward the sin against the Holy Spirit.*⁷

In these quotations we see a clear description of *how* the unpardonable sin is committed. Specifically, we see how it was committed by some of the Pharisees and by the Jewish nation. They attributed the wonderful works of Christ to satanic agencies, but the vital question is: Why? The unambiguous answer given us by the Spirit of Prophecy is that it was because they were determined to reject the world's Redeemer. "In rejecting Christ the Jewish people committed the unpardonable sin."⁸ Therefore, we conclude, the sin of refusing to believe the gospel, which means refusing to believe in Jesus as the Saviour, is the unpardonable sin. This is the, "sin which is unto death" (1 John 5:16, 17).

7. E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, 324, emphasis supplied.

8. Ibid.

The Unpardonable Sin in SDA History

The expression *remnant church* does not appear in the Bible. However, the concept of a church, symbolically represented as a "woman," that is associated with "the remnant," *does* appear in Scripture (see Revelation 12:17). The expression *remnant church* also appears explicitly some seventy times on the E. G. White CD-ROM. We believe the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the "remnant church" of Bible prophecy. This does not mean that Seventh-day Adventists are the only genuine Christians. Today, God's people are scattered about in all of the various denominations. Jesus recognized this in principle even during His time on earth. He said, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, *and* one shepherd" (John 10:16).

The "remnant church," is the seventh or last church brought to view in the prophecies of the book of Revelation. No eighth church is mentioned. Therefore, we conclude that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the end-time church, and it will respond to the counsel of the True Witness. She will repent and be finally victorious before Jesus comes. The message to Laodicea is believed to be addressed to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and implicit in the call to "repent" is the thought that the church is imperfect. One might, however, be surprised to learn the extent to which some, even among the leadership of the church, have erred. However, the Spirit of Prophecy repeatedly refers to the period

of time immediately following the 1888 General Conference session as a time of very grievous error. In studying church history as described in the Spirit of Prophecy, we find that over and over again, the servant of the Lord speaks of the unpardonable sin in connection with Seventh-day Adventist Church history. She speaks of it specifically in connection with the persistent resistance which was manifested against “a most precious message”¹ which came to “us” at that time.

Now, I tell you, God will not be trifled with. God is a jealous God, and when He manifests His power as He has manifested it, it is very nigh unto *the sin of the Holy Ghost* to disbelieve it. The revealings of God’s power have not had any effect to move and to stir persons from their position of doubting and unbelief. God help us that we may remove ourselves out of the snares of the devil! If ever a people needed to be removed, it is those that took their position in Minneapolis at that time on the wrong side.²

These testimonies of the Spirit of God, the fruits of the Spirit of God, have no weight unless they are stamped with your ideas of the law in Galatians. I am afraid of you and I am afraid of your interpretation of any scripture which has revealed itself in such an unchristlike spirit as you have manifested and has cost me so much unnecessary labor. If you are such very cautious men and so very critical lest you shall receive something not in accordance with the Scriptures, I want your minds to look on these things in the true light. *Let your caution be exercised in the line of fear lest you are committing the sin against the Holy Ghost.* Have your critical minds taken this view of the subject? I say if your views on the law in Galatians, and the fruits, are of the character I have seen in Minneapolis and ever since up to this time, my prayer is that I may be as far from your understanding and interpretation of the Scriptures as it is possible for me to be.³

That one can find stronger words of solemn warning in all the writings of Ellen White, than those relating to the resistance manifested against the “most precious message,”⁴ is doubtful. Not only do they reveal the danger of committing the unpardonable sin, they also reveal that there were “some” who committed that sin. Some went “too far to return and to repent.”⁵ The “stand” taken at Minneapolis “proved their ruin.”⁶

1. E. G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, 91.
 2. E. G. White, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 613, emphasis supplied.
 3. *Ibid.*, 631, emphasis supplied.
 4. E. G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, 91.
 5. *Ibid.*, 90.
 6. E. G. White, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 1125

What was the essence of the message which came to us in 1888 at Minneapolis? Why was opposition to it such a serious matter? We find a strong hint as to why this was so serious a matter in the following inspired statements:

*The message of the gospel of His grace was to be given to the church in clear and distinct lines, that the world should no longer say that Seventh-day Adventists talk the law, the law, but do not teach or believe Christ.*⁷

I have no smooth message to bear to those who have been so long as false guideposts, pointing the wrong way. If you reject Christ’s delegated messengers you reject Christ. Neglect this great salvation, kept before you for years, despise this glorious offer of justification through the blood of Christ and sanctification through the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit, and there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation.⁸

The message which began to be proclaimed at the 1888 General Conference session was “the gospel...in clear and distinct lines.”⁹ To believe the gospel means to believe in Christ. In the 1888 era Seventh-day Adventists were so preoccupied with the objective of defending the law and the Sabbath that “Many had lost sight of Jesus.”¹⁰ Thus, the message was sent to bring us back to Jesus, that the “world” might know we “believe Christ.” Therefore, to reject the message after receiving knowledge of its content inevitably involves a rejection of Christ. The Spirit of Prophecy tells us that Christ was rejected in the person of His messengers.¹¹ Thus, we conclude that what was really at stake during the controversies of the 1888 era was the “sin against the Holy Ghost.”¹² In rejecting “the message of the gospel,” some were committing the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.

No one need look upon *the sin against the Holy Ghost* as something mysterious and undefinable. The sin against the Holy Ghost is the sin of persistent refusal to respond to the invitation to repent. *If you refuse to believe in Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour, you love darkness rather than light, you love the atmosphere that surrounded the first great apostate. You choose this atmosphere rather*

7. E. G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, 92, emphasis supplied.
 8. *Ibid.*, 97, emphasis supplied.
 9. *Ibid.*, 92.
 10. *Ibid.*
 11. E. G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, 472.
 12. E. G. White, *Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 631.

than the atmosphere that surrounds the Father and the Son, and God allows you to have your choice.¹³

Here, we see the nature of the unpardonable sin again clearly presented. We see here not a momentary lapse—and not the mistake of one minute or one hour or one day. Rather, we see a conscious, persistent, and unrelenting unbelief of the message of Christ presented in the power of the Holy Spirit. In Ellen White’s words, some “stood for years”¹⁴ in this attitude, before it was “too late.”¹⁵ Did Christ die for this sin—the sin of unrelenting unbelief?

Did Jesus Die for This?

As has been demonstrated in Parts One and Two, the Scriptures teach that Jesus died for everyone and for every sin, except for the sin against the Holy Spirit, which is the final choice to reject Christ. This means that if an individual ultimately and finally refuses to believe in Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord, he/she will then be condemned a second time for unbelief and deliberate rebellion. Jesus did not make atonement for the second condemnation. Sinners will pay the penalty for it themselves in the lake of fire.

If Jesus had died for this sin, then no one could be lost, and sin would be immortalized. Legal condemnation must precede the execution of the penalty. We were all justified unto life at the cross, but those who are finally lost will lose that justified status and come under condemnation before they are destroyed in the lake of fire. The first condemnation¹⁶ was reversed at the cross, but the second condemnation cannot be reversed; therefore, it results in eternal death.

That being said, we want to discover if there is clear evidence in the Spirit of Prophecy supporting the thought that there is a sin for which Jesus did not die. This concept is described in Hebrews 10:26–29. We discussed this description in chapter 10.

Interesting to observe is that Ellen White quotes the same text in one of her solemn warnings to the brethren who were in danger of committing the unpardonable sin by deliberately rejecting the message of justification by faith.

I have no smooth message to bear to those who have been so long as false guideposts, pointing the wrong way. If you reject Christ’s

13. E. G. White, *Review and Herald*, June 29, 1897, emphasis supplied.

14. E. G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, 96.

15. *Ibid.*, 97

16. Here, we refer to the condemnation which came to the race in Adam—a condemnation we have endorsed and embraced through our own sins.

delegated messengers, you reject Christ. Neglect this great salvation, kept before you for years, despise this glorious offer of justification through the blood of Christ and sanctification through the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit, and *there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation.*¹⁷

The fact that the servant of the Lord has cited this text in the midst of a warning concerning the sin against the Holy Ghost does not prove that she believes the text means what *we* may say it means. For evidence that Ellen White believed that there is a sin for which Jesus did not die, we must discover more explicit statements in her writings.

“No Sacrifice”

The sons of Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu had been instructed concerning the temple services. They knew that all of the offerings made in the sanctuary were to be consumed by the fire which was “ever burning” (Leviticus 6:13). Nevertheless, the book of Leviticus records their sad departure from the explicit command of God.

And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD (Leviticus 10:1, 2).

On the surface, this is a startling, perhaps even perplexing story. The punishment does not appear to fit the offence. Why did God take such sudden and drastic measures in punishing these two young men? The Spirit of Prophecy illuminates the problem.

And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, then offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. What could have come upon the sons of Aaron, that they should thus transgress the requirement of God? The sacred fire which *God Himself had kindled* and preserved was at their hand. Direction had been given concerning it, and God had said: The fire upon the altar shall be burning in it; it shall not be put out: and the priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and lay the burnt-offering in order upon it; and he shall burn thereon the fat of the peace-offerings. The fire shall ever be burning upon the altar; it shall never go out.¹⁸

This “ever burning” fire, which “God Himself had kindled,” was the *only*

17. E. G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, 97, emphasis supplied.

18. E. G. White, *Review and Herald*, May 15, 1894, emphasis supplied.

fire allowed for use in the temple. When the sacrifices were consumed by this sacred fire, the symbolic process typified the fact that Christ would not die because of what men would do to Him, nor would His life be taken by Satan. He would be consumed by the “fire” which comes from “God Himself.” In pagan sacrificial rituals man kindles the fire and consumes the sacrifice in order to appease an angry god. In God’s system He Himself provides the sacrifice and consumes it with His holy wrath against sin. Ellen White describes what happened at the cross:

He [Christ] was bearing the penalty of transgression for a sinful world. This proceeded not from Satan nor from man. It is best described in the words of the prophet, “Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the Man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts.” Christ was realizing His Father’s frown. He was now suffering under divine justice.¹⁹

The “penalty of transgression” proceeded from the Father. It came not from “Satan nor from man.” Neither Satan nor man had any part in our redemption—that was entirely of God. Here, then, is another *essential* element of the gospel. In this light we can see that when Nadab and Abihu offered “strange fire” before the Lord, they were doing much more than using the wrong fire. They were in fact rejecting and perverting the gospel. They were committing the unpardonable sin, and that is why the punishment was so sudden and drastic. Nevertheless, there is still more concrete evidence in the Spirit of Prophecy on this question. Did Jesus die for the unpardonable sin?

The Spirit of Prophecy comments on the transgressions of Eli’s sons provides a direct and explicit answer to our question.

The transgressions of Eli’s sons were so daring, so insulting to a holy God, that *no sacrifice could atone* for such willful transgression. These sinful priests profaned the sacrifices which typified the Son of God. And by their *blasphemous* conduct they were *trampling upon the blood of the atonement*, from which was derived the virtue of all sacrifices.²⁰

Here the neglect of Eli is brought plainly before every father and mother in the land.... Both the parent who permitted the wickedness and the children who practiced it were guilty before God, and He would accept *no sacrifice or offering for their transgression*.²¹

The Spirit of Prophecy explicitly declares that sins were committed,

19. E. G. White, *Signs of the Times*, December 2, 1897.

20. E. G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, 402, emphasis supplied.

21. E. G. White, *Review and Herald*, May 4, 1886, emphasis supplied.

for which “no sacrifice could atone.”²² In the first quotation regarding Eli and his sons Ellen White declares that what was involved here is “blasphemy.” She then alluded to the same passage in Hebrews chapter 10, with the words, “trampling upon the blood of the covenant.” Therefore, we draw the following conclusions:

- ▶ Hebrews 10:26–29 is a description of the unpardonable sin.
- ▶ The unpardonable sin is the sin for which no sacrifice can be accepted.
- ▶ Jesus’ sacrifice is not applicable to the unpardonable sin.
- ▶ Because there is no sacrifice for the unpardonable sin, that sin cannot be forgiven in this life or the life to come.
- ▶ All sins have already been atoned for and judicially pardoned except the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ Therefore, the death of the unbeliever does not involve double jeopardy.
- ▶ Unbelievers will suffer the penalty of eternal death for the sin for which Jesus did not die.

22. E. G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, 402.

Genuine Confession Flows From the Heart

If Christ has already atoned for all possible sins, past, present, and future (except for the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit), and this “atonement” has resulted in a judicial act of pardon, the question may still linger, why do we need to confess our sins? We have already seen that there is no merit associated with the repentance of the sinner (see chapter 19), nor is there any merit associated with our faith in Christ. The faith and obedience of Christ alone is meritorious. In the view presented in the Spirit of Prophecy, what then is the significance of our repentance, and why do we need to confess our sins?

The common understanding of repentance views it as a switch which activates God’s pardoning love making it applicable to a specific sinner. In other words, the concept seems to be that God stands back passively, perhaps *wanting* to forgive us, yet unable to act apart from the sinner’s initiative. This is *not* how the Spirit of Prophecy represents the process.

It was taught by the Jews that before God’s love is extended to the sinner, he must first repent. In their view, repentance is a work by which men earn the favor of Heaven. And it was this thought that led the Pharisees to exclaim in astonishment and anger. “This man receiveth sinners.” According to their ideas He should permit none to approach Him but those who had repented. But in the parable of the lost sheep, Christ teaches that salvation does not come through

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our seeking after God but through God's seeking after us. "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way." Romans 3:11, 12. We do not repent in order that God may love us, but He reveals to us His love in order that we may repent.¹

In this statement we find a different view of the process of salvation and the concept of repentance. Here is a view which is in harmony with the biblical idea that "The goodness of God leads you to repentance" (Romans 2:4, NKJV). God is pursuing us, and not the other way around. "He reveals to us His [pardoning] love in order that we may repent." How did God reveal His love?

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him (Romans 5:8, 9, NKJV).

God fully revealed His pardoning love, when Christ died upon the cross. Now, please do not overlook the fact that when Christ died, we were "justified by His blood." We were granted a judicial pardon—we were forgiven. Thus, we see that we do not repent in order that God may forgive us. He has already forgiven us, "in order that we may repent."² In other words, God gave the gift of His only begotten Son in order to make us willing to receive more of His gifts.

When we realize how far He has come to save us, and we begin to understand something of the sacrifice involved in His pursuit, our hearts are melted, and we receive the gift of authentic repentance. Our confession and repentance has much more to do with cleansing than it has to do with pardon.

The more we truly understand of the wondrous love revealed in the plan of redemption, the more we want to be cleansed of all sin. We need to understand much more. In order to really appreciate the significance of genuine repentance, we need to understand in a much fuller sense just what Christ means to us now. The Spirit of Prophecy provides insight into what the plan of redemption means and why we should confess our sins and receive the gift of cleansing from all unrighteousness. Consider the following:

Those who think of the result of hastening or hindering the gospel think of it in relation to themselves and to the world. Few think of its relation to God. Few give thought to the suffering that sin has caused our Creator. All heaven suffered in Christ's agony; but that

1. E. G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 189.

2. Ibid.

GENUINE CONFESSION FLOWS FROM THE HEART

suffering did not begin or end with His manifestation in humanity. The cross is a revelation to our dull senses of the pain that, from its very inception, sin has brought to the heart of God. Every departure from the right, every deed of cruelty, every failure of humanity to reach His ideal, brings grief to Him.³

This statement reveals at least to some extent why John the Revelator repeatedly refers to the Lamb in the heavenly sanctuary, but he doesn't merely refer to a lamb. He describes it as a lamb "as though it had been slain."⁴ This imagery reveals to our understanding the present reality of the cross. We often think of the cross as an event represented as a vertical line on the timeline of history. These quotations suggest that the cross should not be represented as a vertical line. It should rather be represented as a horizontal line on the timeline of history. This horizontal line extends from the inception of sin to at least the final restoration of this world. This understanding of reality should broaden our concept of the expedience of repentance.

Christ our Saviour came to the world to seek and save that which was lost. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." During every moment of Christ's life in our world, God was repeating His gift. Christ, the sinless One, was making an infinite sacrifice for sinners, that they might be saved. He came as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and those for whom He came looked upon Him as stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. The cup of suffering was placed in His hand, as if He were the guilty one, and He drained it to the dregs. He bore the sin of the world to the bitter end. And yet men continue to sin, and Christ continues to feel the consequences of their sin as if He Himself were the guilty one.⁵

These thoughts are beyond finite comprehension. We stand amazed before an incomprehensible mystery. Yet the truth appeals to our hearts. The heavenly sanctuary is the center of present truth for mankind today. Both of the preceding quotations speak of what Christ *is* doing, in the present continuous tense. Evidently, there are still "consequences," which are borne by Christ, every time we sin. As we consider these profound statements, we need to clearly recognize the distinction between the "penalty" for sin and the "consequences" of our sins.

3. E. G. White, *Education*, 263.

4. Revelation 5:6, 12, 13:9. In his commentary on Leviticus, Roy Gane states, "John, the beloved disciple, saw him in heaven symbolically depicted as a Lamb that had just been slaughtered but had not yet crumpled to the ground from loss of blood (Rev. 5:6)" (Roy Gane, PhD, *The NIV Application Commentary*, 183).

5. E. G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 13, 369.

Justice demands that sin be not merely pardoned, but the death penalty must be executed. God, in the gift of His only-begotten Son, met both these requirements. By dying in man's stead, Christ exhausted the penalty and provided a pardon.⁶

Since Calvary, there is no more a "penalty" to be paid. Christ's suffering and death has "exhausted the penalty."

Yet Jesus ascended to heaven as our High Priest, to offer both "gifts and sacrifices for sins" (Hebrews 5:1, 8:3). We must allow our hearts to realize and appreciate this idea. As our Intercessor, He continues to bear the consequences of our sins for us "as if He Himself were the guilty one." Because Christ intercedes, our quality of life is much better than we deserve.

Some of these thoughts are overwhelming, yet true. Jesus has risen in a glorified human body. He now has perfect recall regarding all that He endured as a man while on earth. We have all had experiences that we do not perfectly recall. In fact, most of us can barely recall our earliest memories. Jesus has perfect recall. In that light we should consider Ellen White's expression: "Every departure from the right, every deed of cruelty, every failure of humanity to reach His ideal, brings grief to Him."⁷ The agony of Calvary is, in a sense, "immortalized,"⁸ and this is why we should confess our sins and receive the gifts of repentance and cleansing from all unrighteousness.

6. E. G. White, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, 1099.

7. E. G. White, *Education*, 263.

8. E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, 343.

The Message of the Latter Rain

Although this book does not present a direct study of the teachings of Jones and Waggoner, it was inspired by their message. It might be considered a restatement of their message as we see it in the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. However, we felt it necessary to include a small sample of the original Jones-Waggoner message, in order to demonstrate that the message presented in this volume is based upon and intended to build upon that "most precious message," that was identified by the servant of the Lord, as the beginning of the "loud cry."

Some contemporary proponents of the message which came to the church through Elders Jones and Waggoner have recognized in the message the concept of two phases of justification—a key element of the message and a prominent feature of this book. One well-known author who deals extensively with the message of Jones and Waggoner wrote,

The Jones-Waggoner message recognized that there are two phases of justification: (1) forensic, or legal, made for all men, and accomplished entirely outside of us; and (2) an effective transformation of heart in those who believe, and thus a justification *by faith*.¹

Although the above quoted author makes a very clear statement concerning the existence of a concept of two phases of justification in the

1. Robert J. Wieland, *The 1888 Message, an Introduction* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1979), 74.

Jones-Waggoner message, he provides no evidence from Jones and Waggoner for such a concept. At least this is the case in the book cited above. In that work the author emphasizes the second phase of justification. In spite of this excellent work, honest doubts concerning the authenticity of the first phase of justification have lingered for a number of years. These doubts are very unfortunate, because understanding the first phase of justification is foundational and essential to understanding and experiencing the second phase.

We may, however, find strong evidence for such an understanding on the part of the original proponents of the message in their writings and talks. The following is an excerpt taken from the 1893 General Conference session:

“To the praise of the glory of His grace wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.” Now what do you say to that? [Congregation: “Amen.”] When did He do that? [Congregation: “Before the foundation of the world.”] Precisely. “Before the foundation of the world.” That answers all this idea about whether we can do anything in order to be justified or not. He did it all before we had any chance to do anything—long before we were born—long before the world was made. Don’t you see that the Lord is the one that does things, in order that we may be saved and that we may have Him?²

Now He has done all that and has done it freely. For how many people did He do this? [Congregation: “All.”] Every soul? [Congregation: “Yes, sir.”] Gave all the blessings He has to every soul in this world; He chose every soul in the world; He chose Him in Christ before the foundation of the world, predestinated him unto the adoption of children and made him accepted in the Beloved, did He not? [Congregation: “Yes.”] Of course He did.³

In this portion of his sermon, A. T. Jones provides evidence that he believes in the first phase of justification, when he says:

That answers all this idea about whether we can do anything in order to be justified or not. He [God] did it all before we had any chance to do anything—long before we were born—long before the world was made.⁴

Later, in the same talk, Jones provides evidence that he believes in a second phase of justification. He continues:

The thought I am after just now is that no one can *have* these

2. A. T. Jones, *1893 General Conference Daily Bulletin*, 401.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

things and know they are his without his own consent. The Lord will not force any of these things upon a man, even though He has *given* them already, will He? [Congregation: “No.”] This is a *cooperation*, you see. God pours out everything in one wondrous gift, but if a man will not *have* it, the Lord will not compel him to *have* a bit of it. Every man that will *take* it, it is all his own. There is where the *cooperation* comes in. The Lord has to have our *cooperation* in all things.⁵

In this sermon, A. T. Jones initially suggested that there is nothing we can do to be justified. He said, “He [God] did it all.”⁶ However, later in the same sermon, he clearly indicates that there is an aspect of salvation in which God has *not* done it all. Something remains that we must do because God will not complete what He desires to do “without...[our] consent.” Jones said, “The Lord will not force any of these things upon a man.”⁷ “Cooperation” is involved. This cannot be the same aspect of salvation which he was speaking of earlier in this sermon, unless he is irrational or confused. More evidence for this second aspect of salvation may be found later in the same sermon.

Note that Jones has previously explained that the Lord has already “chosen” us and “predestinated” us and “accepted” us. The “us” refers to the entire human race. Thus, the only thing that can prevent us from *belonging* to the Lord experientially is our “choice.”

When the man chooses to put his will on the side where God’s will is, then the thing is accomplished. Then it is at a man’s choice that he *practically*, in his own *experience*, becomes the Lord’s indeed. Then is it not by the man’s own permission in choosing the Lord’s way that the man becomes the Lord’s in *practical experience*?⁸

Notice that A. T. Jones had previously asserted that God “did it all,” because He loved us and wanted to do it all. Yet He does not “force” His will upon us. We are always free to choose, and we *must* choose. Apart from our choice, God can never complete the process which He has initiated through Christ.

The Lord gave Himself for us; then when I will not let Him have me, in that very thing I count myself worth more than the price that was paid—that is, worth more than the Lord, and that is the same self that puts itself above God all the time. Oh let this mind be in us

5. Ibid., emphasis supplied.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. A. T. Jones, *1893 General Conference Daily Bulletin*, February 26, 1893, 405, emphasis supplied.

that was in Christ, who emptied Himself that God and man might again be united in one.⁹

E. J. Waggoner taught the same understanding of the two phases of justification. He wrote:

By the righteousness of One the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. There is no exception here. As the condemnation came upon all, so the justification comes upon all. Christ has tasted death for every man. He has given himself for all. Nay, he has given himself to every man. The free gift has come upon all. The fact that it is a free gift is evidence that there is no exception. If it came upon only those who have some special qualification, [i.e. faith] then it would not be a free gift.¹⁰

Here, Waggoner speaks of the first phase of justification. It comes upon “every man.” No special qualification is required, not even faith. The free gift comes upon all. Again, Waggoner said,

Christ died for all men; all men were under the condemnation of the law of God; and so he was made under its condemnation. By the grace of God he tasted death for every man [Heb. 2:9].¹¹

Waggoner, it is evident, believed that all “were under the condemnation of the law of God.” The past tense used in this statement is critical. All “were” under condemnation, but “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law.” This statement also makes clear reference to the first phase of justification which has been accomplished for all men. Now, we shall observe that Waggoner believed in a second phase of justification.

The will of God is our sanctification. 1 Thess. 4:3. He wills that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. 1 Tim. 2:4 And He ‘accomplishes all things according to the counsel of His will.’ Eph. 1:11. “Do you mean to teach universal salvation?” someone may ask. We mean to teach just what the Word of God teaches—that ‘the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men.’ Titus 2:11, RV. God has wrought out salvation for every man, and has given it to him; but the majority spurn it and throw it away. The judgment will reveal the fact that full salvation was given to every man and that the lost have deliberately thrown away their birthright possession.¹²

Note that some will choose to be lost after they have been saved. They

9. Ibid., 403.

10. E. J. Waggoner, *Waggoner on Romans*, 101.

11. E. J. Waggoner, *The Gospel in the Book of Galatians*, 293.

12. E. J. Waggoner, *Glad Tidings*, 13, 14.

will recognize the gift, yet “spurn it and throw it away.” Everyone has the freedom to choose. Many will choose to reject the gift. God will force no one to be saved, even though Christ has died for every human soul. Here, Waggoner speaks of the second phase of justification/salvation, where human choice is decisive.

Thus, we find that both Jones and Waggoner understood and taught two aspects, or phases, of justification/salvation. This formed a major component of the message that was proclaimed during the initial outpouring of the “latter rain.” This distinguishing component of that message also forms the heart of the book which you hold in your hands. This concept, followed to its logical conclusion, clarifies the gospel and resolves the long-standing tensions between various theological schools of thought. It must therefore be included as a part of “the message that God commanded to be given to the world. It is the third angel’s message, which is to be proclaimed with a loud voice, and attended with the outpouring of His Spirit in a large measure.”¹³

According to the marginal reference of Joel 2:23, the former rain is a “teacher of righteousness.” In our world there is only one kind of genuine righteousness—that which is acquired by faith. If the former rain is a teacher of righteousness by faith, then it follows that the latter rain must be a teacher of righteousness by faith. Thus, the message of the righteousness of Christ which came to us in 1888 is the message of the latter rain—the message of the gospel that Jesus commanded us to take to the whole world.

13. E. G. White, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 1336.

Conclusion

Since there are different phases of salvation, justification, judgment, and atonement, there are also different phases of forgiveness and pardon. All mankind was, in a certain sense, forgiven at Calvary and placed under probationary grace. This is the meaning of 2 Corinthians 5:19: “To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” In all of the 6,000 years of earth’s history, God has never imputed our sins to us, not even a single one to a single individual. He has imputed all of our sins to His only begotten Son. Thus, we were born forgiven.

We may all say with the Psalmist, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5). We were all conceived in sin, yet we were born forgiven. God forgave us before we even realized our need for forgiveness. This good news applies to the whole world. God has not imputed sin to any of us. If He had, we would be dead. Thus, we conclude that the whole world has been, in a certain sense, forgiven of all of their sins, except for one. Whoever blasphemes the Holy Ghost “shall not be forgiven” (Matthew 12:31). “He that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). For this reason, many will be lost. And it is not because Jesus did not redeem them “from the curse of the law” (Galatians 3:13). He “is the Saviour of all men” (see John 4:42, 1 Timothy 4:10, 1 John 4:14).

“Christ died for our sins” (1 Corinthians 15:3). The good news of the gospel is for everyone. He has died for everyone’s sins. Yet the plan of salvation stands free of logical contradictions and unjust machinations. The death of Christ for the sins of the whole world is *actual* and not merely

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provisional. “We have now received the atonement” (Romans 5:11). The first phase of the atonement is complete and effective for everyone. “All alike are justified” (Romans 3:24, NEB). Nevertheless, the plan of salvation does *not* conclude in a form of double jeopardy. A sin does exist for which Jesus did not die. A clear understanding of the unpardonable sin resolves all the difficulty and makes the gospel very easy to understand.

Epilogue

In 1977 a Reformed scholar and Anglican clergyman by the name of Geoffrey J. Paxton published a book entitled *The Shaking of Adventism* (*A documented account of the crisis among Adventists over the doctrine of justification by faith*). Immediately following chapter 1 of that book is an appendix entitled: *1888: A Thorn in the Church's Flesh*.¹ Geoffrey Paxton was certainly correct in his assessment of our problem. What happened in 1888 has been “a thorn in the ... flesh.” The conclusion of the appendix is also correct. It says, “The drama of the church's response to 1888 is not yet finished.”² The finishing of the drama is the hope of the authors.

In 1888 in Minneapolis the messenger of the Lord stood to warn our brethren. She said, “God will withdraw His spirit, unless His truth is accepted.”³ Unfortunately, the servant of the Lord was publicly defied at Minneapolis, as her counsels to the leadership were openly disregarded. Her prophetic voice was never so directly challenged as it was at that terrible conference. Nevertheless, history has overwhelmingly vindicated the prophet.⁴

As we study the message that accompanied the beginning of the latter rain and begin to understand its meaning, we realize that God's truth was not fully accepted. We also realize that the message

1. Geoffrey J. Paxton, *The Shaking of Adventism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 34.

2. Ibid.

3. E. G. White, Oct. 20, 1888, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 124.

4. See Ron Duffield, *Return of the Latter Rain*.

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presents an understanding of His “pardoning love,” which suggests that our rejection⁵ of “His truth” has already been pardoned. We now have a responsibility to seek the second phase of forgiveness with respect to this failure. As we do, we remember that “We do not repent in order that God may love us, but He reveals to us His [pardoning] love in order that we may repent.”⁶

The principles which were introduced in the 1888 General Conference session are not generally conversant within Adventism today. Perhaps that is why Laodicea has not understood Christ’s call to repent (see Revelation 3:19). Receiving “His truth” is essential to understanding genuine repentance.

If we are to receive the latter rain at long last, we must also receive the message that was sent so long ago. We know that we shall receive it, for the work can never be finished, and Christ can never come, until we do. Laodicea has an appointment with a glorious destiny. “The message of Christ’s righteousness is to sound from one end of the earth to the other to prepare the way of the Lord. This is the glory of God, which closes the work of the third angel.”⁷

5. This rejection is not final. That type of rejection of the gospel would be unpardonable.

6. E. G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 189.

7. E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, 19.

Appendix:

UNDERSTANDING JOHN 3:18

John 3:18 presents a special challenge to those who want to believe this message of the gospel. For them, this text seems to contradict the overall theology of this book— The Message of the Latter Rain. The words of John 3:18 seem to say that we are born condemned. This book however, demonstrates that both the Scriptures and the writings of Ellen White clearly teach that Christ has redeemed the world from the curse of the law. He has saved the world—He has emancipated the human race. How then are we to understand John 3:18, without having to put ourselves at odds with Scripture and Ellen White?

If the words of Scripture say one thing, but the context of those words clearly says something different, which do we accept? This question is important, and it appears to be the case that we face in John 3:18. This verse appears to say one thing, but the words violate the context in which they appear. As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we hold to a governing principle that suggests that the context should dictate the meaning and not the words.

Verse 18 says: “He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

If one does not believe in Jesus, this verse says, he is already under condemnation. Although not a strict interpretation, this appears to be the strong implication. These words may be interpreted by some to mean that we are born under condemnation. If we are born under condemnation, we are therefore not delivered from condemnation until we believe in Christ Jesus. We must be extremely careful anytime we choose to base

any belief upon an

implication of a single verse of Scripture, rather than on the preponderance of biblical evidence. The question is: Are these interpretations correct?

If one eisegeses the words of John 3:18, the Arminian theology seems to be correct. The text says that the nonbeliever is “condemned already.” To an Arminian, this means we are born condemned. However, Seventh-day Adventists do not believe in the verbal plenary inspiration of the Bible. We believe that the thoughts of the Bible were inspired by God, yet the words of the Bible were chosen by men. The Bible writers were God’s penmen, not His pen (see also Selected Messages, bk. 1, 23).

(If the Arminian interpretation of John 3:18 is correct—that we are born condemned—how do we interpret the clear biblical teaching that all have been redeemed from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13)? For the Arminian, the resolution of this contradiction comes by simply believing one text and ignoring the other. Thus the Arminian position is: Nobody is redeemed until he believes.)

Thus, when forced to choose between the words of Scripture and the context in which those words appear, Seventh-day Adventists choose to accept the context. This is the choice that we must make when interpreting John 3:18. Verse 18 does seem to imply that we are born condemned. However, the very next verse of this scriptural passage clarifies the thought. It reads: “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). Note the clear teaching of verse 19: Men must love darkness (i.e., reject light) in order to be condemned.

We are not born with “light.” Therefore, because of what Jesus has done, paying the penalty for the sins of the world, we are not born condemned. In order to be condemned, one must reject light. The light comes to us after we are born. If we reject the light of truth, then condemnation follows. Thus, while verse 18 may be interpreted by some to teach bad news (i.e., we are born condemned), the context supports good news: We are born under grace. The default state of humanity is not condemnation but grace. “But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Rom. 5:20). As we have demonstrated in the book that you hold in your hands, this conclusion is consistent with the preponderance of Scripture, as well as the writings of Ellen White. After all, how could we be born under condemnation after, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13)? In other words, if all have been redeemed from the curse of the law, how can all still be under the curse of the law?

When we look at verse 18 in this light, we understand that John in-

troduces the term already to highlight the uniqueness of this condemnation. If one refuses to believe after light comes, he comes under final condemnation. The expression, already condemned refers to the fact that probation has closed for that individual. Thus we see in verse 18 a reference to the final condemnation reserved for the act of committing the unpardonable sin. This condemnation can only be seen as a second condemnation. We were all redeemed from the first condemnation (i.e., the condemnation that came in Adam) and placed under probationary grace. But those who refuse to believe the gospel will come under ultimate and final condemnation—and that is condemnation which can never be reversed. This condemnation results in eternal damnation.

In a similar passage of Scripture, Christ teaches this same lesson: “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15, 16). Notice that Christ does not say that he that believeth not remains in the condemnation into which he/she was born. Rather, He says, “He that believeth not shall be damned” (emphasis supplied). John 3:18 must be interpreted in agreement with the preponderance of the New Testament. We are born under grace. We are not born under condemnation.

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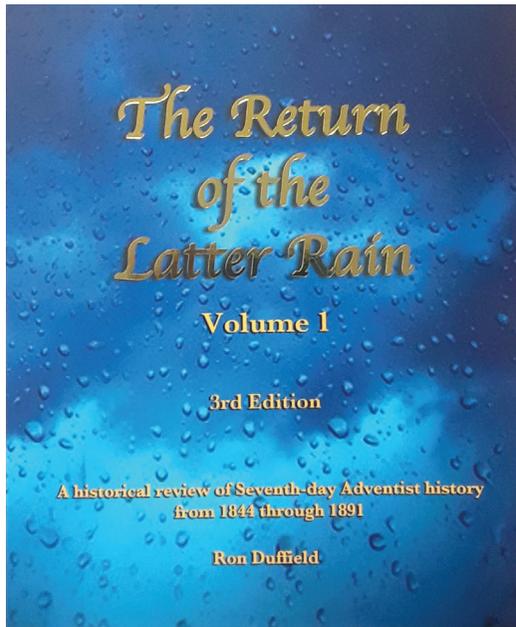
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