

# NEW ENGLAND PASTOR

*"One interest will prevail . . . Christ our righteousness."*

January/February 2010



## LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

LEARNING HOW TO ALIGN OUR PRAYERS WITH GOD'S

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## NEW ENGLAND PASTOR

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New England Pastor is a bi-monthly magazine for pastors in New England, carrying forth the vision that Ellen White had for the area over a century ago: “I saw that when the message shall increase greatly in power, then the providence of God will open and prepare the way in the East for much more to be accomplished than can be at the present time” (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, p. 149, ). It is free of charge to those who pastor in New England. For all those living outside of New England who would like to subscribe, please call or email us.



## Recent History and Our Calling

by Bill Brace

No doubt many of you receive a magazine on a somewhat regular basis that is critical of the teachings and belief system of Seventh-day Adventism. It is the work, primarily, of a former pastor within the ranks of our denomination. According to *Wikipedia* (which I will admit cannot always be trusted), he left the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1981. That would place his departure approximately at the same time as another more well-known figure who, greatly beloved by many in the higher echelons of church government and multitudes of laity alike, was in the midst of a theological controversy with the brethren. If my guess is accurate, the more well-known personage had a theological impact upon the propagator of the current magazine intended to call Seventh-day Adventists away from what many of us believe to be God's remnant Church.

I write this short, above introduction to let you know that I recall, first of all, a summarizing observation that was made in the presentation by the latter personage which brought the whole affair to the forefront of the denomination. The speaker, in an attempt to categorically dismiss the denomination's central theological emphasis, quoted Mary Magdalene's response to the inquiry of the two angels on resurrection morning with the words, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him" (John 20:13, KJV). Thus, in quoting Mary, the speaker suggested there were problems in the church's teaching of the gospel—at best, anyway. At worst, and this is the way I took it, the gospel had disappeared from our screens completely, both in the classrooms of our schools and in the pulpits of our churches.

Such accusations led to an eventual

dismissal and defrocking. What else could the leadership have done under the circumstances? I, for one, felt pity in my heart for those who were intimately involved on both sides of the issue, especially toward those who had given every ounce of their energies to proclaim the eternal biblical principles of the gospel and the truths of this church which have the power to vindicate God's character before the universe.

Make no mistake: God's bride is precious to Him. Each time I read Ephesians 5, I am reminded of the depths of the Godhead's love and devotion to her. However, the historical events I refer to above caused me to evaluate my own preaching in the immediate aftermath of this traumatic denominational episode. I began to wonder: What was I preaching? Was it permeated with the gospel of Jesus Christ? Or was it possible I had a dim understanding of Christ's promise: "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself" (John 12:32, NIV)? So I began more earnestly to pray and to study. And then, providentially, I do believe, God sent someone into my life who assisted me toward a greater understanding of the beautiful gospel of Seventh-day Adventism in the context of the Most Holy Place ministry of Jesus Christ. Since that time, the message of this denomination has become more and more special to me, and it has safe-guarded my steps on the pathway to eternity during the time that, sadly, several of my old seminary colleagues have fallen by the wayside.

But author Eric Metaxas writes in his wonderfully inspiring book on Wilbur Wilberforce, of the conditions in the churches in England during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century: "England's pulpits were filled with . . . 'lukewarm professors' lukewarmly professing a lukewarm faith

that thrilled no one and challenged no one."<sup>1</sup>

Is it possible that some contemporary, unbiased observer could make the same comments about our preaching today? I would hope that never would this be so about me. How about you? May none of us become complacent in our preaching. May it be that we are so thrilled with what we preach that as soon as one Sabbath closes, we anxiously and excitedly await our appointment in the pulpit again the following week! However, the "fire in the belly" will only continue to be a reality if we, as pastors, hunger and thirst for righteousness.

I do not believe I exaggerate when I suggest that perilous times are ahead; in fact, more perilous than ever for both us and this beloved denomination. And those turbulent days may come sooner than any of us imagine. Let us, therefore, be sure of whom we believe *now*. God's very honor is/will be at stake. The call is to faithfulness.

1 Eric Metaxas, *Amazing Grace* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 170.

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# “Lord, Teach Us to Pray”—Part 1

by Andi Hunsaker



**A**s Christians, prayer is a part of our lives, but often is a supplemental rather than a fundamental portion of our experience. For many of us, prayer is more of a praying-on-the-fly experience with the expectation of powerful and detailed answers from the One to whom we prayed. We pray quickly and distractedly, depositing our wish list at the throne of Grace, somewhere between a hurried breakfast and racing out the door to begin the morning school drop-offs and commute, expecting to have the order filled by day's end. Plowing through the day with the cares of this world, we spend little time in contemplation of things as they are in Heaven or any real connection to the One to whom these lists are addressed.

For many, the scenario is quite different. Agonizing prayers for healing of a loved one, a job for the primary family provider, restoration in a marriage gone bad are offered up to God in earnestness and sincerity, but the ceiling is as brass and the Lord is silent. To make matters worse, answers to simple prayers filter down to our ears; the Lord causes the bananas to be on sale at exactly the price asked for or a parking spot is found miraculously. In all of these situations, the cry goes up: “Does God not see? Does He not hear?”

My prayer is that whatever situation is yours, may the Word speak. Luke 11:1 and Matthew 6:2 record what is known as the Lord's Prayer. Luke, however, records for us a version given specifically to the disciples. The beauty of the first verse is not to be missed. It says “And it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased that one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray’” (Luke 11:1).<sup>1</sup> Christ was no stranger to prayer. Prayer was a

pattern in the life of Jesus. The gospels record many instances in which Jesus prayed. These are in and of themselves instructive to us; Luke 6:12 says, “He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.” This was on the eve of His making a decision of global import, the selection of the twelve disciples. Jesus knew He was going to the cross, for He came to die. But He needed to train those who would carry out His work here on earth after His death, and so He was driven to His knees to wrestle with God all night in prayer to

***Agonizing prayers for healing of a loved one, a job for the primary family provider, restoration in a marriage gone bad are offered up to God in earnestness and sincerity, but the ceiling is as brass and the Lord is silent.***

commune with His Father about whom to choose.

In English, several words are used to say that He spent all night in prayer, but the Greek uses one word: *dianuktereuo*. This word bespeaks persistence at a task through the night. It has the sense of toiling through the night, staying at it all night long. He likely prayed between ten and twelve hours at a time because of the immensity of His mission—to be about His Father's business.

Again, we see him praying out of a heart filled with grief and sorrow at the

news of the death of John the Baptist. The scripture says, “He went up on a mountain by Himself to pray. And when evening had come, He was alone there” (Matthew 14:23). Observe, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, needed to pray. These were no perfunctory prayers. His prayers were either borne out of great grief (Matthew 4:9-23), compassion for the multitudes (Mark 1:32-35; Luke 5:12-16), His transfiguration (Luke 9:28-35), and yes, even for Peter—the man who would betray Him (Luke 22:31,32). Of course we cannot forget the most anguished prayer in the garden of Gethsemane where He began to taste death for every man (Mark 14:32). Yes, the Son of Man labored all night in prayer with a heart full of care and compassion for us and that His mission would not fail.

I suppose that it was one of these prayer sessions that His disciples witnessed, giving them a burning desire to have that same experience. The pen of inspiration puts it like this:

The disciples had been for a short time absent from their Lord when on their return they found Him absorbed in communion with God. . . . The hearts of the listening disciples were deeply moved. . . . They marked the look of peace upon His face, the sense of refreshment that seemed to pervade His presence.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, the disciples observed something about Jesus as He prayed and after He prayed and yearned for that very experience. Hence, they asked, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

So He taught them a prayer very familiar to all. But one phrase in the prayer is often overlooked: “Your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven” (Luke 11:2). What could that phrase mean? Could it be that this thought should be

uppermost in our minds when we pray? The phrase begs two questions. First, what is His will? And second, how is His will manifested in Heaven? 1 John 5:14 says, “If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.” This does not mean that God is deaf but rather when we pray according to “*His will*,” the desires of His heart, there is a resonance there. Job said, “I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food” (Job 23:12). Jeremiah had a similar experience when he said, “Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart” (Jeremiah 15:16). They found a resonance with God and were on the same page.

It behooves us, then, to know the will of God. The apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians gives us insight into “His will.” He writes,

Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will. . . . Having made known to us the mystery of His will. . . . that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things which are in Heaven and which are on Earth in Him (Ephesians 1:4,5,9,10).

Several practical points leap out of this very theologically dense passage. Long before sin entered the world, resulting in separation between the Creator and His creation, God had a plan which was His highest pleasure to carry out. The plan involved adopting us back to Him—this is His will. The text says that in “the fullness of the times,” God would adopt us. Does that sound familiar? Galatians 4:4,5 tells us that “when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son . . . to redeem those who were under law that we might receive the adoption as sons.”

Our adoption as sons is only a

portion of His will, however, because the rest of Ephesians 1:10 says that in the fullness of the times, not only are we adopted but that He will gather together “all things in Christ both which are in Heaven and which are on Earth.” This is where we left off in the Lord’s Prayer in Luke 11. The apostle Paul again has words for us, which shed light on this passage. He says, “And by Him to reconcile all things to Himself . . . whether things on Earth or things in Heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross” (Colossians 1:20). Paul here lays out for us what it took to adopt us and reunite forever things in Heaven and things on Earth: the precious blood of Jesus. It was the will

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and pleasure of God and Jesus, for the counsel of peace was between them both (Zechariah 6:13), to empty all Heaven to redeem, restore, and adopt all creation in order for things on Earth—our hearts—to be as the hearts of those in Heaven.

What are things like in Heaven? We get a sneak peek in Revelation 4 and 5

where John the Revelator saw amazing and moving things. Four symbolic living creatures “full of eyes” (discernment) surrounded the throne upon which One sat. Continually they said “Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God Almighty. . . . You are worthy O Lord to receive glory and honor and power: for You created all things” (Revelation 4:8-11). This they repeated over and over without rest day or night. Not only did John see this, he also saw that as the living creatures were giving glory and honor, the twenty-four elders fell down before Him who sat on the throne, worshipping Him and casting their crowns before Him.

Then, as John the Revelator continues to look at the throne lo, in the midst of the throne, he sees the slain Lamb of God (Revelation 5:6). The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb and sang a new song! The song was “You are worthy . . . For You were slain and have redeemed us to God by Your blood” (Revelation 5:8,9). Then John sees something great: ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands of angels joined in! But the scene gets better. He sees that every creature which is in Heaven and on the Earth all join in the song (Revelation 5:11-13). When we appreciate the width and length, the depth and height of God’s love for us and the enormity of the sacrifice of Jesus for us, our praying will be different. We will pray according to His will—our sanctification, our adoption, the bringing together of all things on Earth and in Heaven—and things will be on Earth as they are in Heaven.

1 All scripture references *New King James Version*, unless otherwise specified.

2 Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1955), 102.

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# The Latter Rain is the Message of Christ and His Righteousness—Part 2

by Jerry Finneman

This article is Part 2. Part 1 was in the November/December 2009 issue, also available at [www.newenglandpastor.com](http://www.newenglandpastor.com).

—Editors

In 1892 Ellen White wrote that the “loud cry” had already begun. She wrote in the *Review & Herald*: “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. This is the beginning of the light of the angel whose glory shall fill the whole earth.”<sup>1</sup>

Just as Joel predicted that the specified events of the early rain and the latter rain, symbolizing the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, were associated with the message of righteousness, even so Ellen White proclaimed that in her time, prior to 1892, the latter rain/loud cry event, was a message that had its beginning in the revelation of Christ and His righteousness sometime prior to that date. In accepting the *message*, people received the beginning of the “loud cry.” But in rejecting the *message*, they rejected the beginning of the “loud cry.”

This is the message for the last days. This “everlasting gospel” message is the good news of the righteousness of God in Christ. It will extend worldwide as stated in the passages Rev 12:6 and 18:1. It will swell to a “loud cry” in proclaiming God’s glorious character of righteousness as sketched in Rev 18:1. This message will call out God’s people who are in Babylon. They will be called to stand with Him in the closing scenes of earth’s history (Rev 18:4).

Accompanying the proclamation of this good news of “great joy,” is a most fearful warning against those who reject and fight against it (Rev 14:9-11). The fall of Babylon comes about by persistent neglect, denial, and rejection of the loud cry.

Thus Joel’s prophecy will be fulfilled in judgment and in salvation.

That prophetic proclamation of salvation by Joel is the message of “righteousness according to righteousness” by the “Teacher of righteousness.” The teacher is Christ in the Person of the Holy Spirit. The teaching of Christ and His righteousness is “the latter rain.”

Babylon’s gospel may counterfeit the genuine in experience, but not in doctrine. It is by the doctrine of Christ, believed, that we will know we are one in the Lord.

Any proclamation of any teaching

***Any proclamation of any teaching of “the latter rain” or “the loud cry” or of “the refreshing from the presence of the Lord” must have Christ and His righteousness as central in its teaching and in the experience that follows this teaching. Anything else is bogus.***

of “the latter rain” or “the loud cry” or of “the refreshing from the presence of the Lord” must have Christ and His righteousness as central in its teaching and in the experience that follows this teaching. Anything else is bogus. It is another gospel, even a perverted gospel and not “the truth of the gospel” (Gal 1:8,7; 2:5, 13); in short, it is a false latter

rain.

Today people are wandering in a parched desert experience, feeling they must have a “latter rain” experience. And some pray earnestly for it. We do not deny a genuine experience with the Lord. However, the experience must come especially from the central doctrine of Scripture, even the teaching of “righteousness according to [God’s] righteousness.” Some persons long for an experience apart from doctrine of any kind. Some (as with many within modern day Charismatica) deny doctrine because of their false experience. This was not unlike the fanatics in Luther’s time.

Luther was faced big time with this phenomenon. While protected in the Wartburg castle, the plague of “Enthusiasm” apart from doctrine struck Wittenburg, the center of the Reformation. Luther knew that one day it would strike. He said, “I always expected that Satan would send us this plague.”<sup>2</sup> They went into Catholic churches and pulled down idols that decorated the interior. Luther met the “Enthusiasts” with the Word of God.

From his earlier days as a reformer, Martin Luther recognized that great reformers before him dealt with principles of reform in attempting to change the Dark Age Church. Reformers within the medieval church, such as Peter Waldo, John Huss, and John Wycliffe, addressed abuses in the life of the church in the centuries before 1517.

In the 16th century, Erasmus of Rotterdam, a great Humanist scholar, was the chief proponent of liberal Catholic reform that attacked moral abuses and popular superstitions in the church and urged the imitation of Christ. These movements reveal an ongoing concern for reform within the church in the years before Luther posted his

Ninety-five Theses on the door of the Castle Church, Wittenberg, on Oct. 31, 1517.

Luther claimed that what distinguished him from previous reformers was that while they attacked corruption in the life of the church, he went to the theological root of the problem—the perversion of the church’s doctrine of redemption and grace.

He remarked that “Life is as evil among us as among the papists, thus we do not argue about life but about doctrine. Whereas Wyclif and Hus attacked the immoral lifestyle of the papacy, I challenge primarily its doctrine.”<sup>3</sup>

“Others before me have contested practice. But to contest doctrine, that is to grab the goose by the neck!”<sup>4</sup>

The fanatics in Wittenburg fought the objective doctrine of justification, from the Scriptures alone, through grace alone, and because of Christ alone. Instead, they pushed a subjective experience on everyone who would listen. This was in place of, and at the expense of, doctrine.

### **An Illustration of Doctrine and Experience**

Doctrine is like the skeletal framework of the human body. The covering of skin represents experience. Just as the living human body needs both bones and skin, so we need both doctrine and experience. Experience without doctrine is like skin without the skeletal framework. This is a gelatinous substance having the consistency of jelly. It is something of a deficient “flabby” character shaped by every changing current of experience. Try to wrap your arms around a glob of jelly.

On the other hand, doctrine without experience is a skeleton of bare bones deficient of subjective spirituality. Who in their right mind would long to hug either the glob of jelly or the skeleton? We need both doctrine and experience with the experience, yes, covering the doctrine but following the doctrine. This

gives us both structure and shape; both strength and softness to those who touch us.

Let’s revisit the statement about the beginning of the loud cry. It reads: “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. This is the beginning of the light of the angel whose glory shall fill the whole earth.”<sup>5</sup>

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Clearly here, Mrs. White considered “the loud cry” – “the latter rain” – as, first of all, a message, a doctrine, a teaching, in short a “revelation.” It was in fact “the revelation of the righteousness of Christ.” This is the message contained in the prophecy of Joel regarding the “former rain” and the “later rain.” Both downpours from heaven are teachings of “righteousness

according to righteousness” taught by the Heavenly “Teacher of righteousness.”

This is our message for today and for tomorrow. This message will prepare a people to stand in “the time of trouble” in the near future. I want to relate a conversation and ask some questions in closing.

After discussing the message of Christ and His righteousness with a pastor, lasting several hours, there was no agreement. As we walked to the door, he revealed a state of mental incongruity as he turned to me and said, “I don’t believe your doctrine, but I sense the presence of the Holy Spirit.” He evidently could not understand that the presence of the Holy Spirit was joined to the doctrine.

So how is it with you? How do you relate to the Holy Spirit and His work? Are you seeking to understand the “loud cry” as the message of Christ and His righteousness followed by an experience of “righteousness according to righteousness?” Or are you attempting to pray down the Spirit, separate and disassociated from that message? Do you think you can have a genuine experience with the Holy Spirit without the message of the righteousness of Christ?

- 1 White, *The Review & Herald*, Nov. 22, 1892.
- 2 Merle D’Aubigne, *History of the Reformation*, vol. 3 (New York: American Tract Society, 1849), 328.
- 3 Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart, (New York: Image Books, 1992), 50.
- 4 Quoted in James M. Kittelson, “The Accidental Revolutionary,” *Christian History* 1 April 1992.
- 5 *The Review & Herald*, Nov. 22, 1892.

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# Wrestling with Wesley's Gospel—Part 1

by Steven Grabiner



It is clear that within the pages of Scripture there exists, what can best be described

as *tensions*. For example, there are clear passages that emphasize God's sovereignty, His fore-ordaining of events and His foreknowledge. With that needs to be paired the biblical emphasis on free will, the times when God's sovereignty is frustrated, and the reality of *risk* in the plan of salvation.

These tensions should cause the bible student to closely examine his/her stance on bible doctrines, to ensure one maintains the biblical harmony. I have recently been impressed with how John Wesley, the leader of the 18th century Methodist revival, did this in an area which seems irreconcilable. At first glance, it appears that Wesley was inconsistent in his teaching on total depravity (the human condition under the control of sin) and human responsibility. However, a closer look reveals an underlying harmony.

Wesley was an extremely multifaceted individual. He was an organizer, preacher, educator, and a powerful influence in English society. He preached tens of thousands of sermons over his lifetime. Although it is certain that he repeated sermons, his journal records numerous accounts of his preparing sermons as he traveled. Often those sermons were prepared during the day that they were to be preached. This method of sermon preparation would not lend itself to an extreme precision in thoughts and words. It is inevitable that some contradiction or ambiguity should be found among his voluminous recorded sermons.

At times, it appears that there are glaring contradictions in his teachings. Yet, as with the Scriptures, further study shows a deeper harmony. In studying Wesley's understanding of original sin, preventing grace<sup>1</sup> (his term), and his resulting "limited

universalism" (my term, admittedly an awkward one), a harmonious gospel becomes clearer.

## Original Sin

In 1757, Wesley published a treatise entitled *The Doctrine of Original Sin According to Scriptures, Reason and Experience*. Two years later this was shortened into the sermon *Original Sin*. This sermon was included in the book of *44 Sermons*, which is a standard for Methodist beliefs. This well-considered sermon demonstrates Wesley's understanding on this subject. The sermon has three main divisions. The

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first discusses humanity before the flood; the second considers humanity's condition at the present time; and the third section draws conclusions. Wesley opens the sermon by inferring that there are those

"in the present country" who hold a view of the human nature that is not in harmony with Scripture. These people, Wesley stresses, consider humanity to be little less than God.<sup>2</sup>

In the 18th century Enlightenment, differing understandings on the nature of man were being considered. Emphasis was being given to the role of reason and the progress of human nature. The century dealt more with experience than with knowledge; the question was: is experience to be judged by reason or Scripture? One view held that *reason* is sufficient to lead a person to faith. It was the idea that humanity had the innate capacity to come to God that Wesley contended against in this sermon.

Wesley did not in any way view original sin as fictional. He understood that the present human condition is a direct result of Adam's fall. His argument was that when "fallen, sinful Adam" began to have children, they received the results of Adam's transgression. These children were formed in his likeness, which is a likeness that is fallen and sinful. As a result of this, all of humanity is "by nature 'dead in trespasses and sin.'" Every person receives this heritage. In the exposition of his opening text, Genesis 6:5, Wesley emphasizes the universality of the effects of sin. He underlines the fact that the fall has affected "the whole human race," "every man born," and the "whole of human nature."<sup>3</sup>

The universal effects of sin has many dimensions. Wesley emphatically preached that due to Adam's sin, human nature is devoid of all natural goodness. Humanity, in the "natural state," that is, without the work of God's grace, has only evil thoughts, and "that continually." By nature, a person has no knowledge of God. By nature, no one loves God or delights in Him. By nature, children would grow up without any religion at all.<sup>4</sup> Sin has brought about the entire corruption of the whole human nature.

Wesley emphasized this total depravity throughout his sermon. On behalf of those who would argue against original sin, he raises a question: “Was there not good mingled with the evil? Was there not light intermixed with the darkness?” He then gives the unequivocal answer, “No; none at all.” Wesley stresses his point by attributing *atheism* to everyone. He states that before God opens the understanding, all are “without God, or rather *atheists in the world*.” Later in the sermon he concludes, “Thus are all men atheists in the world.”<sup>5</sup> Due to Adam’s fall, the human race, by nature, is totally separate from God. Humanity, by nature, has no inclinations to, nor knowledge of God.

Wesley understands the doctrine of total depravity to be a key doctrine which separates Christians from heathen. He argues: “Here is the shibboleth: Is man by nature filled with all manner of evil? Is he void of all good? Is he wholly fallen? Is his soul totally corrupted? . . . Allow this, and you are so far a Christian. Deny it, and you are but a heathen still.”<sup>6</sup>

Here Wesley is very much in harmony with Luther and Calvin. They frequently used the concepts of total depravity and total corruption to describe the human condition. Both spiritual life and the image of God in the soul were lost at the fall. In losing the image of God, all virtue, all righteousness, and true holiness were also lost. The image of God was replaced with that of another image.

Wesley pairs the loss of God’s

image in the soul with a loss of love toward God. Instead of love toward God reigning supreme in the heart, now a new love reigns there. This is the love that is devoted to self. Wesley states it thus: “We worship ourselves, when we pay that honour to ourselves, which is due to God only. Therefore all pride is idolatry; it is ascribing to ourselves what is due to God alone.”<sup>7</sup> He contends that the giving of honor to oneself is evidence that the image of God has been replaced by the image of Satan. That “Satan has stamped his own image on our heart” is demonstrated by both human pride and self-will.

Wesley’s understanding of original sin is very orthodox. In contending against those who hold in high esteem the ability of the human will, Wesley painted a very bleak picture. He understood the fall to have brought about a total depravity, an utter inability of humanity to move toward God. The fall has brought a spiritual death and the loss of the image of God within the soul. Humanity, by nature, does not have the capacity to know God. God’s image has been replaced with that of the devil and with a feral nature. Toward the end of the sermon, Wesley points out that the remedy for the fall is the healing of the soul. This is done by a revelation of the knowledge of God. How this revelation is given involves a unique Wesleyan understanding.

Up to this point, Wesley has been in harmony with the Reformed views. It is in the solution to the fall that Wesley made a striking break with Calvin, Luther, and

the Continental Reformers. Calvinism continues to argue that only the elect will experience God’s grace, thus moving them toward God. For Calvinism, this grace is sovereign and cannot be resisted in any of its aspects. Thus, God’s grace is understood in terms of electing some to salvation. It is in his understanding of the work of grace that John Wesley significantly differs from the Reformers and many of his contemporaries.

- 1 We need to remember that the older English meaning of “prevent” was to precede. Today Wesley might use the phrase “preceding grace.” Compare 1 Thessalonians 4.15 KJV with a modern translation.
- 2 This sermon can be found on line at <http://new.gbpm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/44/> as of Nov 12, 2009.
- 3 John Wesley, *44 Sermons* (London: J. Alfred Sharp, n.d.), 535-6.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 540.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 539.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 545.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 541.

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# What is Faith?—Part 1

by Jonathan Martin



The issue of righteousness by faith is very much in vogue today within and without the Adventist Church.

There are few who would deny that it is Jesus, not our works, who saves us. Yet in the back of their minds, many people still feel uneasy about it and are therefore not able to find any practical application for this doctrine. We all say “amen” when we hear the preacher boldly declare that we are saved not of works lest anyone should boast. Yet in the back of our minds we know that in order to get into heaven we have to be good, at least most of the time.

What makes this voice so hard to silence is that it speaks from the Bible. Jesus told his hearers that their righteousness had to exceed that of the Pharisees if they were to be saved (see Matthew 5:20). The context reveals that He was not talking about some substitute righteousness that was removed from the individual’s personal experience, but a very real and tangible righteousness that could be seen by all. Jesus then went on to say that we are to “enter by the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and that there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13,14 NKJV). The parable of the house on the rock illustrated for us that we could not fake our way into heaven, but actually have to follow Jesus’ words (see Matthew 7:24-27).

The solution to this problem must be found in a proper understanding of faith. What is genuine faith? How can we not rely on our works for salvation, while knowing that they are an important part of the mix?

I recently read in the book *Education* something that I suspected was true for some time: “Unselfishness, the principle of God’s kingdom, is the principle that Satan

hates; its very existence he denies. From the beginning of the Great Controversy he has endeavoured to prove God’s principles of action to be selfish, and he deals in the same way with all who serve God. To disprove Satan’s claim is the work of Christ and of all who bear His name.”<sup>1</sup>

Yes, that’s it! That’s the central issue in this mess: the principle of unselfishness. Notice that Satan does not claim himself to be unselfish and God to be selfish. He denies the very existence of unselfishness, both in God and in himself, and therefore denies God’s right to judge anyone.

How was Satan’s accusation against God presented to Eve? What was the core

***Because we are free beings, only love can produce genuine obedience in us. Love cannot be forced; rather, it has to come from a genuine admiration and faith in the object of our love.***

deception? That God was selfish. God was holding them back from something good. That is the core deception Satan has sought to convince every intelligent being of since the beginning. Sadly, he’s been very successful. Even within Christianity, we are slow to fully embrace the utter unselfishness of God. That is

the key reason we have so much trouble trusting and obeying Him. Yes, we preach that “God is Love,” yet in our human experience, there is no love that is untainted with selfishness.

Satan states that because God Himself is sometimes self-centered in His actions and decrees, the angels have a right to question Him. Satan’s goal is to get us to believe that God is less than totally unselfish. That way He can get us to question, to doubt, and to assert our independence when our will runs contrary to God’s. Don’t miss this: the way Satan destroyed total, love-based obedience is through getting us to disbelieve God’s character of 100% unselfish love. It stands to reason therefore that those who once again come to believe in (i.e., have faith in) God’s character of *completely* unselfish love will once again obey from love *completely*.

Because we are free beings, only love can produce genuine obedience in us. Love cannot be forced; rather, it has to come from a genuine admiration and faith in the object of our love. The love required to motivate our obedience is always in proportion to how costly that obedience is. That’s why God made babies so cute. We need to love them a lot because they sure are demanding. That’s why God has placed the greatest joys within the contexts of the relationships that cost us the most.

God requires more of us than any other Being in the universe. He made it clear that we must be willing to give up everything to follow Him (see Luke 14:26-33). God requires a full submission to His entire will for us. He doesn’t give us a check-list of rules and regulations that we can complete and then go back to being selfish. He requires total allegiance. That kind of obedience requires a lot of love. That’s what makes it so fragile.

Satan knew that He didn’t have to make God into this evil tyrant in order to break our allegiance to Him. Satan rarely tries to portray God as completely evil. Just a little bit of selfishness will do.

All he has to do is convince us that God is less than 100% love—say 99% love. That 1% selfishness on God’s part would basically justify my 1% selfishness and independence. That ounce of sin is the only foothold Satan needs to break my allegiance to God and make me His slave. It takes only one broken link to sever even the strongest of chains.

To do this, Satan set about to distort God’s law, made up of two principles: the sole worship of God, and unselfish love towards others. In both these areas, he has sought to distort God’s character of love.<sup>2</sup>

“Faith is trusting God—believing that He loves us and knows best what is for our good.”<sup>3</sup>

Our victory over sin will always be in proportion to how much we really believe in God’s love. That’s why faith and works will always be inseparable. It’s why Christians are failing today. We are still failing to see that God is 100% love. Satan has fought hard to keep that 1% selfishness in our view of God. We say: “I trust God and all, but I’ve got obligations,

habits, personality traits, or desires, that I just can’t give up.” Or, “Let’s be practical here.” Or, “God understands.” What we’re really saying is “I don’t trust God completely.” We fail to see just how completely devoted to our happiness God truly is. We fail to see that God asks only what is in our best interest, that He is with us every step of the way, that He will surely save us from whatever we fear. We grumble and complain because we doubt the goodness of God’s purpose for us.

Ellen White once stated that the last message of mercy to be given to the world is a revelation of His character of love.<sup>4</sup> This is the message that will finish the work. Let us not waste our time on less important matters. We need to learn to present every truth in scripture as a bold declaration of God’s character of *completely unselfish* love. This is God’s answer to that form of godliness that denies its power (see 2 Timothy 3:5). The presentation of God as a very close, very interested, very powerful, loving Saviour is God’s antidote to the lawlessness that

exists in our day. We need to pray that God will open our eyes so that we may see like Elisha’s servant (see 2 Kings 6:17) just how great heaven’s interest in us really is, *and* just how foolish it is to doubt God’s care for us at any time.

- 1 See Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1952), 154.
- 2 In my next article, I will illustrate this in greater detail.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 253.
- 4 See *Idem.*, *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1941), 415, 416.

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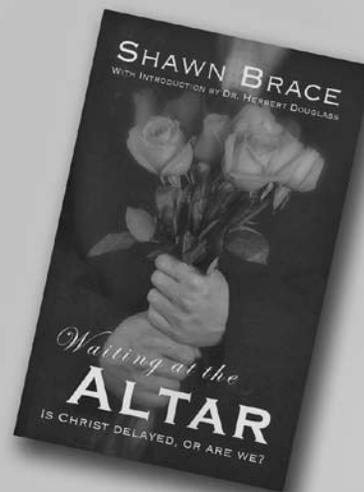
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# Isaiah 53, Substitution, and the Covenant Curses—Part 2

by Richard M. Davidson



This article is Part 2. Part 1 was in the November/December 2009 issue, also available at [www.newenglandpastor.com](http://www.newenglandpastor.com).

—Editors

A final linkage in Isaiah 53

to the covenant curses is breathtaking. Isa 53:8 indicates that the Suffering Servant “was cut off [from the Hebrew root *gwr*] from the land of the living, and for the transgression of My people He was stricken.” The Hebrew word here translated “cut off” is not the expected Hebrew *karat*, “cut [off]”, regularly used to describe the making, or literally “cutting” of a covenant, and the “cutting off” of transgressors. Instead, the Hebrew root *gwr* (“cutting [off], dividing”) harks back to the covenant-making ceremony of God with Abram in Genesis 15. Let’s briefly survey the striking details of that ceremony.

God graciously condescended to enter into a covenant of the kind that was understood in Abraham’s day so that Abraham could understand the assurance of the gospel.<sup>1</sup> Picture a scene somewhat repulsive to us of modern minds, and yet fraught with deep significance. A heifer three years old, a three-year old goat, and a three-year old ram, a turtledove and a young pigeon, all in the peak of health, slain with a stroke of the slaughter knife. The larger animals are cut in two down the middle, and each half laid beside the other, and the birds, left whole, are laid opposite one another, with room for someone to pass through the row of paired carcasses.

The vultures come down to eat the pieces, but Abram drives them away. The sun sets. A deep sleep settles upon the man who has slain the animals and separated their parts. The sleep is followed by a dread and great darkness. All is silence and blackness. Suddenly out of the darkness appears a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch. The pot and torch slowly pass between the pieces of the

***What is even more amazing to me is that Abram and his descendants did break the covenant, and instead of us, the vassals, being dismembered, the Godhead stepped into our place and took the covenant curses in our stead***

dead animals. The ceremony is complete.

What does it all mean? Moses explicitly states in Gen 15:18 that on this day “the Lord made [Hebrew *karat*] a covenant with Abram.” Throughout the Bible when it states (in English) that God made a covenant, the Hebrew word for “made” is usually *karat*, literally, “cut.” This expression of “cutting” a covenant refers to the common practice in ancient Near Eastern times of making a covenant by cutting a sacrifice and walking between the pieces. In Jer 34:18-19 we find a reference to this practice still in use in Jeremiah’s day. God says to those in Judah who broke the covenant they made with the Lord: “And I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant,

who have not performed the words of the covenant which they made [*karat*] before Me, when they cut [*karat*] the calf in two and passed between the parts of it—the princes of Judah, the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf. . . .”

In the ancient Near Eastern treaties, when a suzerain (overlord) entered into a treaty/covenant with a vassal (servant state), he would regularly have them cut a sacrifice and pass through the pieces. What is important for us to note here is what the vassal was in effect acknowledging by passing through the pieces: “May it be done to me as was done to this animal if I am unfaithful to the covenant.”

We have numerous illustrations of this practice in the ancient Near East, with the king saying to the vassal, “If you do not remain faithful to the covenant, it will happen to you as to this animal.”<sup>2</sup> Note, for example, the covenant made by the Assyrian king Ashur-nirari V with the vassal Mati-ilu. After Mati-ilu divides a ram, Ashur-nirari V says: “This head is not the head of the ram, but the head of Mati-ilu, his sons, his nobles, and the people of the land. If Mati-ilu violates this oath, as the head of this ram is struck off, . . .so will the head of Mati-ilu be struck off.”<sup>3</sup> The one passing through the pieces, by so doing, indicates that he will undergo similar dismemberment if he is unfaithful to the covenant.

Now it was expected for the vassal to pass through the pieces and in effect make this kind of dismemberment oath. Note that in Jeremiah 34 it was the people that passed through the pieces, and the Assyrian king threatens the vassal with dismemberment for violating the covenant. But Genesis 15 doesn’t even mention that Abraham passed through

the pieces, although the parallel ancient Near Eastern covenant pattern makes this act on his part likely. Ellen White mentions that he did pass through,<sup>4</sup> and this could be implied in his very act of arranging the animals (v. 10), but this is not the point emphasized in the Genesis 15 account. The point emphasized is that, radically contrary to ancient Near Eastern practice, where only the vassal and not the suzerain moved through the pieces, God Himself, the Divine Suzerain or Overlord, passed through the pieces! The reference to the smoking oven and the burning torch are symbols of the divine presence, reminiscent of the smoking fire on Mt Sinai. The same two Hebrew words connoting the divine presence link these two events together: “smoke” *’ashan* (Genesis 15:17; Exodus 19:18; 20:18) and “lamp” *lappid* (Genesis 15:17; Exodus 20:18).

Why *two* symbols of the divine presence in Gen 15? I’m convinced that it is significant that both a smoking oven and the burning torch passed through—two divine light sources, symbolizing the Father and the Son. Over and over in the narratives recorded in Genesis and Exodus, we find the Angel of the Lord both *sent* from Yahweh, and yet saying, “I *am* Yahweh.”<sup>5</sup> There is the implication of two divine beings in the Godhead involved in these narratives. As both the Father and Son appeared at Mt. Sinai,<sup>6</sup> so both Father and Son were involved in the covenant-making ceremony with Abraham. The poignant truth is that as the Father and the Son pass through the pieces of the sacrifices, Divinity is saying, in effect, “If we break our promise of the covenant, then let the Godhead be dismembered, let Divinity be ripped from divinity, as these pieces.” In effect, the Father and Son were placing their very existence and unity on the line in this oath of covenant loyalty! That’s how sure is the Gospel promise!

What is even more amazing to me is that Abram and his descendants *did* break the covenant, and instead of us, the vassals, being dismembered, the Godhead stepped into our place and took the

covenant curses in our stead (Gal 3:10-13). The choice of the animals that Abram was to sacrifice is instructive, as these are the very animals that were at the heart of the sacrificial system in Leviticus. They point to the substitutionary sacrifice of the Messiah taking the place of us sinners. The narrative of Genesis 22, the offering up of Isaac on Mt. Moriah, is instructive in typifying how both the Father and Son were involved in the anguish of the atoning sacrifice.

We’ve noted above that the description of the work of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 uses the very terms as described in the covenant curses of Isaiah 1 and Deuteronomy 28. He bears the “sicknesses” and “stripes” that we deserved, and the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all. The linkage of Isaiah 53 with Genesis 15 is revealed in a striking way. The Hebrew word for the “[cut-off or separated] pieces [of a slaughtered animal]” that the divine Presence passed through in Gen 15:17, is from the root *gZR*, and this root appears again in the Hebrew Bible in a sacrificial context only in Isa 53:8, as already quoted above: “He was cut off [*gZR*] from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.” By using this rare word for being sacrificially “cut [off],” Isaiah links the divine passing through the pieces in Gen 15 with the death of the Messiah.

Daniel 9:26-27 further links the Messiah’s death with the cutting of the covenant portrayed in Gen 15. According to the prophecy in the midst of the week the Anointed One (Messiah) would be “cut off”—and the Hebrew word here is *karat* which means both “cut off” as in death and “cut” as in covenant making. So the Messiah was “cut off” (died) to “cut” the new covenant. This is the same word as found in Gen 15:18 for God’s making (literally “cutting”) of the covenant.

For the ultimate fulfillment of this covenant-making service in Genesis 15, alluded to also in Isaiah 53 and Daniel 9—to see the ultimate depth of the gospel, we must go to Calvary. On the cross we hear Jesus’ anguished words, as He takes

upon Himself the covenant curses that we deserved: “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?” In light of God’s implied oath of Self-dismemberment in Genesis 15, this takes on incredible meaning. Ellen White points out that on the cross, as Jesus became the Sin-bearer, the unity of the Father and Son was broken up and Jesus felt the anguish of eternal separation from His Father.<sup>7</sup> In terms of Genesis 15, as it were, God was ripped from God! Deity was torn from deity! Divine dismemberment took place so that we might live! Christ took our curses as our Substitute and Surety, suffering the agony of eternal separation between God and man that we deserved, so that we might have the covenant blessings of eternal life. That’s how sure our acceptance with God is! Amazing Gospel of substitutionary, covenant grace!

1 See Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1958), 137.

2 See Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), 430-434, for samples of these treaties.

3 James Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 353-354.

4 See White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 137.

5 Cf. Gen 16:7-11 with v. 13; 18:1 with vv. 2, 33, and with 19:1; 31:11 with v. 13; 32:24, 30 with Hos 12:3-6; 48:15, with v. 16; Exod 3:2 with vv. 4, 6, and 7; and 13:21 with 14:19.

6 See White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1970), 616.

7 See Idem., *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1940), 686, 753-754, etc.

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## Appreciating the “Prophetic Perfect”

By Shawn Brace

**D**o you need a heart that longs for God—one that knows Him intimately and desires fellowship with Him all the time? I don’t know about you, but I often get tripped up in a “saved by devotions” mentality. My whole life I have been told that I must wake up extra early in the morning and spend however long reading my Bible and praying. As a pastor, this pressure seems to be even greater. I am often told that the “average pastor spends five minutes a day in prayer,” and then I feel guilty because, far too often, I fall into the “average pastor” category.

So what happens? The New Year comes around, and I tell myself that I will spend more time in prayer, more time in Bible study, more time interceding on behalf of my church members. Sadly, it doesn’t take too long for me to realize that Ellen White was all too right when she said that our “promises and resolutions are like ropes of sand.”<sup>1</sup> Just as quickly as I am excited about my New Year’s resolution, the passion dies out and I find myself hitting the “snooze” button over and over again.

But there’s good news for us. What we need to understand is the “prophetic perfect.”

Underwhelmed? As you may know, the “prophetic perfect” is a use of speech in the Hebrew Bible that English readers cannot fully appreciate. When a verb is in the “perfect” tense in Hebrew, this signifies past and completed action. However, there are a number of places in the Hebrew Bible that seem to be using the “perfect” tense in a *future* sense—as if it were a prophecy. As one author has put it, the “prophetic perfect” is a “*prediction*, but the prophet sees it existing in the future in a completed state.”<sup>2</sup> In other words: you can take this prediction “to the

bank.” You know that it will come to pass. It would almost be like me saying, “I *had* five children,” when you know, as of right now, I have only one.

So what does this have to do with anything? I came across a beautiful promise in the book of Jeremiah that is laced with “prophetic perfect” verbs—and I believe it is particularly relevant to us. Though God is speaking to those who have been taken captive to Judah, His words are pregnant with meaning to us as well. “For I will set My eyes on them for good,” says the Lord, “I will build them and not pull them down, and I will plant them and not pluck them up.” So far, all of these verbs have been “prophetic perfects.” But there is more—and this is where it gets particularly exciting: “Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart” (Jeremiah 24:6, 7, NKJV).

Did you catch that? God is going to give us a heart to know Him—and we shall return to Him with our whole hearts! This is a predication for the future which is as good as done. We can take it to the bank. This is God’s commitment to us. He beautifully declares that it is *His* job to give *us* a heart that longs to know Him. It’s not our job. We have had it backwards our whole lives. How often do we get tricked into thinking that we need to pursue God so that we can know Him intimately—all the while God is the One pursuing us, trying to draw a response from our hearts.<sup>3</sup>

Yes, as Ellen White beautifully continues the previous quotation,

What you need to understand is the true force of the will. This is the governing power in the nature of man, the power of

decision, or of choice. . . . The power of choice God has given to men; it is theirs to exercise. You cannot change your heart, you cannot of yourself give to God its affections; but you can choose to serve Him. You can give Him your will; He will then work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Thus your whole nature will be brought under the control of the Spirit of Christ; your affections will be centered upon Him, your thoughts will be in harmony with Him.<sup>4</sup>

So why not allow God to fulfill that “prophetic perfect” in your heart this New Year? He’s longing to give you and me hearts to know Him.

- 1 Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1956), 47.
- 2 Bob Smith, *Basics of Bible Interpretation* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Discovery Publishing, 2003), 108.
- 3 This is also a neat promise that we can claim while praying for those who are not walking with the Lord. God’s promise for a heart to know Him applies to the *whole* world. He is trying to draw a response from everyone. So let’s take Him at His word.
- 4 White, 47.

*Shawn Brace pastors four congregations in New Hampshire and Vermont. He and his wife, Camille, live in West Lebanon, New Hampshire, and they recently welcomed their first child, Camden Shawn, into the world. He also published his first book, Waiting at the Altar, in 2008. When he isn’t busy with pastoring, he loves spending time outdoors—especially photographing the beauty of New England.*

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