

What *IS* Legal Justification?

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Since before the Protestant Reformation, thinking men and women have been discussing the vital question regarding the benefits of the sacrifice of Christ. What are these benefits? Who receives of these benefits and *when* are these benefits received — i.e. when is the individual justified? Are the benefits of the sacrifice extended only to the “elect of God” or did the sacrifice of Christ do something for the whole world (“elect” and “non-elect” alike)? Is legal justification merely the assignment of certain temporal benefits (as limited to the realm of this sin-cursed earth) that apply to everyone regardless of their individual submission and sustained commitment to God?¹

Or did the sacrifice of Christ do something far greater for the whole world? What was indemnified through the sacrifice of Christ, and was it a full indemnity?

Reformation Views

Martin Luther (1483-1546) is credited with providing the impetus for the full-fledged revolt against the Roman Catholic dogma on justification. Luther’s straight reading of the Bible compelled him to believe that Paul’s declaration, “the just shall live by faith,” was the fundamental element of the Gospel, needing no modification. To Luther, the Church’s additions of sacraments, penances, and indulgences were foreign to the Bible’s message of righteousness by faith. From this beginning other men would follow, attempting to clarify and systematize the doctrine of justification.

Luther held two opinions on what faith is: (1) an assent to some truthful proposition that the logical mind can comprehend; and (2) a total dependency on God for everything in this life and the next. Luther called the first worthless because it gives man nothing. The second, which he believed was a gift from God, was that faith which wrought out a personal experience within the believer. Luther taught that this faith opens the door for man to receive and appropriate the justification of Christ.

Luther saw true faith (the gift from God) as a powerful vehicle through which we obtain justification. But justification was always spoken of as needing to be “appropriated” and “received” before the individual was justified before God.

The justification by faith which Luther experienced within his soul was the personal experience of the believer standing in the continuous line of the Christian fellowship, who receives the assurance of the grace of God in his exercise of a personal faith,—an experience which comes from appropriating the work of Christ which he is able to do by that faith which is the gift of God.

We hold, on the other hand, that in true repentance faith lays hold on and appropriates to itself *Christ’s satisfaction*, and in so doing has something which it

can oppose to the law's accusations at the bar of God, and thus bring it to pass that we should be declared righteous.²

John Calvin's (1509-1564) views on justification were substantially the same as Luther's. Calvin emphasized that justification was found only as one was united with Christ, and one is only united to Christ by faith. However, Calvin wrestled with the idea of who were included in the "covenant of promise" — who were the elect and who were the non-elect? Assuming the idea that "inclusion" in the covenant was something external to the person introduced a limiting factor into the equation of justification that accommodated Calvin's views on election and predestination. Those who believed proved by their "faith" that they were the ones God had predestined to justification and eternal life; unbelief or apostasy was a sure sign of eternal unelection.

Calvin's conclusion was that:

We say, then, that Scripture clearly proves this much, that God by his eternal and immutable counsel determined once for all those whom it was his pleasure one day to admit to salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, it was his pleasure to doom to destruction. We maintain that this counsel, as regards the elect, is founded on his free mercy, without any respect to human worth, while those whom he dooms to destruction are excluded from access to life by a just and blameless, but at the same time incomprehensible judgment. In regard to the elect, we regard calling as the evidence of election, and justification as another symbol of its manifestation, until it is fully accomplished by the attainment of glory. (*Calvin's Institutes* [1559], Book III, Chapter 21, section 7).

By the late 1800s, this idea of election had been confirmed by some Calvinist theologians using definitive language in referring to the eternal and external nature of the election:

It is also evident that the sinner's justification need not wait until he is converted, nor until he has become conscious, nor even until he is born. This could not be so if justification depended upon something within him. Then he could not be justified before he existed and had done something. But if justification is not bound to anything in him, then this whole limitation must disappear and the Lord our God be sovereignly free to render this justification at any moment that He pleases. Hence the Sacred Scripture reveals justification as an eternal act of God, i.e., an act which is not limited by any moment in the human existence. It is for this reason that the child of God seeking to penetrate into that glorious and delightful reality of his justification, does not feel himself limited to the moment of his conversion, but feels that this blessedness flows to him from the eternal depths of the hidden life of God.

It should therefore openly be confessed, and without any abbreviation, that justification does not occur when we become conscious of it, but that, on the contrary, our justification was decided from eternity in the holy judgment-seat of our God.

. . . It does not spring from our consciousness, but it is mirrored in it, and hence must have being and stature in itself. Even an elect infant which dies in the cradle is declared just, though the knowledge or consciousness of its justification never penetrated its soul. And elect persons, converted, like the thief on the cross, with their last breath, can scarcely be sensible of their justification, and yet enter eternal life exclusively on the ground of their justification.³

Building on Luther's work, Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) also attempted to form a clear theological statement on what was accomplished at the Cross. Contrary to Calvin's conclusion of limited atonement, Arminius decided that God did indeed do something for the entire world, however, it was only a provision that extended certain temporal benefits and spiritual opportunities to all persons. Arminius claimed that Jesus died on behalf of all persons and that through His death, salvation is *available* to all. In contrast to Calvinism, Arminianism claims that God places no limits upon who can believe and bring themselves into a salvific relationship with God. Arminius regarded Christ's death as the legal payment for sin for all persons, and, like Luther, viewed it as limited only to those who respond and claim the payment made in their behalf.

Thus Arminianism believes that through the beneficent grace of God the endowment of the Cross that is capable of erasing the guilt of sin, is available for appropriation by every individual. It is placed within the reach of all mankind, but each individual must "obtain" the provision and apply it to their personal lives before it profits them. Hence, Arminius taught a universal atonement, but limited application. The unlimited atonement is restrained in its legal effect. According to Arminius, the atonement was intended by God to benefit all, but requires the action of the individual's faith before legal justification can be effected for that individual. Therefore, we are not legally justified until after we believe. According to Arminius, "God regards no one in Christ unless they are engrafted in him by faith."⁴

Neither Luther, nor Calvin, nor Arminius ever caught so much as a glimpse of the concept of legal justification. They never comprehended the full depth of Christ's sacrifice (partly because they didn't rightly comprehend the meaning of death itself).⁵ For all these reformers, great as their work was in beginning to restore truth from the Bible and to remove the paganism that had crept into the church during the millennium prior to the Reformation, they could not envision the entire picture of Christ's work for humanity. Scratching around in the dust on only one side of the justification equation, and though using terminology related to the eternity and universality of the atonement, they were focused on justification by faith and nothing more.

In the providence and planning of God, it was all that was allotted for them to discover in their day. Prophecy must be fulfilled first, paving the road that would open people's minds to the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-12. The French Revolution, the Enlightenment, and the Millerite Movement as part of the Second Great Awakening must all come upon the scene before the final unveiling of the truth and power of Christ and His righteousness could be fully preached and appreciated.

In the early 1800s when God's spirit was being poured out in world-wide evangelism, universalism rose up in opposition to the dispiriting theology of the Calvinistic schools. Preaching a universal salvation for all men was an attempt to inspire the individual with a positive idea about God and His love. Around 1833, Abraham Lincoln wrote an essay on "predestinated universal salvation" that criticized the orthodox doctrine of predestined election to endless punishment which was so much the focus of the Calvinistic churches.

Similar to Arminianism, Universalism holds that the substitutionary death of Christ unreservedly paid the penalty for the sins of the whole world. However, justification is an event that took place entirely in the past. Accomplished on the Cross, it abrogated sin's penalty forever and is therefore irrelevant to individuals today. Universalists claim that God can be motivated only by His love for His creation, and therefore He is compelled to save everyone from eternal destruction regardless of their behavior, attitude, or particular belief. Their view is that if the omnipotent God does not want to, or is unable to save everyone, then He is not a God worth worshipping. This is a counterfeit justification. The counterfeit was widely preached just before E.J. Waggoner and A.T. Jones were called of God to preach the full power of God's love as revealed in forensic justification and the everlasting covenant.

Advancing Beyond the Reformation

It was within this theological environment of Calvin and Arminius's limited effect of the atonement, and the completely unlimited salvation error of Universalism, that God sent His truth of justification. Did God, in Christ, do something that extended to the whole human race, regardless of the individual's position of supposed "election"? Was this eternal act of God something more than the limited justification of the Calvinists as expounded by Kuyper in 1888? Did God's love and forgiveness extend to the entire human race, declaring all persons legally justified through the atoning sacrifice of "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world"? (Revelation 13:8).

In 1888 at the Minneapolis General Conference session, two young men presented a revolutionary position on justification. Because it embraced the Scriptural doctrine of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary, it was light-years beyond anything that the Reformer's had ever dreamed of. The foundation of this position on justification is the covenant promise conceived in the mind of the Godhead before sin entered into this world.

Ardent Bible students, A.T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner had independently arrived at the same truth from Scripture on the consummate work of Christ and His righteousness. This is the truth they presented at that General Conference at Minneapolis in 1888. From his studies on the covenants, Waggoner had discovered that the everlasting (also known as "new") covenant is all encompassing in its power to save lost humanity. The everlasting covenant is the Godhead's promise to redeem from sin and restore the birthright possession to Adam's race (Genesis 3:15; 15:6-21; Hebrews 6:13-18; *Ministry of Healing*, p. 90).

. . . The earth, fresh and new from the hand of God, perfect in every respect, was given to man for a possession. Gen.1:27, 28, 31. Man sinned, and brought the curse upon himself. Christ has taken the whole curse, both of man and of all creation, upon Himself. He redeems the earth from the curse, that it may be the everlasting possession that God originally designed it to be; and He also redeems man from the curse, that he may be fitted for the possession of such an inheritance. This is the sum of the Gospel. “The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Romans 6:23. This gift of eternal life is included in the promise of the inheritance, for God promised the land to Abraham and to his seed for “an everlasting possession.” Genesis 17:7, 8. It is an inheritance of righteousness, because the promise that Abraham should be heir of the world was through the righteousness of faith. Righteousness, eternal life, and a place in which to live eternally, — these are all in the promise, and they are all that could possibly be desired or given. . . .

The covenant and promise of God are one and the same thing. This is clearly seen from Galatians 3:17, where Paul asserts that to disannul the covenant would be to make void the promise. In Genesis 17 we read that God made a *covenant* with Abraham to give him the land of Canaan [by implication, the whole world] for an everlasting possession. Galatians 3:18 says that God gave it to him by *promise*. God’s covenants with men can be nothing else than promises to them. (Waggoner, *The Glad Tidings*, p. 70-71 [1972 edition]).

One may ask: How does this relate to the subject of legal justification? When Adam sinned, he forfeited his birthright possession, having sold it to Satan for that piece of fruit, placing a curse upon himself and the earth (Genesis 3:17-19). However, as Waggoner stated, “Christ has taken the whole curse, both of man and of all creation, upon Himself.” Christ’s assumption of our guilt (and our guilt’s consequences upon the whole earth) constitutes a legal action taken on behalf of all humanity. We were unable to act as our own representative. Christ stands before the violated Law of God with His righteousness, proclaiming His merits as our own. This is no legal fiction. “People are not simply counted righteous, but actually made righteous by the obedience of Christ, who is as righteous as He ever was.” (*Waggoner on Romans*, p. 102). It is the essence of Biblical redemption of possessions lost (whether that “possession” was land or liberty or life itself) as illustrated in the stories of the kinsman redeemer (see Leviticus 25:47-49; Ruth 4:1-8; Matthew 18:11). “The work of redeeming us and our inheritance, lost through sin, fell upon Him who is ‘near of kin’ unto us. It was to redeem us that He became our kinsman.” (E.G. White; *Desire of Ages*, p. 327).

But legal justification goes far deeper than just restoring the birthright possession lost through sin. “Do not forget as we proceed that the covenant and the promise are the same thing, and that it conveys land, even the whole earth made new to Abraham and his children. Remember also that since only righteousness will dwell in the new heavens and the new earth, the promise includes the making righteous of all who believe.” (*Glad Tidings*, p. 72).

Knowing that the Bible teaches that God will by no means clear the guilty (Exodus 34:7), some may be confounded by such a sweeping statement. How can God declare all of humanity legally justified before the Law? “It is true that God will by no means clear the guilty; He could not do that and still

be God. But He does something far better: He removes the guilt, so that the one formerly guilty does not need to be cleared, — he is justified, and counted as though he never had sinned.” (Waggoner; *Christ and His Righteousness*, p. 64 [1892 edition]).

After quoting from Zechariah 3:1-5, Waggoner goes on to say: “Notice in the above account that the taking away of the filthy garments is the same as causing the iniquity to pass from the person. And so we find that when Christ covers us with the robe of His own righteousness, He does not furnish a cloak for sin, but takes the sin away. And this shows that forgiveness of sins is something more than a mere form, something more than a mere entry in the books of record in heaven, to the effect that the sin has been cancelled. The forgiveness of sins is a reality; it is something tangible, something that vitally affects the individual.” (ibid. p. 66).

Universality of the Gift of Christ’s Life

How does it “vitally affect the individual”? Does this “affect” only apply to the believer as Luther and Arminius claimed, or only the elect as Calvin believed?

When Christ stepped between the living (God Himself) and the dead (Adam) at the moment Adam sinned, He did not make a distinction between the believer and unbeliever; doing something for one group but not the other (i.e. Calvin’s “elect” versus the “non-elect,” and Arminius’s “engrafted” individual versus the non-believer). In all the whole world, there was only Adam and Eve, and they were “unbelievers” when they partook of the forbidden fruit.

Adam was in rebellion against God’s plain command, and from the dialogue recorded for us in Genesis 3:9-13, it doesn’t appear that Adam was repentant or submissive toward God when confronted with his act of rebellion. Adam and Eve were blaming God for their situation. Neither is it recorded for us that Adam nor Eve “accepted” (by repentance and submission) the “offer” (so called by some) in Genesis 3:15 before they were allowed to take their next breath or heartbeat. At the moment they sinned, they both continued to live because of the pledge⁶ (the everlasting covenant) that was made between the Father and Christ before this world began. “The plan of salvation had been laid before the creation of the earth; for Christ is ‘the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world’ Revelation 13:8.” (E.G. White; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 63).

Therefore, at the moment Adam sinned the covenant promise of God went into effect, extending Adam’s probationary life. Life originates only in God, and only God can give it.

The instant man accepted the temptations of Satan, and did the very things God had said he should not do, Christ, the Son of God, stood between the living and the dead, saying, “Let the punishment fall on Me. I will stand in man’s place. He shall have another chance.”

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. (*Review and Herald*; March 12, 1901; also *The Faith I Live By*, p. 75).

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Through Adam, sin and death became his children’s heritage; but at that instant God’s grace and mercy and life were extended to the whole of humanity yet unborn. When fully revealed, it is this message of mercy, extended before the sinner could even think to ask, that converts the heart. God’s grace and mercy are *not* limited to only those who believe.

The message of mercy that was brought from the Father was meant for the ears of the whole world. Christ came to unveil the character of God. He did not select a part of the human race and place a limited value on them. His grace is for all, and the estimate He places on the human soul is infinite. His power also is unlimited by right of His position with the Father. Had it not been for the great sacrifice He made in giving His life for mankind, the human race would have perished in their sin. But after the fall of Satan and man, Christ stepped in to give us another trial. He alone could give man another opportunity to recover himself, for only He who has equal with God could carry out the great scheme of redemption. (E.G. White; *Manuscript Releases*, Vol. 13; page 160).

“The message of mercy” is far more than the “temporal benefits” of food, water, and air to breathe, or even the more exalted benefits that result from Christian living. The message of mercy is that, as a demonstration of the Godhead’s great love for humanity, Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins, thus legally justifying the entire world — wiping the slate clean, as it were. “He [Christ] came to unveil the character of God” which is *agape* (1 John 4:8) — that peculiar love that sees only good in what is inherently wicked because His creative power can make it so.⁷ That totally selfless love that would rather give up its own life if it would save someone else’s life (Philippians 2:5-8). That is far more than “temporal benefits.” Like the Bible, Ellen White defines her own meaning of phrases she uses. “Last message of mercy” is the “revelation of His character of love” (*Christ Object Lessons*, p. 415). Thus, “the message of mercy” must be the message of God’s *agape* that saved the world. When this message fully controls the heart, the believer’s response to it will be demonstrated before the world (*ibid.* p. 416).

The fundamental premise of the 1888 message⁸ is that God in Christ *has* accomplished something for the whole world. This act of God is termed “legal justification” or “forensic justification” (both terms are synonymous). Our response to what God has done for us either results in justification by faith (and sanctification) or, if rejected and despised, will result in loss of eternal life because of our persistent unbelief.

Forgiveness Was Extended Before Adam Asked

One significant statement that is often overlooked states, “Jesus became the world’s Redeemer, rendering perfect obedience to every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. He redeemed Adam’s disgraceful fall, uniting the earth [which in context must include the entire human race; Adam was corporate mankind], that had been divorced from God by sin [again, this has to include the entire human race — “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God”], to the continent of heaven.” (*Bible Echo*; Aug. 6, 1894; also found in *Bible Commentary* vol. 1, p. 1085). “In Adam” the entire human race became “divorced from God” when he sinned in Eden. “In Christ,” the entire human race was restored from the foundation of the world, but in a far more profound way than had ever before been presented in the halls of academia or from the pulpits of the world.

Romans 5:15-19 is a discourse on this subject using parallelism to explain what God has done for all humanity to satisfy the legal claims of His holy Law. As a result of what God has already done, He can make the claim found in Isaiah 44:22: “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud, thy sins: return unto Me; for I have redeemed thee.”

This one verse seems more than clear that God did something *before* there was any repentance found in His people. The “blotting out” of our transgressions in this verse is a past tense event; then God called His people to recognize what He had done for them (“I *have* redeemed thee”). This fact is not clearly understood as demonstrated by the marginal note for Isaiah 44:22 in many Bibles, which states: “Pardon Promised.” This is not what the verse says; pardon (legal justification) is not just “promised” and waiting contingently upon something else which must happen first (this is the Arminian position). The verse says that God *has already* done the pardoning and forgiving.

A.T. Jones stated:

Now what is the meaning of forgive”? The word “forgive” is composed of “for” and “give,” which otherwise is give for. To forgive, therefore, is simply to give for. For the Lord to forgive sin is to give for sin. But what does the Lord give for sin? He declares “His *righteousness* for the remission of sins.”

Therefore when the Lord forgives — gives for — sin, He gives righteousness for sin. And as the only righteousness that the Lord has is His own, it follows that the only righteousness that God gives, or can give, for sin is the righteousness of God.

This is the righteousness of God as a gift. As all men have only sinned and if they are ever clear must have forgiveness entirely free, and as the forgiveness of sin — the righteousness of God given for sin — is entirely free — this is the righteousness of God as a free gift “upon all men unto justification of life.” Rom. 5:18. (*Lessons on Faith*; p. 40).

God now asks that His people recognize this fact and return to Him, the only true God and Saviour (Isaiah 43:3). Such a demonstration of God’s love and grace found in His legal declaration that we are already forgiven should cause us to “return” to Him in heart-felt appreciation. This is God’s intention. What remains is for us to recognize what God has already done, respond to it through a

heart-appreciation of the cost of salvation,⁹ and live like we are sons and daughters of the King of the universe.

A heart-appreciation (receiving into the heart, not just a mental assent) of the gift of salvation will transform the characters of believers, bringing us into conformity to all the commandments of God (see endnote 8). Thus in one revolutionary message is presented both aspects of justification: legal (objective as relates to the Law of God) and justification by faith which is sanctification (subjective as relates to the transforming of our characters). This is the truth of the 1888 message which was given by God to prepare a people for translation out of this world of sin. It is the fundamental basis of the cleansing of the sanctuary teaching!

All Are Predestined to Eternal Life

Speaking on Ephesians 1:3-6, A.T. Jones clearly articulated the Gospel truth of forensic justification in the 1893 *General Conference Bulletin*, p. 401:

Next verse: “Having predestinated” — appointed the destiny [birthright inheritance of righteousness] that He wants us to reach, long before hand. The destiny that God fixes for man is worth having. “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.” Why did He do it then? Not because we were so good, but because He is so good; not because we were so well pleasing to Him, but because of the good pleasure of His own will. It was just Himself to do it. That’s why He did it.

Verse 6: “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? . . .

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.

We will read other verses on that presently. The thought I am after just now is that no one can have these 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.

Jones's assertion certainly seems to go well beyond mere "temporal benefits" of whatever kind. If God's redeeming work was for "all" (as Jones and the delegates at that conference agreed), then "all" must include even those that are ungodly, unbelieving sinners, at least while they remain in a state of existence this side of the fires of destruction. Those that are eternally lost find themselves thus simply because they refused to "cooperate" with God's will for them. Lack of "cooperation" or (in other words) stubborn resistance of the grace and power of God, places them outside of Christ at the end of the millennium. They are outside of the New Jerusalem when the cleansing fires of hell ignite, just as those who refused to believe Noah's message of Christ and His righteousness found themselves outside the ark when the rain started. Having thrown away their birthright possession (eternal life and the earth made new), they have chosen to be where they ultimately find themselves.

God declared, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." And, apart from the plan of redemption, human beings are doomed to death. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." But Christ gave His life to save the sinner from the death sentence [eternal annihilation]. He died that we might live. To those who receive Him He gives power that enables them to separate from that which, unless they return to their loyalty, will place them where they must be condemned and punished. (*Review and Herald*; March 15, 1906).

Justification Includes Eternal Life

Looking deeper, we find a few more questions that arise from the concept of legal justification. What is this "life" we possess; what is the source of our present animated, conscious state? To answer these questions we must consider what happens to individuals when they cease to live and breathe.

As the Scriptures teach us, no one is really "dead"¹⁰ just asleep in the grave awaiting the resurrection, whether to eternal life or total annihilation at the end of the millennium (Revelation 20:12-15). Thus, even the wicked who are lost and are now sleeping in their graves, are being restrained from absolute non-existence through the power of Christ's life.¹¹ Therefore, just as the righteous who are asleep in their graves are "in Christ" so must the wicked be. The only reason the wicked are destroyed after the millennium is that they have persistently demonstrated their unbelief in the free gift of eternal life. In unbelief, they have thrown away their birthright possession and no place is found in heaven and earth for them any more.

A.T. Jones addressed this point at the 1895 General Conference session:

The question is, Does the second Adam's righteousness embrace as many as does the first Adam's sin? Look closely. Without our consent at all, without our having anything to do with it, we were all included in the first Adam; we were there. All the human race were in the first Adam. What that first Adam, what that first man,

did, meant us; it involved us. That which the first Adam did brought us into sin, and the end of sin is death; and that touches every one of us, and involves every one of us.

Jesus Christ, the second man, took our sinful nature. He touched us “in all points.” He became we and died the death. And so in Him, and by that, every man that has ever lived upon the earth, and was involved in the first Adam, is involved in this, and will live again. There will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust. Every soul shall live again by the second Adam from the death that came by the first Adam. (for full discussion see: 1895 *General Conference Bulletin*, pp. 268-269).

Above we read that Ellen White stated (just as the Bible teaches) that Christ gave His *life* for mankind. This must be understood as being greater than merely making a sacrifice on Calvary’s cross (wonderfully great as that act was!). If the giving of His life was “merely” making a sacrifice “instead of” me paying the price, then the act has nothing much to do with me (as the Universalists believe). It took place at a particular time in history, but that was a long time ago, and is rather irrelevant to me as my life is lived today. By illustration: just as many legal declarations have been made in this great land of ours, most have little relevance to me in my day to day affairs.

However, He *gave His life*. Christ has only one life, and that is eternal life. He willingly exchanged His eternal life for our death sentence, which is annihilation — total non-existence, the “second death.” Thus in giving up His life on the cross, in giving His eternal life for us (or rather, *AS* us) — He exchanged His life of righteousness for our life of sin and death. Christ’s is a life uncondemned by the Law, and therefore possessing the implicit right to live eternally.

Standing before the Law, Christ represents humanity in two ways: He is corporate humanity as the Last Adam dying on Calvary as the human race’s legal proxy (in compliance with and ratifying the everlasting covenant). All humanity were “in Christ” as He died on Calvary. He also individually represents us as our personal Advocate before the Law through our faith in His work (His high priestly ministry; Hebrews 10:10-22; *Desire of Ages*, p. 113). In Christ we are not only declared righteous by that single act on Calvary (legally justified before the Law that condemned us), but also we have been given eternal life by that same act (though under a probationary stipulation). “Therefore we know that Christ Himself is given to every one of us. The fact that men live is an evidence that Christ has been given to them, for Christ is the ‘life,’ and the ‘life’ is ‘the light of men.” (*Glad Tidings*, p. 11; also see 1 John 5:10-13; John 1:4, 9; 14:6).

There is only one Life, and all that live do so by the grace of that Life being extended to us as a gift. The revealing to mankind of the Godhead’s covenant promise was done in Eden (Genesis. 3:15). The ratification of the Godhead’s covenant promise was accomplished at Calvary. It was Christ’s life that was extended to Adam in Eden at the moment he rebelled against God (when he should have died eternally according to Genesis 2:17 and Isaiah 59:2; being separated from God is to be without life). When Adam was created, he was given eternal life contingent upon his obedience concerning the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Therefore, when Christ “stepped between the living and the dead,” Adam was restored to his previous state of eternal life (though receiving it as a second

probation). When Adam died 930 years later he didn't do anything except "fall asleep" in Christ, and when he is finally resurrected, Adam will go on living the life he had before he died, but in a new, incorruptible body. His next breath and thought will take up right where it left off when he fell asleep in Christ.¹²

What we're dealing with when discussing "forensic justification" and "temporal benefits" is much, much more than food and water and air to breathe. It is eternal life. We can believe that we *have been* given eternal life, appreciate the gift and through faith in God's power over Satan and sin, cultivate righteousness by faith in our probationary status here and now. Then we will go on living that same eternal life in the New Earth either after resurrection or translation (Enoch, Elijah, and Moses attest to this fact). Or, we can disbelieve this "message of mercy" of God's redeeming love, throw that eternal life away, and die in the flames of hell, which was only "prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). It's our choice.

Irresistible Grace?

Whether or not redeeming grace is resistible was a watershed subject between Calvin and Arminius. Calvin taught that those who finally obtain salvation do so, not by any action of their own free will, but because the sovereign God declared them "predestined" to salvation from the foundation of the world. Arminians refute this as illogical. Instead they believe that prevenient grace is equally provided to all persons. For the Arminians the only reason that anyone ever finds salvation is because they have appropriated for themselves this gracious provision.

The 1888 message goes much farther than Calvin or Arminius thought to take the idea of legal justification. The true Gospel is revolutionary in its scope and purpose, but it can be resisted through persistent unbelief. God never removes our free will.

"By the righteousness of One the free gift came upon all men to 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 exemption. If it came upon only those who have some special qualification, then it would not be a free gift.

It is a fact, therefore, plainly stated in the Bible, that the gift of righteousness and life in Christ have come to every man on earth. There is not the slightest reason why every man that had ever lived should not be saved unto eternal life, except that they would not have it. So many spurn the gift offered so freely. (Waggoner; *Waggoner on Romans*; p. 101).

Waggoner declared the same thought in his book *The Glad Tidings* (all emphases in original). "Many say of Christ, 'We will not have this Man to reign over us,' and thrust the blessing of God from them. But redemption is for *all*. *All* have been purchased with the precious blood — the life

— of Christ, and *all* may be, if they will, free from sin and death. By that blood we are redeemed from ‘the futile ways inherited from your fathers.’ 1 Peter 1:18.” (p. 61). And on a previous page, “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.” (p. 14). To drive this truth home, after quoting Romans 5:18 Waggoner again emphatically writes: “God, who is no respecter of persons, ‘has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.’ Ephesians 1:3. The gift is ours to keep. *If anyone has not this blessing, it is because he has not recognized the gift, or has deliberately thrown it away.*” (p. 66).

The logic follows as day follows night: if Christ has already died our second death — paid the legal penalty for our sin — the only way we can be lost is to veto through unbelief what He has done for us. The “unforgivable sin” is persistent rebellion against God’s redeeming love. There is no sacrifice for genuine rebellion. When God’s character of love is fully revealed, as it was to the angels in heaven, and sinners persist in their rebellion, no provision has been made for such transgression.¹³ Persistent unbelief reveals genuine rebellion that resides in the heart. This is the only sin that will banish human beings to hell (John 3:18-21; 5:24-29).

Final Implications

The focus of the 1888 message was the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary, and as Jones put it in *Consecrated Way to Christian Perfection*, this must begin at the fountain of sin — in the hearts of the people.¹⁴ The life-giving truth of legal justification, when rightly presented, provides the motivating power to surrender our hearts to the God who loves us so much that He willingly laid down His own life that we might have eternal life with Him. “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). What people around the world are yearning to hear is how they can be set free from sin. Only the “most precious message” of Christ and His righteousness (and all that this entails) can bring this comfort to the people.

Jones stated at the 1893 General Conference: “Why, brethren, the world is ready to hear the message, *when we get the message*; the world is ready to hear it, and they will hear it. . . . Well, what is that all summed up in one thing? What expresses it? — The Gospel. What is it to preach the Gospel? It is to preach the mystery of God, which is Christ in men the hope of glory.” (p. 147; emphasis in original). The message Jones was referring to is the “mystery of God” — that sinful human beings can overcome sin through faith in God’s power to deliver from sin and death. The “mystery of God” includes the 1888 message elements of forensic justification and its corollary of justification by faith in Christ’s work as fallen humanity’s representative, which results in the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary. This then, is the sum total of the everlasting covenant promise: If we do not resist His work, God intends to deliver us from sin and restore us righteous in the New Earth.

Well, then, first, nothing will support us but the power of God. And where do we find the power of God? In Jesus Christ. “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God;” that is what He is. Where do we find the character of God? In Christ. Where do we find all things, the great things of God? In Christ. Where do we find a better life than this? — The life of God, in Christ.

Well, then, what in the world have we to preach to the world, but Christ? What have we to depend upon, but Christ? Then what is the third angel’s message but Christ? Christ the power of God; Christ the unsearchable riches of God; Christ the righteousness of God, Christ the life of God; Christ is God! That is the message that now we are to give to the world. Is it not? Then what does the world need? Christ. Do they need anything else? No. Is there anything else? No. “In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the godhead bodily, and ye are complete in Him.” (1893 *General Conference Bulletin*; p. 147).

The focus of the Gospel is the presentation of Christ and His righteousness. The 1888 message shows how this relates to individuals living at the end of time, during this cosmic cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary. When this focus is maintained, all else will fall into its place. Evangelism under the power of the Latter Rain will move like lightning around the world (Revelation 18:1-4). People will more easily understand the prophecies in Daniel and Revelation; from this understanding, people will be able to better comprehend what is going on in the world around them as the final events are taking shape in the religious and political worlds (the making of the image to the beast that will deny our religious liberties).

All these final events are contingent upon one thing. God is patiently waiting for the day His character is revealed in believing human beings. “Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own. It is the privilege of every Christian not only to look for but to hasten the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*; p. 69). Some day soon, the Lord will point to His people and declare to watching universe: “Here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus!” May our goal be to hasten that day, is my prayer!

Endnotes:

1. “Temporal benefits” are variously and broadly defined by theologians, ranging from the basics of food, water and air to breathe, to benefits such as personal honor, fame, riches, enjoyments, and health. Some contrast temporal benefits with the temporal consequences of sin, thus claiming that the benefits are those that arise from living a righteous life, these being the blessing of fellowship with like believers, pleasant opportunities arising from a family managed

under the influence of Christian principles, to the enjoyment of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in ones life as He teaches, guides and illuminates. These are all distinguished from “spiritual benefits” which are defined as justification, regeneration (or sanctification), redemption from the death penalty, and eventually, glorification.

2. Thomas M. Lindsay, MA., D.D. (Principal, United Free Church College, Glasgow); *A History of the Reformation*, vol. 1; (New York; Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1928); pp. 448 and 451; italics in original.

3. Dutch theologian and politician Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920); *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, vol. 2; pp. 369-370 (as originally pub. in 1888, and 1900 in America); online source found at: <http://homepage.mac.com/shanerosenthal/reformationink/akjust2.htm>

4. “For God chooses no one unto eternal life except in Christ, who prepared it by his own blood for them who should believe on his name. From this it seems to follow that, since God regards no one in Christ unless they are engrafted in him by faith, election is peculiar to believers, and the phrase “certain men,” in the definition, refers to believers. For Christ is a means of salvation to no one unless he is apprehended by faith. Therefore, that phrase “in Christ” marks the meritorious cause by which grace and glory are prepared, and the existence of the elect in him, without which they could not be elected in him.” Jacobus Arminius, *Writings*, III:311.

5. All the reformers mentioned in this document retained their Catholic notion on the “state of the dead,” or the idea of an ever-living soul apart from any connection to the fleshy body. They could not see that Christ’s death was the equivalent of the eternal annihilation of the wicked. Thus, they could not have a full comprehension of what Christ suffered on the cross, nor what His resurrection from the dead truly meant.

6. “The salvation of human beings is a vast enterprise, that calls into action every attribute of the divine nature. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have pledged themselves to make God’s children more than conquerors through Him that loved them.” *Review and Herald*, January 27, 1903.

7. A.T. Jones; 1893 *General Conference Bulletin*, p. 381: “In me is no righteousness; here is all ungodliness; here is all uncleanness; God has set forth that same One who declared the word and the worlds came and who declared the word ‘light,’ and light came — He has set forth that same One to declare righteousness in place of this body of sin. [Congregation: ‘Praise the Lord’]. In this place, this body, this character of sin, He calls that which is not as though it were, and, thank the Lord, it is. [Congregation: ‘Amen.’] In this place which is all uncleanness He has set forth that blessed One to declare holiness and He calls this thing which is not as though it were, and, thanks be to His almighty power, it is. [Congregation: ‘Amen’]. And I am glad of it. ‘Calleth those things which be not as though they were.’ A sinner is not righteous; the ungodly are ungodly; but God calls that which is not, as though it were and it is. [Congregation: “Amen”]. It is.”

8. “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. . . . This is 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.” (*Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 91-92).

9. “You may say that you believe in Jesus, when you have an appreciation of the cost of salvation. You may make this claim, when you feel that Jesus died for you on the cruel cross of Calvary; when you have an intelligent, understanding faith that His death makes it possible for you to cease from sin, and to perfect a righteous character through the grace of God, bestowed upon you as the purchase of Christ’s blood. The eyes of fallen men may be anointed with the eye-salve of spiritual comprehension, and they may see themselves as they really are,—poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked. They may be brought to realize their need of repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” (E.G. White; *Review and Herald*, July 24, 1888).

10. See for example Psalm 13:3; Matthew 27:52; John 11:11-14; Acts 2:29, 34; 13:36; 1 Corinthians 15:51; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-15; Hebrews 9:27).

11. “In consequence of Adam’s sin, death passed upon the whole human race. All alike go down into the grave. And through the provisions of the plan of salvation, all are to be brought forth from their graves. ‘There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust;’ ‘for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.’ But a distinction is made between the two classes that are brought forth. ‘All that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.’ They who have been ‘accounted worthy’ of the resurrection of life are ‘blessed and holy.’ ‘On such the second death hath no power.’” *Great Controversy*, pp. 544-545.

12. Though this statement from *Great Controversy* is regarding the wicked when they are raised from their graves after the millennium, the idea applies to all. “In that vast throng are multitudes of the long-lived race that existed before the Flood; men of lofty stature and giant intellect, who, yielding to the control of fallen angels, devoted all their skill and knowledge to the exaltation of themselves; men whose wonderful works of art led the world to idolize their genius, but whose cruelty and evil inventions, defiling the earth and defacing the image of God, caused Him to blot them from the face of His creation. There are kings and generals who conquered nations, valiant men who never lost a battle, proud, ambitious warriors whose approach made kingdoms tremble. In death these experienced no change. *As they come up from the grave, they resume the current of their thoughts just where it ceased.* They are actuated by the same desire to conquer that ruled them when they fell. (E.G. White; *Great Controversy*; p. 664; emphasis supplied).

13. E.G. White; *The Story of Redemption*, p. 17-18.

14. “Therefore the very first work in the cleansing of the sanctuary was the cleansing of the people. That which was preliminary and essential to the cleansing of the sanctuary itself, to the finishing of the transgression and bringing in everlasting righteousness, there, was the finishing of transgression, and the making an end of sins, and making reconciliation for iniquity, and bringing in everlasting righteousness *in the heart and life of each one of the people* themselves. When the stream that flowed into the sanctuary was thus stopped at its source, then, and then alone, could the sanctuary itself be cleansed from the sins and transgression which, *from the people, by the intercession of the priests*, had flowed into the sanctuary.” (*Consecrated Way to Christian Perfection*, pp. 118-119 [1905 edition]).