

Readings

for the Week of Prayer

To be read from Friday, December 1,
to Sabbath, December 9, 2017

Righteousness by Faith



Introduction

"You may as well know ... that in the last days it is going to be very difficult to be a Christian, for men will love only themselves and their money; they will be proud and boastful, sneering at God, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful to them, and thoroughly bad." 2 Timothy 3:4, The Living Bible, Paraphrased.

As we begin the Week of Prayer at a time when the world is in turmoil on many fronts and the religious world celebrates the 500th anniversary of an important moment in the Protestant Reformation, it is appropriate that we focus on Jesus and "Righteousness by Faith." The principle of *Sola scriptura* (Scripture alone) preached and practiced by the Reformers of the Sixteenth Century has to a great degree shaped Western society. The idea that there are absolute laws in nature as well as in human behavior has in many ways created the world in which we live. Believing in the consistency of natural law, man has learned to fly above the clouds, create communication networks, and glimpse some of the truly amazing workings of the amazing web of life.

However, while we enjoy the fruits of advanced knowledge, the human race has unfortunately turned its back on the most important knowledge by failing to apply the absolute laws of human interaction and the spiritual side of man. God has truly blessed this world with rich physical and spiritual treasures, but the corresponding fruits of gratitude and humility have not appeared.

Today "there is need of a return to the great Protestant principle—the Bible, and the Bible only, as the rule of faith and duty.... The same unswerving adherence to the Word of God manifested at that crisis of the Reformation, is the only hope of reform today...." —*The Great Controversy*, 1888, pp. 204, 205.

"At this time we must gather warmth from the coldness of others, courage from their cowardice, and loyalty from their treason." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 136.

As the principles of God's law have not changed and cannot change, let

us be transformed into new men and women in Christ Jesus. By beholding and following Him, the Rock of our salvation, we will indeed reflect His image. The secret is simple: "We become overcomers by helping others to overcome." —*Review and Herald*, February 25, 1909.

Let us shake ourselves, arise, and rekindle our lamps to reflect God's character to all around us and send His saving message into the world through our actions, gifts, and prayers. He has ordained that our lives and our unselfish gifts of love will bless many both near and far with a revelation of Himself to earth's last generation. Considering the times and God's great mercies to us, can we be too giving? Let our hearts burn with that "first love" as we see Jesus' coming drawing near.

Sabbath, December 9, the final day of the Week of Prayer, is a day of fast-

ing and prayer. The annual Week of Prayer offerings will be gathered for the General Conference. They will be disbursed across a broad spectrum of missionary outreach and will bless God's work.

The church leaders are requested to visit and share the *Readings* with those who are unable to attend the meetings because of illness or infirmity. Let everyone participate wholeheartedly in this Week of Prayer as the believers across the globe unite in prayer to God to shed His righteousness into every heart that is surrendered to His will. This is the only way that the promise can be fulfilled, that "God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms." —*The Great Controversy*, p. 595.

—*The brothers and sisters of the General Conference*

Readings for the Week of Prayer

December 1-9, 2017

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Issued by the

General Conference

International Missionary Society

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Righteousness Is Love

By Francesco Dominico Caputo, Italy

Dear brothers, sisters, and friends, in analyzing this topic, we will answer some questions: What does righteousness mean? What is the source of unrighteousness? What is the relationship between righteousness and love? How shall we approach God?

What does “righteousness” mean?

The Italian encyclopedia *Treccani* gives the following meaning for the word “righteousness”: “Eminently social virtue that consists of the willingness to recognize and respect the rights of others by giving to each one what is due according to reason and law.” Another meaning is “the power to achieve that which is right with measures that are legally enforceable and with the exercise of this power and the system that allows it to be carried out.” The same encyclopedia reports that righteousness is a principle and a moral virtue that consists in giving each person that which belongs to him (*suum cuique tribuere*).

From the Biblical point of view, the true meaning of the word “righteousness” is loving God and one’s neighbor. On one side, it is giving God what belongs to Him (love, worship, gratitude, supremacy, sacred time, obedience, virtually all our being). Exodus 20:1-11. On the other side, it is to give our neighbor his due (affection, help, service). Exodus 20:12-17. Jesus said, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.” Matthew 22:21. He instructs the human being to love God above all; and, his neighbor as himself. Matthew 22:34-40.

What is the source of unrighteousness?

Originally, man was created in the image and likeness of God. Genesis 1:26.

“It was possible for Adam, before the fall, to form a righteous character by obedience to God’s law. But he failed to do this, and because of his sin our natures are fallen and we cannot make ourselves righteous.” –*Steps to Christ*, p. 62. It is clear: Before the fall, man was able to live righteously, loving the Lord above all and his neighbor (Eve) as himself. His actions were filled with selfless love. Unfortunately, in choosing Satan as his master, the father of our race fell into total misery, practicing self-justification and unrighteousness. This was shown by the answer that he gave to God’s question whether he had eaten of the forbidden tree. He blamed his partner and consequently the Creator Himself. Genesis 3:11, 12.

From that moment on, human nature became more and more corrupt, and righteousness practically disappeared from the earth. There is a progression into greater and greater evil—brother against brother, husband against wife, children against parents, parents against children, uncles who deceive their nephews, brothers who rape their sisters. Polygamy, incest, divorce, child abuse, massacres of innocent people, slavery, and imaginable other evil practices have become common today.

Human beings try to justify themselves by claiming to be righteous, while they blame or accuse their neighbors of unrighteousness. Or they try to establish righteousness by making rules without going to the source of true goodness—God. Jeremiah 23:6. In their foolishness, they draw from broken cisterns that cannot hold water, forgetting the Saviour and Creator. Jeremiah 2:13. They do not recognize that their righteousness is like “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:4-6) and that their actions are devoid of love. Israel, by multiplying its sacrifices in the attempt to demon-

strate self-sufficiency, tried thus to buy God’s love and favor while forgetting that the Lord Himself is love—“merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.” Exodus 34:5-7.

In bringing sacrifices and fasting, the people of Israel showed that they did not understand the true fast that is pleasing to God. Through the prophet Isaiah He warned His people: “Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward [rearguard].” Isaiah 58:4-8.

Israel did not heed God’s call to live righteously and to love. The repeated appeals through the prophets were ig-

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 1 John 4:10.

nored. The society's moral condition became more and more degraded, to the point where it was desperate by the time Jesus came to earth. Pharisaism had made the consciences of the chosen people callous; love, righteousness, and mercy were supplanted by many meaningless rules. There was a show of meritorious deeds; but all the things that were of value to God were neglected or set aside, such as caring for the sick, loving the orphans and widows, keeping the moral law, loving one's parents, etc.

Jesus reveals what is in man's heart, urging him to look inside: "And He saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him; Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats? And He said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man." Mark 7:18-23.

So, unrighteousness is part of our heritage, of our life, of our very nature. Can this be changed? Is there a remedy for this? Can you and I go back to being righteous, as Adam was before the fall? If so, how does this come about? Jesus came to this earth for this very purpose—to lift up the human race. He lived perfect righteousness, full of love and mercy. His obedience and service were perfect, and therefore He is "The Lord Our Righteousness." Jeremiah 23:6.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." 1 Corinthians 1:30. And in the second letter to the Cor-

inthians, he added: "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." 2 Corinthians 5:21. Thus, Christ's merits are imparted to the believing sinner, who is considered righteous through Christ, as if he had never sinned. Through the grace of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit, one is able to experience true righteousness, free from pharisaism and full of purity and holiness, because it comes from Christ Our Righteousness.

What is true righteousness?

For Christ, His righteousness is so important that He included it in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." Matthew 5:6.

When a person is hungry or thirsty, he is so desperate that all of his energy is focused on looking for bread and water to satisfy his need. He does not stop until he finds water to quench his thirst and food to satiate his hunger. Similarly, one who is in Christ will do everything he can to serve God and to meet the needs of his neighbors. By living an active life, full of acts of righteousness and love, it will become natural for him to be a "channel" through which Christ's love and righteousness flow out to the needy, the afflicted, and those who are searching for God.

Righteousness equated with love

God is righteousness and love at the same time; and because of this, one is justified by faith in Christ. Romans 3:26, 24. Justification is pardon and forgiveness, and this is possible because of God's love. "Justification is a full, complete pardon of sin. The moment a sinner accepts Christ by faith, that moment he is pardoned. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to him, and he is no more to doubt God's forgiving grace." —*Reflecting Christ*, p. 78.

"God does not deal with us as finite men deal with one another. His thoughts are thoughts of mercy, love, and tenderest compassion. 'He will abundantly pardon.' He says, 'I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions'...." —*Our High Calling*, p. 27.

"Jesus is the only one who can give you peace. He loved you and gave Himself for you. His great heart of love is 'touched with the feeling of our infirmities.' What sins are too great for Him to pardon, what soul too dark and sin-oppressed for Him to save? He is gracious, not looking for merit in us, but of His own boundless goodness healing our backslidings and loving us freely, while we are yet sinners. He is 'slow to anger, and of great kindness,' 'long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.'" —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 649.

Additionally the Spirit of prophecy relates how righteousness and love are embodied in Christ. As we receive Him, we receive both gifts. "**Righteousness is holiness, likeness to God, and 'God is love.'**" 1 John 4:16. It is conformity to the law of God, for 'all Thy commandments are righteousness' (Psalm 119:172), and love is the fulfilling of the law. Romans 13:10. Righteousness is love, and love is the light and the life of God. **The righteousness of God is embodied in Christ.** We receive righteousness by receiving Him.

"Not by painful struggles or wearisome toil, not by gift or sacrifice, is righteousness obtained; but it is freely given to every soul who hungers and thirsts to receive it. 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat,... without money and without price.' Isaiah 55:1.

"No human agent can supply that which will satisfy the hunger and thirst of the soul....

"As we discern the perfection of our Saviour's character, we shall desire to become wholly transformed and renewed in the image of His purity. The more we know of God, the higher will be our ideal of character and the more earnest our longing to reflect His likeness....

"If you have a sense of need in your soul, if you hunger and thirst after righteousness, this is an evidence that Christ has wrought upon your heart, in order that He may be sought unto to do for you, through the endowment of the Holy Spirit, those things which it is impossible for you to do for yourself....

And this is love, that we walk after His commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it. 2 John 1:6.

"The words of God are the well-springs of life. As you seek unto those living springs, you will, through the Holy Spirit, be brought into communion with Christ. Familiar truths will present themselves to your mind in a new aspect, texts of Scripture will burst upon you with a new meaning as a flash of light, you will see the relation of other truths to the work of redemption, and you will know that Christ is leading you, a divine Teacher is at your side..."

"God has poured out His love unstintedly, as the showers that refresh the earth. He says, 'Let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together.' Isaiah 45:8." —*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 18-21.

Nicodemus and Paul, like all doctors of the law, were educated to seek perfection by righteous acts in order to please God. When did they change this attitude and way of thinking? It was through an encounter with Jesus. Only then did these men of learning come to understand Jesus' true nature. It was then that they had a change of thinking and asked themselves: "Am I born again? Does my life reflect Jesus' character?" Paul, after he had a personal experience with Jesus, realized that all his perfection, righteousness, and faithfulness to God were void of true love; he later described such empty love as a tinkling cymbal; in other words, it was useless. Jesus said that His followers' righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees, otherwise they will never enter the heavenly kingdom.

How then shall we approach God?

"Jesus ... declared that the righteousness upon which the Pharisees set so great value was worthless. The Jewish nation had claimed to be the special, loyal people who were favored of God; but Christ represented their religion as devoid of saving faith. All their pretensions of piety, their human inventions and ceremonies, and even their boasted performance of the outward requirements of the law, could not avail to make them holy. They were not pure in heart or noble and Christlike in character.

"A legal religion is insufficient to bring the soul into harmony with God. The hard, rigid orthodoxy of the Pharisees, destitute of contrition, tenderness, or love, was only a stumbling block to sinners. They were like the salt that had lost its savor; for their influence had no power to preserve the world from corruption. The only true faith is that which 'worketh by love' (Galatians 5:6) to purify the soul. It is as leaven that transforms the character.

"All this the Jews should have learned from the teachings of the prophets. Centuries before, the cry of the soul for justification with God had found voice and answer in the words of the prophet Micah: 'Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?... He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' Micah 6:6-8.

"The prophet Hosea had pointed out what constitutes the very essence of Pharisaism, in the words, 'Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself.' Hosea 10:1. In their professed service to God, the Jews were really working for self. Their righteousness was the fruit of their own efforts to keep the law according to their own ideas and for their own selfish benefit. Hence it could be no better than they were. In their endeavor to make themselves holy, they were trying to bring a clean thing out of an unclean. **The law of God is as holy as He is holy, as perfect as He is perfect. It presents to men the righteousness of God.** It is impossible for man, of himself, to keep this law; for the nature of man is depraved, deformed, and wholly unlike the character of God. The works of the selfish heart are 'as an unclean thing;' and 'all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.' Isaiah 64:6.

"While the law is holy, the Jews could not attain righteousness by their own efforts to keep the law. The disciples of Christ must obtain righteousness of a different character from that of the Pharisees, if they would enter the

kingdom of heaven. God offered them, in His Son, the perfect righteousness of the law. If they would open their hearts fully to receive Christ, then the very life of God, His love, would dwell in them, transforming them into His own likeness; and thus through God's free gift they would possess the righteousness which the law requires. But the Pharisees rejected Christ; 'being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness' (Romans 10:3), they would not submit themselves unto the righteousness of God.

"Jesus proceeded to show His hearers what it means to keep the commandments of God—that it is a reproduction in themselves of the character of Christ. For in Him, God was daily made manifest before them." —*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 53-55.

How do we live righteously?

The first and seventh periods of the Christian church were similarly rebuked. Revelation 2:4; 3:17. The faithful Witness stated that the church of Ephesus had lost its first love; and, Laodicea considered itself rich, when in fact it was "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," counseling it to buy from Him gold and white raiment. The period of Ephesus is thus a warning to all of us living in the time of Laodicea; we are urged to examine ourselves, our righteousness, and our sufficiency in the light of God's word and the Spirit of prophecy.

"'I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.' Revelation 2:4, 5. The people to whom these words are addressed have many excellent qualities, which are recognized by the True Witness. 'Nevertheless,' He says, 'I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.' Here is a want that will have to be supplied. All the other graces fail to make up the deficiency. The church is counseled to 'remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I

will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.... He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.' Revelation 2:4-7.

"In these words are warnings, reproofs, threatenings, promises, from the True Witness, He that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand....

"When this church is weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, it is found wanting, having left its first love. The True Witness declares, 'I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience, and for My name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.' Revelation 2:2, 3. Notwithstanding all this, the church is found wanting. What is the fatal deficiency? 'Thou hast left thy first love.' Is not this our case? Our doctrines may be correct; we may hate false doctrine, and may not receive those who are not true to principle; we may labor with untiring energy; but even this is not sufficient. What is our motive? Why are we called upon to repent? 'Thou hast left thy first love.'

"Let each member of the church study this important warning and reproof. Let each one see if in contending for the truth, if in debating on the theory, he has not lost the tender love of Christ. Has not Christ been left out of the sermons, and out of the heart? Is there not danger that many are going forward with a profession of the truth, doing missionary work, while the love of Christ has not been woven into the labor? This solemn warning from the True Witness means much; it demands that you shall remember from whence you are fallen, and repent, and do the

first works; 'or else,' says the True Witness, 'I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.' Revelation 2:5. O that the church might realize its need of its first ardor of love! When this is wanting, all other excellences are insufficient. The call to repentance is one that cannot be disregarded without peril. A belief in the theory of the truth is not enough. To present this theory to unbelievers does not constitute you a witness for Christ. The light that gladdened your heart when you first understood the message for this time, is an essential element in your experience and labors, and this has been lost out of your heart and life. Christ beholds your lack of zeal, and declares that you have fallen, and are in a perilous position.

"In presenting the binding claims of the law, many have failed to portray the infinite love of Christ. Those who have so great truths, so weighty reforms to present to the people, have not had a realization of the value of the atoning Sacrifice as an expression of God's great love to man. Love for Jesus, and Jesus' love for sinners, have been dropped out of the religious experience of those who have been commissioned to preach the gospel, and self has been exalted instead of the Redeemer of mankind. The law is to be presented to its transgressors, not as something apart from God, but rather as an exponent of His mind and character. As the sunlight cannot be separated from the sun, so God's law cannot be rightly presented to man apart from the divine Author. The messenger should be able to say, 'In the law is God's will; come, see for yourselves that the law is what Paul declared it to be—holy, and just, and good.' It reproves sin, it condemns the sinner, but it shows him his need of Christ, with whom is plenteous mercy and goodness and truth. Though the law cannot remit the penalty for sin, but charges the sinner with all his debt, Christ has promised abundant pardon to all who repent and believe in His mercy. The love of God is extended in abundance to the repenting, believing soul. The brand of sin upon the soul can be effaced only through the blood of the atoning Sacrifice. No less an offering was required than the sacrifice of Him who was equal with the Father.

The work of Christ—His life, humiliation, death, and intercession for lost man—magnifies the law, and makes it honorable.

"Many sermons preached upon the claims of the law have been without Christ, and this lack has made the truth inefficient in converting souls. Without the grace of Christ it is impossible to take one step in obedience to the law of God. Then how necessary that the sinner hear of the love and power of his Redeemer and Friend! While the ambassador for Christ should plainly declare the claims of the law, he should make it understood that none can be justified without the atoning sacrifice of Christ. Without Christ there can be only condemnation and a fearful looking for a fiery indignation, and final separation from the presence of God. But he whose eyes have been opened to see the love of Christ, will behold the character of God as full of love and compassion. God will not appear as a tyrannical, relentless being, but as a father longing to embrace his repenting son.

"The sinner will cry with the psalmist, 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.' Psalm 103:13. All despair is swept from the soul when Christ is seen in His true character.

The third angel's message in verity

"Some of our brethren have expressed fears that we shall dwell too much upon the subject of justification by faith, but I hope and pray that none will be needlessly alarmed; for there is no danger in presenting this doctrine as it is set forth in the Scriptures. If there had not been a remissness in the past to properly instruct the people of God, there would not now be a necessity of calling a special attention to it. The exceeding great and precious promises given us in the Holy Scriptures have been lost sight of to a great extent, just as the enemy of all righteousness designed that they should be. He has cast his own dark shadow between us and our God, that we may not see the true character of God. The Lord has proclaimed Himself to be 'merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.'

Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 1 John 3:16.

"Several have written to me, inquiring if the message of justification by faith is the third angel's message, and I have answered, 'It is the third angel's message, in verity.'" —(*Review and Herald*, April 1, 1890) *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 369-372.

Conclusion

My brethren, I wish to close this reading by reminding us all of a few verses from God's word concerning righteousness. These verses speak both collectively and individually, giving us the hope of a glorious future. "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." "He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life, righteousness, and honour." "And the work of righteousness shall be peace." Proverbs 14:34; 21:21; Isaiah 32:17.

Even though God is the Righteous One, He makes it possible for us to be considered righteous when we accept Christ's imputed righteousness by faith. Then, the believer, through the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, becomes a partaker of the divine nature through the imparted righteousness of Christ, making it possible for him to live in harmony with the requirements of God's holy law. Only in this way is one able to fulfill all righteousness and live the golden rule: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." Matthew 7:12.

Jesus' life was one of love and righteousness. Let us follow in His footsteps to the end; then we will be with Him in His kingdom of peace, love, and holiness. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Matthew 6:33. Dear brothers and sisters, may the Lord help us to live our lives through Christ Our Righteousness! Amen! ■

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. 1 John 4:9.

Reading 2 – Sabbath, December 2, 2017

Imputed and Imparted Righteousness

By Pablo Hunger, Austria/U.S.A.

In his religious zeal to find peace and God's forgiveness, Martin Luther decided to make a pilgrimage to the city of Rome. In his heart was a great desire for an experience bringing him closer to God. He had been taught that the perfect way was in Rome—to climb the holy steps and receive forgiveness of sin. Luther's heart beat fast as he approached the great city and finally reached the Santa Scala (Holy Stairs). There he began to climb the stairs step after step on his knees and performed his prayers, eager to have the security of God's pardon. Suddenly, like an arrow, the words of the Holy Scriptures struck his mind, "The just shall live by faith." He immediately got up from his knees and fled from Rome, beginning a new journey to discover the Biblical truth of justification by faith.

Luther came to understand that forgiveness can be obtained not by making sacrifices or by performing one's own works, but by a total surrender to God through faith. He understood that the work of salvation is accomplished by God's power for and in man. He saw that no one can buy forgiveness from God, or with money, as offered by Rome through indulgences, or with his works, as he had tried.

"As the penitent sinner, contrite before God, discerns Christ's atonement in his behalf, and accepts this atonement as his only hope in this life and the future life, his sins are pardoned. This is justification by faith." —*The Faith I Live By*, p. 116.

Imputed righteousness

Why imputed righteousness? As did Luther, we must understand that our human righteousness has no value to

God. That is why the prophet Isaiah wrote: "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." Isaiah 64:6.

Therefore, the Lord wants to give us His righteousness; and great is "the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." Romans 4:6-8.

"Impute" is a verb that means "to attribute," "to apply," "to accredit," "to place to the account of someone." In the case of the sinner, it actually refers to Christ's righteousness that is imputed or accredited to the repentant one who believes in Him and accepts Him as his Redeemer.

"The thought that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, not because of any merit on our part, but as a free gift from God, is a precious thought. The enemy of God and man is not willing that this truth should be clearly presented; for he knows that if the people receive it fully, his power will be broken." —*The Faith I Live By*, p. 111.

I remember a sister who had been in the faith more than ten years who came to me sobbing, "Brother, I am lost!" After speaking a few words of encouragement, I asked her why she had these thoughts. She replied that she did not feel accepted by God, that she had lived a life as good as she could; but there were always new failures, and now she felt too weak to continue fighting. She had led a life full of works of self-righteousness, but this was not sufficient to give her the security of forgiveness.

I told her that the work of the Holy Spirit was leading her to see her need of Christ's power so she would stop trusting in her own works and instead give her strength to God so He could do the work that she could not do. The secret for everyone is constant surrender to God, recognizing that we cannot do this work for ourselves and that we need the divine, transforming power.

"The Lord of life and glory clothed His divinity with humanity to demonstrate to man that God through the gift of Christ would connect us with Him. Without a connection with God no one can possibly be happy. Fallen man is to learn that our Heavenly Father cannot be satisfied until His love embraces the repentant sinner, transformed through the merits of the spotless Lamb of God.

"The work of all the heavenly intelligences is to this end. Under the command of their General they are to work for the reclaiming of those who, by transgression, have separated themselves from their Heavenly Father. A plan has been devised whereby the wondrous grace and love of Christ shall stand revealed to the world. In the infinite price paid by the Son of God to ransom man, the love of God is revealed. This glorious plan of redemption is ample in its provisions to save the whole world. Sinful and fallen man may be made complete in Jesus through the forgiveness of sin, and the imputed righteousness of Christ." —*Messages to Young People*, p. 137.

Illustration of forgiveness

A story is told of a man in England who started off in his Rolls-Royce to travel through the European countries to get to know them better. While he was driving, far away from home, his car's engine quit. He wrote to the Rolls-Royce company in England and explained his problem. A quick decision was made by the company's officers. They sent a mechanic by plane to the place where the customer was! The mechanic fixed the car so the man was able to continue his journey, and the mechanic flew back to England.

But then the owner of the car began to wonder how much he would have to pay for this repair service. After he returned to England, he wrote a letter

and asked what was due for the work the mechanic had done on his car. He received a letter from the company office with the following reply: "Dear Sir, no records appear in our files about anything going wrong with a Rolls-Royce." What an unexpected answer, and how happy the man was when he read the message!

This is what the Lord does. He came to this world to help man, who was stuck and had no way out. Although there were enormous costs that had to be paid, God took care of everything. To this day, one only needs to request His help.

This implies that if we accept Jesus, our assurance of forgiveness does not lie in our own works but is rooted in the merits of Jesus' life and perfect sacrifice that God puts in our favor. This is why it is called imputed righteousness, or righteousness that is placed on our record by Christ; and our names are written in the Lamb's book of life. Instead of our lives being recorded, the life of Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, is recorded under our names. God no longer sees our stained lives but sees the perfect life of Christ. We have no unpaid debts with God.

Imparted righteousness

The work of justification by faith does not end with the forgiveness of sin. God does a complete work, imputing or attributing the righteousness of Christ to the sinner, thus changing his life.

"Righteousness within is testified to by righteousness without. He who is righteous within is not hard-hearted and unsympathetic, but day by day he grows into the image of Christ, going on from strength to strength. He who is being sanctified by the truth will be self-controlled, and will follow in the footsteps of Christ until grace is lost in glory. The righteousness by which we are justified is imputed; the righteousness by which we are sanctified is imparted. The first is our title to heaven, the second is our fitness for heaven." —(*Review and Herald*, June 4, 1895) *Messages to Young People*, p. 35.

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we,

that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Romans 6:1-4.

This is why Martin Luther stated clearly that justification by faith without a transformed life that is shown in works of righteousness is not justification by faith, and that works of human righteousness without God's forgiveness are idolatry.

But many Christians still fail to understand the wonderful balance that God brings about, because they remain with the imputed work of Christ alone. They consider forgiveness something that justifies sin in a believer's life. This does not coincide with the character of God. How can a holy God forgive and then allow sin? Christ declared in His message of mercy and pardon: "Go, and sin no more." His words included the work of imparted righteousness that God desires to accomplish in every sinner who has been forgiven.

When the sinner has been touched by the power of the Holy Spirit and has fallen at the feet of Jesus, true repentance leads him to turn away from sin and to live a different life, a life of righteousness that God imparts daily to the believer.

"Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God." "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness." Romans 6:13, 16-18.

Why is this called imparted righteousness? It is because it is not our righteousness but God's work—His righteousness operating in the repentant sinner. This is why the apostle Paul calls us to "yield your members ser-

vants to righteousness unto holiness." "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Romans 6:19; Ephesians 2:10. Imparted righteousness is also called sanctification, or the work of God in setting man apart for a holy life, in harmony with His will. Speaking of this balance, James says: "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." James 2:26.

How many times is the question asked, "Have you been born again?" this being considered something that happened in the past life of the believer? But through the work of the Holy Spirit, every day we see things in our lives that we need to repent of and change, things that we need to give up and leave behind; we need to die to sin and to be born again into new habits with Christ. Dying to sin—the work of sanctification—lasts for our entire lives.

"Many commit the error of trying to define minutely the fine points of distinction between justification and sanctification. Into the definitions of these two terms they often bring their own ideas and speculations. Why try to be more minute than is Inspiration on the vital question of righteousness by faith?...

"Sanctification is not the work of a moment, an hour, a day, but of a lifetime. It is not gained by a happy flight of feeling, but is the result of constantly dying to sin, and constantly living for Christ. Wrongs cannot be righted nor reformations wrought in the character by feeble, intermittent efforts. It is only by long, persevering effort, sore discipline, and stern conflict that we shall overcome.

"It [sanctification] is not merely a theory, an emotion, or a form of words, but a living, active principle, entering into the everyday life. It requires that our habits of eating, drinking, and dressing be such as to secure the preservation of physical, mental, and moral health, that we may present to the Lord our bodies—not an offering corrupted by wrong habits but—'a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.'" —*The Faith I Live By*, p. 116.

This is why the life of the believer is not a mere emotion, or a feeling based on a religious service full of ecstasy, but

the understanding of our constant need for God, the guidance of His word, and His counsel to change our decisions that have often been wrong. Just as a young man or woman in love surrenders his or her heart in willingness to serve and make his or her beloved happy, so the believer wants to serve those who have demonstrated their love by giving their lives to save him. If your loved one is away, think of how much you appreciate being able to speak on the phone or receive a letter or an email message from him or her. So it must be in our relationship with God. He who has been touched by the love of Christ will value the time he spends in communication with God through prayer and reading His holy word as a message of encouragement and guidance every day, desiring to learn more about his Beloved and knowing how to serve Him better.

"The Scriptures are the great agency in the transformation of character.... If studied and obeyed, the word of God works in the heart, subduing every unholy attribute." —*The Faith I Live By*, p. 116.

Thus, imparted righteousness operates in each person for the transformation of character.

Many Christians think that heaven can be won by performing many charitable deeds and constantly being involved in religious activities, but they forget that it is the Lord who works in a person's character and produces the fruit that is seen in his actions. "For the love of Christ constraineth us;..." 2 Corinthians 5:14.

"God has made every provision whereby our thoughts may become purified, elevated, refined, and ennobled. He has not only promised to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, but He has made an actual provision for the supply of the grace that will lift our thoughts toward Him, and enable us to appreciate His holiness. We may realize that we are Christ's possession, and that we are to manifest His character to the world. Prepared by heavenly grace, we become clothed with the righteousness of Christ, in the wedding garment, and are fitted to sit down at the marriage supper. We become one with Christ, partakers of the divine nature, purified, refined, elevated, and acknowledged to be the children of

God—heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ." —(*The Youth's Instructor*, October 28, 1897) *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, p. 660.

"We are now in probationary time, and it is important for us to consider the fact that we are deciding our own eternal destiny." —*The Youth's Instructor*, October 28, 1897.

"The faces of men and women who walk and work with God express the peace of heaven. They are surrounded with the atmosphere of heaven. For these souls the kingdom of God has begun. They have Christ's joy, the joy of being a blessing to humanity. They have the honor of being accepted for the Master's use; they are trusted to do His work in His name." —*The Adventist Home*, p. 535.

"An earthly parent cannot give his child a sanctified character. He cannot transfer his character to his child. God alone can transform us. Christ breathed on His disciples, and said, 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost.' John 20:22. This is the great gift of heaven. Christ imparted to them through the Spirit His own sanctification. He imbued them with His power, that they might win souls to the gospel. Henceforth Christ would live through their faculties, and speak through their words.... They must cherish His principles and be controlled by His Spirit. They were no longer to follow their own way, to speak their own words. The words they spoke were to proceed from a sanctified heart, and fall from sanctified lips.

"We need the softening, subduing, refining influence of the Holy Spirit, to mold our characters, and to bring every thought into captivity to Christ. It is the Holy Spirit that will enable us to overcome, that will lead us to sit at the feet of Jesus, as did Mary, and learn His meekness and lowliness of heart. We need to be sanctified by the Holy Spirit every hour of the day, lest we be ensnared by the enemy, and our souls be imperiled." —*God's Amazing Grace*, p. 203.

The message of the latter rain

"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. Many had lost sight of Jesus. They needed to have their eyes directed to His divine person, His merits, and His changeless love for the human family. All power is given into His hands, that He may dispense rich gifts unto men, imparting the priceless gift of His own righteousness to the helpless human agent. This is the message that God commanded to be given to the world. It is the third angel's message, which is to be proclaimed with a loud voice, and attended with the outpouring of His Spirit in a large measure." —*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 91.

It has been 129 years since God sent this important message to the Adventist people. The message of imputed and imparted righteousness must be lived and proclaimed by God's people if they wish to be recipients of the final blessing of the latter rain.

Dear brother, dear sister, if you are still thinking about how to be saved, remember that Jesus paid the price for you; He died in your place. You can be grateful and happy. Do not doubt God's forgiveness if you have confessed your sins and have made the firm decision to put them away. Do you find it difficult to be kind to your husband, do you choose to be selfish when asked for a favor, do you find it hard to be honest in little things, or are you wasting your precious time on the Internet or on social networks? It is not enough to try to improve a little bit here and there. God wants to deliver us from self and the power of darkness every day. Our own thoughts are perverse, and so our actions are centered in self. God alone is able to take control and give us victory through the guidance of His Holy Spirit in righteousness and peace.

The Lord is waiting for the total surrender of His children. He wants them to give Him their hearts, time, and strength so their lives and characters will be completely transformed. God grant us His grace so this message will be lived and proclaimed throughout the world and the end will come. Amen. ■

Reading 3 – Sunday, December 3, 2017

Perfect Obedience in Christ

By Roland Dela Paz, Philippines

"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." Romans 5:19.

This year, we commemorate a very important event in the history of the Protestant Reformation—500 years since Martin Luther's ninety-five theses were posted to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. He is one of the prominent Reformers, whose lives and teachings are worth studying.

Martin Luther (November 10, 1483–February 18, 1546) was an Augustinian monk, German professor of theology, composer, and priest, as well as a seminal figure in the Protestant Reformation.

"Foremost among those who were called to lead the church from the darkness of popery into the light of a purer faith, stood Martin Luther. Zealous, ardent, and devoted, knowing no fear but the fear of God, and acknowledging no foundation for religious faith but the Holy Scriptures, Luther was the man for his time; through him God accomplished a great work for the reformation of the church and the enlightenment of the world." —*The Great Controversy*, p. 120.

Luther's teachings and the Roman Catholic Church

Luther came to reject a number of teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. He objected strongly to his understanding of the Catholic view on indulgences—that freedom from the punishment for sin could be purchased with money. Luther proposed an academic discussion of the practice and efficacy of indulgences in his Ninety-Five Theses of 1517. His refusal to renounce

all of his writings at the demand of Pope Leo X in 1520 and the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms in 1521 resulted in his excommunication by the pope and condemnation as an outlaw by the Emperor.

"He declared to his hearers that they must individually believe in Christ, if they would receive salvation through Him; no priest or pope could take the place of the divine Mediator. Those who came to Jesus as repentant, believing sinners, would find pardon and peace, and would have His righteousness imputed to them. Sanctification is the fruit of faith, whose renewing power transforms the soul into the image of Christ. It was by faith in a crucified Redeemer that souls were saved in the days of the apostles; it was only by the same faith that souls could be saved in the days of Luther. He taught the people that they must exercise repentance toward God, whose holy law they had transgressed, and faith in Christ, whose blood could atone for their sins. He showed them that all who were truly penitent would pray earnestly for divine aid to battle against their evil propensities, and he also urged upon them the fact that the sincerity of their prayers would be evinced by the energy of their endeavors to render obedience to the law of God." —*Signs of the Times*, June 7, 1883.

Using his arguments against the traditions and dogmas of his day, let us compare his teachings with the Bible and Testimonies' declarations on the righteousness of Christ.

The Righteousness of Christ

Understanding the righteousness of Christ and how to render obedience

that is acceptable to God is supremely important for our salvation. Without the righteousness of Christ, it is impossible for man to obey God's holy law.

"Righteousness is holiness, likeness to God, and 'God is love.' 1 John 4:16. It is conformity to the law of God, for 'all Thy commandments are righteousness' (Psalm 119:172), and 'love is the fulfilling of the law.' Romans 13:10. Righteousness is love, and love is the light and the life of God. The righteousness of God is embodied in Christ. We receive righteousness by receiving Him.

"Not by painful struggles or wearisome toil, not by gift or sacrifice, is righteousness obtained; but it is freely given to every soul who hungers and thirsts to receive it. 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat,... without money and without price.' 'Their righteousness is of Me, saith the Lord,' and, 'This is His name whereby He shall be called, The Lord Our Righteousness.' Isaiah 55:1; 54:17; Jeremiah 23:6." *—Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 18.

Imputed and imparted righteousness

As we ponder these important subjects concerning our salvation, we will obtain a clearer view of how God saves man. The inspired pen wrote that "the righteousness by which we are justified is imputed; the righteousness by which we are sanctified is imparted. The first is our title to heaven, the second is our fitness for heaven...."

"As the penitent sinner, contrite before God, discerns Christ's atonement in his behalf, and accepts this atonement as his only hope in this life and the future life, his sins are pardoned. This is justification by faith.

"Sanctification is not the work of a moment, an hour, a day, but of a lifetime. It is not gained by a happy flight of feeling, but is the result of constantly dying to sin, and constantly living for Christ. Wrongs cannot be righted nor reformations wrought in the character by feeble, intermittent efforts. It is only by long, persevering effort, sore discipline, and stern conflict that we shall overcome...."

"There is no such thing as instantaneous sanctification. True sanctification is a daily work, continuing as long as life shall last." *—The Faith I Live By*, p. 116.

"But while God can be just, and yet justify the sinner through the merits of Christ, no man can cover his soul with the garments of Christ's righteousness while practicing known sins, or neglecting known duties. God requires the entire surrender of the heart before justification can take place; and in order for man to retain justification, there must be continual obedience, through active, living faith that works by love and purifies the soul." *—Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 366.

What God requires

In every promise of God, there is a corresponding requirement. He tested Adam's faithfulness and obedience to determine if he would remain in Eden and have dominion over all the creatures. He had access to the tree of life, he communicated with his Creator face to face, and he enjoyed the company of the holy angels.

The Greek word for "obedience" is *hupakoe* (hoop-ak-o-ay'), which also refers to compliance and submission. Therefore, to be perfectly obedient, the entire submission of self is required. "When we submit ourselves to Christ, the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life." *—Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 312.

"God requires of us perfect obedience. We are to purify ourselves, even as He is pure. By keeping His commandments, we are to reveal our love for the Supreme Ruler of the universe. And the Lord has not left us in ignorance regarding His law." *—Review and Herald*, September 27, 1906.

God required of Adam perfect obedience to His law. Likewise, He requires of every person righteousness without a fault in His sight. He makes it possible for us to render to Him all that His law requires—through that faith that brings Christ's righteousness into daily practice. Through the transforming grace of Christ, His children

will be obedient to all of God's requirements.

"True sanctification will be evidenced by a conscientious regard for all the commandments of God, by a careful improvement of every talent, by a circumspect conversation, by revealing in every act the meekness of Christ...."

"This is the true test—the doing of the words of Christ. And it is the evidence of the human agent's love to Jesus, and he that doeth His will giveth to the world the practical evidence of the fruit he manifests in obedience, in purity, and in holiness of character." *—Faith and Works*, pp. 53, 113.

Daily transformation

We need living faith, because faith and action go together; believing and doing are blended. As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. James 2:26. Christ requires—and provides—perfect obedience and flawless righteousness.

"In order to meet the requirements of the law, our faith must grasp the righteousness of Christ, accepting it as our righteousness. Through union with Christ, through acceptance of His righteousness by faith, we may be qualified to work the works of God, to be co-laborers with Christ. If you are willing to drift along with the current of evil, and do not cooperate with the heavenly agencies in restraining transgression in your family, and in the church, in order that everlasting righteousness may be brought in, you do not have faith. Faith works by love and purifies the soul. Through faith the Holy Spirit works in the heart to create holiness therein; but this cannot be done unless the human agent will work with Christ. We can be fitted for heaven only through the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart; for we must have Christ's righteousness as our credentials if we would find access to the Father. In order that we may have the righteousness of Christ, we need daily to be transformed by the influence of the Spirit, to be a partaker of the divine nature. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to elevate the taste, to sanctify the heart, to ennoble the whole man." *—Selected Messages*, vol. 1, p. 374.

Cooperation with God

When Jesus came to this world, He showed His perfect obedience in complete cooperation with His Father. In every aspect of life, we must grow in Christ through His grace and love.

"Man is to cooperate with God, employing every power according to his God-given ability. He is not to be ignorant as to what are right practices in eating and drinking, and in all the habits of life. The Lord designs that His human agents shall act as rational, accountable beings in every respect....

"We cannot afford to neglect one ray of light God has given. To be sluggish in our practice of those things which require diligence is to commit sin. The human agent is to cooperate with God, and keep under those passions which should be in subjection. To do this he must be unwearied in his prayers to God, ever obtaining grace to control his spirit, temper, and actions. Through the imparted grace of Christ, he may be enabled to overcome....

"He who is trying to reach heaven by his own works in keeping the law, is attempting an impossibility. Man, cannot be saved without obedience, but his works should not be of himself; Christ should work in him to will and to do of His good pleasure. The effort that man makes in his own strength to obtain salvation, is represented by the offering of Cain. All that man can do without Christ is polluted with selfishness and sin; but that which is wrought through faith is acceptable to God. When we seek to gain heaven through the merits of Christ, the soul makes progress. Looking unto Jesus, we may go on from strength to strength, from victory to victory; for through Christ the grace of God has worked out our complete salvation....

"Let no man present the idea that man has little or nothing to do in the great work of overcoming; for God does nothing for man without his cooperation. Neither say that after you have done all you can on your part, Jesus will help you. Christ has said, 'Without Me ye can do nothing.' John 15:5....

"Never leave the impression on the mind that there is little or nothing to do on the part of man; but rather teach man to cooperate with God, that he

may be successful in overcoming. Let no one say that your works have nothing to do with your rank and position before God. In the judgment, the sentence pronounced is according to what has been done or to what has been left undone. Matthew 25:34-40....

Look to Jesus

"In looking to Christ, we shall see that His love is without a parallel, that He has taken the place of the guilty sinner, and has imputed unto him His spotless righteousness. When the sinner sees his Saviour dying upon the cross under the curse of sin in his stead, beholding His pardoning love, love awakens in his heart. The sinner loves Christ, because Christ has first loved him, and love is the fulfilling of the law. The repenting soul realizes that God 'is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' The Spirit of God works in the believer's soul, enabling him to advance from one line of obedience to another, reaching on from strength to greater strength, from grace to grace in Jesus Christ." —*Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 380, 381, 364, 381, 374, 375.

"In everything Christ sought first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and that which He did He commands His followers to do. This example He gave to the human race that they might in His strength render to God the obedience He requires, and in the end present themselves perfect before His throne. He was one with the Father. His life was a fulfilling of the law, a continual obedience to God's commands." —*Review and Herald*, October 2, 1900.

God's law is perfect

"The whole world will be judged by this law. It reaches even to the intents and purposes of the heart, and demands purity in the most secret thoughts, desires, and dispositions. It requires us to love God supremely, and our neighbor as ourselves. Without the exercise of this love, the highest profession of faith is mere hypocrisy. God claims, from every soul of the human family, perfect obedience to His law. 'Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.' James 2:10.

"The least deviation from that law, by neglect, or willful transgression, is sin, and every sin exposes the sinner to the wrath of God. The unrenewed heart will hate the restrictions of the law of God, and will strive to throw off its holy claims. Our eternal welfare depends upon a proper understanding of the law of God, a deep conviction of its holy character, and a ready obedience to its requirements. Men and women must be convicted of sin before they will feel their need of Christ. Those who trample under their feet the law of God have rejected the only means to define to the transgressor what sin is. They are doing the work of the great deceiver." —*Signs of the Times*, March 3, 1881.

Obedience by faith brings righteousness into our lives

"When we bring our lives to complete obedience to the law of God, regarding God as our supreme Guide, and clinging to Christ as our hope of righteousness, God will work in our behalf. This is a righteousness of faith, a righteousness hidden in a mystery of which the worldling knows nothing, and which he cannot understand. Sophistry and strife follow in the train of the serpent; but the commandments of God diligently studied and practiced, open to us communication with heaven, and distinguish for us the true from the false. This obedience works out for us the divine will, bringing into our lives the righteousness and perfection that was seen in the life of Christ." —*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 7, pp. 357, 358; *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 66.

"Righteousness within is testified to by righteousness without. He who is righteous within is not hard-hearted and unsympathetic, but day by day he grows into the image of Christ, going on from strength to strength. He who is being sanctified by the truth will be self-controlled, and will follow in the footsteps of Christ until grace is lost in glory." —(*Review and Herald*, June 4, 1895) *Messages to Young People*, p. 35.

Compliance with the laws of health

The righteousness of Christ is also manifested in man's obedience to nat-

ural law; he will glorify God with his body and spirit. He will not defile himself, knowing that his body is the temple of God.

“... Obedience to God’s requirements brings the obedient under the laws that control the physical being. Those who would preserve themselves in health must bring into subjection all appetites and passions. They must not indulge lustful passion and intemperate appetite, for they are to remain under control to God, and their physical, mental, and moral powers are to be so wisely employed that the bodily mechanism will remain in good working order.

“Health, life, and happiness are the result of obedience to physical laws governing our bodies. If our will and way are in accordance with God’s will and way; He will keep the human organism in good condition, and restore the moral, mental, and physical powers, in order that He may work through us to His glory. Constantly His restoring power is manifested in our bodies. If we cooperate with Him in this work, health and happiness, peace and usefulness, are the sure results.” –(Manuscript 151, 1901) *Lift Him Up*, p. 160.

God’s providence

“The Lord has made every provision whereby man may have full and free salvation, and be complete in Him. God designs that His children shall have the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness, that all may have the light of truth. God has provided salvation for the world at infinite cost, even through the gift of His only-begotten Son. The apostle asks, ‘He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?’ Romans 8:32. Then if we are not saved, the fault will not be on the part of God, but on our part, that we have failed to cooperate with the divine agencies. Our will has not coincided with God’s will.” –*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 375.

As we enter another year, may God empower us continually through His Spirit to attain His righteousness and joy in obeying and serving Him. Amen. ■

Reading 4 – Tuesday, December 5, 2017

The Relationship between Faith and Works

By Rafael (Felipe) Acuña Sanchez, Costa Rica

Faith should always be accompanied by works, because works are the fruit of faith.

We are told in James 2:14-24: “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.”

“... Are good works of no real value? Is the sinner who commits sin every day with impunity, regarded of God with the same favor as the one who through faith in Christ tries to work in his integrity? The Scripture answers, ‘We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.’ In His divine arrangement, through His unmerited favor, the Lord has ordained that

good works shall be rewarded. We are accepted through Christ’s merit alone; and the acts of mercy, the deeds of charity, which we perform, are the fruits of faith; and they become a blessing to us; for men are to be rewarded according to their works. It is the fragrance of the merit of Christ that makes our good works acceptable to God, and it is grace that enables us to do the works for which He rewards us. Our works in and of themselves have no merit. When we have done all that it is possible for us to do, we are to count ourselves as unprofitable servants. We deserve no thanks from God. We have only done what it was our duty to do, and our works could not have been performed in the strength of our own sinful natures.” –*Review and Herald*, January 29, 1895; *Our High Calling*, p. 122.

Thus the Bible tells us that faith goes hand in hand with action.

“‘Without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.’ Hebrews 11:6. There are many in the Christian world who claim that all that is necessary to salvation is to have faith; works are nothing, faith is the only essential. But God’s Word tells us that faith without works is dead, being alone. Many refuse to obey God’s commandments, yet they make a great deal of faith. But faith must have a foundation.

“God’s promises are all made upon conditions. If we do His will, if we walk in truth, then we may ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us. While we earnestly endeavor to be obedient, God will hear our petitions; but He will not bless us in disobedience. If we choose to disobey His com-

mandments, we may cry, 'Faith, faith, only have faith,' and the response will come back from the sure Word of God, 'Faith without works is dead.' James 2:20. Such faith will only be as sounding brass and as a tinkling cymbal. In order to have the benefits of God's grace we must do our part; we must faithfully work and bring forth fruits meet for repentance....

"Faith and works will keep us evenly balanced and make us successful in the work of perfecting Christian character. Jesus says, 'Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven.' Matthew 7:21. Speaking of temporal food, the apostle said, 'For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.' 2 Thessalonians 3:10. The same rule applies to our spiritual nourishment; if any would have the bread of eternal life, let him make efforts to obtain it.

"We are living in an important and interesting period of this earth's history. We need more faith than we have yet had; we need a firmer hold from above. Satan is working with all power to obtain the victory over us, for he knows that he has but a short time in which to work. Paul had fear and trembling in working out his salvation; and should not we fear lest a promise being left us, we should any of us seem to come short of it, and prove ourselves unworthy of eternal life? We should watch unto prayer, striving with agonizing effort to enter in at the strait gate....

"While we are to be in harmony with God's law, we are not saved by the works of the law, yet we cannot be saved without obedience. The law is the standard by which character is measured. But we cannot possibly keep the commandments of God without the regenerating grace of Christ. Jesus alone can cleanse us from all sin. He does not save us by law, neither will He save us in disobedience to law.

"Our love to Christ will be in proportion to the depth of our conviction of sin, and by the law is the knowledge of sin. But as we see ourselves, let us look away to Jesus, who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from

all iniquity. By faith take hold of the merits of Christ, and the soul-cleansing blood will be applied. The more clearly we see the evils and perils to which we have been exposed, the more grateful shall we be for deliverance through Christ. The gospel of Christ does not give men license to break the law, for it was through transgression that the floodgates of woe were opened upon our world.

"Today sin is the same malignant thing that it was in the time of Adam. The gospel does not promise the favor of God to anyone who in impenitence breaks His law. The depravity of the human heart, the guilt of transgression, the ruin of sin, are all made plain by the cross where Christ has made for us a way of escape....

"We are workers together with God. You are not to sit in indolence, waiting for some great occasion, in order to do a great work for the Master. You are not to neglect the duty that lies directly in your pathway, but you are to improve the little opportunities that open around you...." *-Faith and Works*, pp. 47, 49, 95, 96, 47.

Obedience comes only from faith, because it is the fruit of it. Faith, on the other hand, is always the natural result of something else. Jesus said, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing." John 15:4, 5.

When it is genuine, obedience is natural and spontaneous, not forced.

In *Steps to Christ*, p. 61, we are told that obedience is the fruit of faith; therefore, one is the result of the other.

"Abide in Me, and I in you." This means to have Christ in you, or to be related to Him, to have fellowship with Him every moment of your life. The inspired pen tells us that we should meditate every day for at least one hour on the life of Christ, and especially on the final scenes of His life. The word "abide" means to stay, like the two men on the road to Emmaus said to the Stranger: "Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." Luke 24:29.

According to the book of Luke, two men were walking to Emmaus. They were deeply grieved and disappointed as they discussed what had just happened. A Stranger approached them, listened to them, and commented. Somehow they felt confident and requested Him to stay. Their faith and hope began to revive. One of them, Cleopas, is mentioned by name, while the other is not. Like these two disciples, perhaps you, too, have come to a moment when you have lost faith and hope and, like Cleopas, you don't see that Jesus is by your side. But if you ask Him to abide with you, your eyes will open, and you will run to Jerusalem to testify of His love. However, only if He remains in you will you see your faith develop and work by love, based on a personal encounter with Christ.

Jesus says that if we abide in Him, we will bear much fruit; but without Him we can do nothing, so what does that include? The passage tells us that we can do nothing to produce fruit, while on the other hand we are told: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Philippians 4:13.

There are two things necessary in the Christian life. One is to find Christ, and the second is to abide in Him. How does one do that? In the same way as one found Him; everything is by faith and is the result of faith—the means of spiritual communion.

"Man is to cooperate with God, employing every power according to his God-given ability. He is not to be ignorant as to what are right practices in eating and drinking, and in all the habits of life. The Lord designs that His human agents shall act as rational, accountable beings in every respect....

"We cannot afford to neglect one ray of light God has given. To be sluggish in our practice of those things which require diligence is to commit sin. The human agent is to cooperate with God, and keep under those passions which should be in subjection. To do this he must be unwearied in his prayers to God, ever obtaining grace to control his spirit, temper, and actions. Through the imparted grace of Christ, he may be enabled to overcome. To be an overcomer means more than many suppose it means....

“But though Christ is everything, we are to inspire every man to unwearyed diligence. We are to strive, wrestle, agonize, watch, pray, lest we shall be overcome by the wily foe. For the power and grace with which we can do this comes from God, and all the while we are to trust in Him, who is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him. Never leave the impression on the mind that there is little or nothing to do on the part of man; but rather teach man to cooperate with God, that he may be successful in overcoming.

“Let no one say that your works have nothing to do with your rank and position before God. In the judgment the sentence pronounced is according to what has been done or to what has been left undone. Matthew 25:34-40....

“Everyone who has a realizing sense of what it means to be a Christian, will purify himself from everything that weakens and defiles. All the habits of his life will be brought into harmony with the requirements of the Word of truth, and he will not only believe, but will work out his own salvation with fear and trembling, while submitting to the molding of the Holy Spirit. *—(Review and Herald, March 6, 1888.)*

“When it is in the heart to obey God, when efforts are put forth to this end, Jesus accepts this disposition and effort as man’s best service, and He makes up for the deficiency with His own divine merit. But He will not accept those who claim to have faith in Him, and yet are disloyal to His Father’s commandment. We hear a great deal about faith, but we need to hear a great deal more about works. Many are deceiving their own souls by living an easygoing, accommodating, crossless religion. But Jesus says, ‘If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.’” *—(Signs of the Times, June 16, 1890) Selected Messages, book 1, pp. 380-382.*

It is abundantly clear: Faith without works is dead. God help us to move forward in our lives and to accept Christ as our personal Saviour. This is my great desire for us all. Amen. ■

Reading 5 – Wednesday, December 6, 2017

Christ, the Center of Our Message

By Danilo Lopez Monterroso, Guatemala

The current condition of the world is hopeless and gloomy. Every day, every month, and every year that passes into the history of humanity carries a flood of records of violence, evil, pain, sin, misery, and death that make people seek for a refuge where they can find security and peace. Rulers come and go with their illusory promises without filling the great void that is in the heart of the human being, but it is of the utmost importance to consider the present condition of God’s people. There are many walking on the narrow path; but in their pilgrimage, they complain, murmuring about the road where He has guided them, thus offending God. They stop to think about what they lost and left behind in deciding to give their lives to Jesus. Unfortunately they have lost sight of the goal and are wandering aimlessly. Your experience may be like that of the faithful servants who left everything to walk by faith on the narrow path, because they kept their eyes on the Invisible One, as did Moses. We read in the faith chapter, Hebrews 11:24-27: “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible.”

What is the Christ-centered message?

There are many who preach sermons without a message. We may be able

to understand and decipher prophecy, know the church’s history, understand doctrine and the principles very well, and know that we are living at the end of the time of grace; but the big question that we ask ourselves is: What is the most important part of our message? Why does the message that we preach not carry more weight, even when it conforms to the holy Scriptures? It is because messages are presented without Christ. Prophetic inspiration says the following: “But whatever phase of the subject is presented, uplift Jesus as the center of all hope, ‘the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright and morning Star.’ Revelation 22:16.” *—Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, p. 118.*

When God called the Adventist people to walk the narrow path after the year 1844, He gave them a complete message with essential truths that the church had to understand and preach. They had everything, but they became very legalistic. God in His mercy sent them a wonderful message in 1888, at the Minneapolis Conference. As we read in Psalm 118:22, Christ was and is the foundation, the most important part of the message: “The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.” Sadly, there were many who rejected the fundamental, central part of this message—“Christ Our Righteousness”—and began to

But these [signs] are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name. John 20:31.

question and criticize both the message and the messengers, causing disunity and separation. We read the following statement: "Some of our brethren have expressed fears that we shall dwell too much upon the subject of justification by faith, but I hope and pray that none will be needlessly alarmed; for there is no danger in presenting this doctrine as it is set forth in the Scriptures.... The Lord has proclaimed Himself to be 'merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.'"

"Several have written to me, inquiring if the message of justification by faith is the third angel's message, and I have answered, 'It is the third angel's message, in verity.'" —(*Review and Herald*, April 1, 1890) *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 372.

Christ Our Righteousness

"The third angel's message calls for the presentation of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment, and this truth must be brought before the world; but the great center of attraction, Jesus Christ, must not be left out of the third angel's message. By many who have been engaged in the work for this time, Christ has been made secondary, and theories and arguments have had first place. The glory of God that was revealed to Moses in regard to the divine character has not been made prominent. The Lord said to Moses, 'I will make all My goodness pass before thee.' 'And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.' Exodus 33:19; 34:6, 7.

"A veil has seemed to be before the eyes of many who have labored in the cause, so that when they presented the

law, they have not had views of Jesus, and have not proclaimed the fact that, where sin abounded, grace doth much more abound. It is at the cross of Calvary that mercy and truth meet together, where righteousness and peace kiss each other. The sinner must ever look toward Calvary; and with the simple faith of a little child, he must rest in the merits of Christ, accepting His righteousness and believing in His mercy. Laborers in the cause of truth should present the righteousness of Christ, not as new light but as precious light that has for a time been lost sight of by the people. We are to accept Christ as our personal Saviour, and He imputes unto us the righteousness of God in Christ. Let us repeat and make prominent the truth that John has portrayed: 'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.' 1 John 4:10.

"In the love of God has been opened the most marvelous vein of precious truth, and the treasures of the grace of Christ are laid open before the church and the world. 'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son.' John 3:16. What love this is—what marvelous, unfathomable love—that would lead Christ to die for us while we were yet sinners! What a loss it is to the soul who understands the strong claims of the law, and who yet fails to understand the grace of Christ which doth much more abound! It is true that the law of God reveals the love of God when it is preached as the truth in Jesus; for the gift of Christ to this guilty world must be largely dwelt upon in every discourse. It is no wonder that hearts have not been melted by the truth, when it has been presented in a cold and lifeless manner. No wonder faith has staggered at the promises of God, when ministers and workers have failed to present Jesus in His relation to the law of God. How often should they have assured the people that 'He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?' Romans 8:32....

Look at the cross

"Look at the cross of Calvary. It is a standing pledge of the boundless love,

the measureless mercy, of the heavenly Father. O that all might repent and do their first works. When the churches do this, they will love God supremely and their neighbors as themselves.... Divisions will then be healed, the harsh sounds of strife will no more be heard in the borders of Israel. Through the grace freely given them of God, all will seek to answer the prayer of Christ, that His disciples should be one, even as He and the Father are one. Peace, love, mercy, and benevolence will be the abiding principles of the soul. The love of Christ will be the theme of every tongue, and it will no more be said by the True Witness, 'I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.' Revelation 2:4.... In the oneness of Christ's church it will be proved that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world.

Eliminating pharisaism and self-righteousness

"When God's people are one in the unity of the Spirit, all of Pharisaism, all of self-righteousness, which was the sin of the Jewish nation, will be expelled from all hearts. The mold of Christ will be upon each individual member of His body, and His people will be new bottles into which He can pour His new wine, and the new wine will not break the bottles. God will make known the mystery which hath been hidden for ages. He will make known what are the 'riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.' Colossians 1:27 (verses 28, 29 also quoted).

Destitute of the Holy Spirit

"Jesus came to impart to the human soul the Holy Spirit, by which the love of God is shed abroad in the heart; but it is impossible to endow men with the Holy Spirit, who are set in their ideas, whose doctrines are all stereotyped and unchangeable, who are walking after the traditions and commandments of men, as were the Jews in the time of Christ. They were very punctilious in the observances of the church, very rigorous in following their forms, but they were destitute of vitality and religious devotion. They

Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. 1 John 4:15.

were represented by Christ as like the dry skins which were then used as bottles. The gospel of Christ could not be placed in their hearts; for there was no room to contain it. They could not be the new bottles into which He could pour His new wine. Christ was obliged to seek elsewhere than among the scribes and the Pharisees for bottles for His doctrine of truth and life. He must find men who were willing to have regeneration of heart. He came to give to men new hearts. He said, 'A new heart also will I give you.' But the self-righteous of that day and of this day feel no need of having a new heart. Jesus passed by the scribes and the Pharisees, for they felt no need of a Saviour. They were wedded to forms and ceremonies. These services had been instituted by Christ; they had been full of vitality and spiritual beauty; but the Jews had lost the spiritual life from their ceremonies, and clung to the dead forms after spiritual life was extinct among them. When they departed from the requirements and commandments of God, they sought to supply the place of that which they had lost, by multiplying their own requirements, and making more rigorous demands than had God; and the more rigid they grew, the less of the love and Spirit of God they manifested. Christ said to the people: 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.' 'Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.' Matthew 23:2-7, 23).

The Faithful Witness gives the last call

"The remnant church is called to go through an experience similar to that of the Jews; and the True Witness, who walks up and down in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, has a solemn message to bear to His people. He says, 'I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.' Revelation 2:4, 5. The love of God has been waning in the church, and as a result, the love of self has sprung up into new activity. With the loss of love for God there has come the loss of love for the brethren. The church may meet all the description that is given of the Ephesian church, and yet fail in vital godliness. Of them Jesus said, 'I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience, and for My name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.' Revelation 2:2-4.

"A legal religion has been thought quite the correct religion for this time. But it is a mistake. The rebuke of Christ to the Pharisees is applicable to those who have lost from the heart their first love. A cold, legal religion can never lead souls to Christ; for it is a loveless, Christless religion. When fastings and prayers are practiced in a self-justifying spirit, they are abominable to God. The solemn assembly for worship, the round of religious ceremonies, the external humiliation, the imposed sacrifice—all proclaim to the world the testimony that the doer of these things considers himself righteous. These things call attention to the observer of rigorous duties, saying, This man is entitled to heaven. But it is all a deception. Works will not buy for us an entrance into heaven. The one great Offering that has been made is ample for all who will believe. The love of Christ will animate the believer with new

life. He who drinks from the water of the fountain of life, will be filled with the new wine of the kingdom. Faith in Christ will be the means whereby the right spirit and motive will actuate the believer, and all goodness and heavenly-mindedness will proceed from him who looks unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of his faith. Look up to God, look not to men. God is your heavenly Father who is willing patiently to bear with your infirmities, and to forgive and heal them. 'This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.' John 17:3. By beholding Christ, you will become changed, until you will hate your former pride, your former vanity and self-esteem, your self-righteousness and unbelief. You will cast these sins aside as a worthless burden, and walk humbly, meekly, trustfully, before God. You will practice love, patience, gentleness, goodness, mercy, and every grace that dwells in the child of God, and will at last find a place among the sanctified and holy." *—Selected Messages, book 1, pp. 383-388.*

We are about to end another year, and the questions we ask ourselves are: How is our relationship with God? Are we walking with Jesus? Have we understood from experience what the message of Justification by Faith is? Is Jesus the center of our lives, homes, and churches? We may experience what the two disciples did on the day of the resurrection as they walked toward the village of Emmaus. They were disheartened, sad, discouraged, disconcerted, and hopeless, and that was when a Stranger joined them and began a dialogue regarding the events that had happened over the weekend. They did not recognize Him because their eyes were veiled. It is Jesus who comes to us and gives us consolation in every moment of our lives. He is the center of everything. He is Emmanuel, God with us, who wants to talk to us and stay with us tonight, yes, in the spiritual night that is coming. Do not let Him go. Say, as did the disciples: "Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." Luke 24:29. He entered, then, to stay with them. Stay with us, Lord Jesus, with Your church throughout the world. This is our desire and prayer. Amen. ■

Justified by Faith

By Alfred Ngwenya, Zimbabwe

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Romans 5:1.

Justification is God's act of removing the guilt and penalty of sin while at the same time declaring a sinner righteous through Christ's atoning sacrifice.

Man's state when he was created

God created man in His own image and likeness. Genesis 1:26. The Bible clearly declares that God is holy and righteous in His ways. After God created everything, the declaration was: "And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day." Genesis 1:31. This means that man also came from the hand of God pure and righteous; he did not need justification, for he was holy and upright. Man needed no mercy. The wise man says: "Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright;..." Ecclesiastes 7:29.

Concerning the first man and the first woman, who came from directly God's hand, the Spirit of prophecy confirms: "All heaven took a deep and joyful interest in the creation of the world and of man. Human beings were a new and distinct order. They were made 'in the image of God,' and it was the Creator's design that they should populate the earth. They were to live in close communion with heaven, receiving power from the Source of all power. Upheld by God, they were to live sinless lives.

"The holy pair were not only children under the fatherly care of God, but students receiving instruction from the all-wise Creator. They were visited by angels, and were granted communion with their Maker, with no obscur-

ing veil between." –*Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 7.

They were holy—not justified—and were only "a little lower than the angels." Hebrews 2:7. They did not need mercy or pardon.

Justification

Surprisingly, the apostle says, "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." Why? What brought about such a change? The answer is, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10-14, 23. "Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions." Ecclesiastes 7:29.

Nevertheless, while they were in their holy state—uprightness—they one day faced the tempter and "sought out many inventions." They looked for things that God had not intended them to have. In eating the fruit of the forbidden tree, they transgressed His commandment. They mistrusted their Creator. They lost faith in their heavenly Father, disobeyed Him, sinned against Him, and became unrighteous. They did not love Him. They became His enemies.

This is how man is today. When Adam sinned, he became carnal; and in such a state no one can appreciate the things of God, "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Romans 8:7. When he is in

this state, man can do nothing good. He knows no righteousness and does not even desire it. He cannot please God, because he is not seeking for Him. We conclude that in the natural man dwells nothing good, as the Spirit expressly states: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like:" (in this state, whatever good a man tries to do proceeds from selfishness) "of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Galatians 5:19-21.

Remedy

When man sinned, did God hate him? No, He hated the sin; and He drove Adam and his wife out of the garden of Eden because they had become unrighteous through transgression of God's holy law.

However, it is possible for man to be justified. How? "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16. The Bible says that God is love, and He cannot change. Did God love His Son? Yes! Then, why did He send Him to a world that did not seek for God? "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." 2 Corinthians 5:21.

When man lost his righteousness, God loved him and sent His righteous Son to be the righteousness of fallen human beings. How could He give righteousness to unrighteous people? He "was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justifica-

tion.” Romans 4:25. Now, for man to be righteous, he must first be justified; and this is possible only through one righteous Man, Jesus Christ, who became human to open a way for sinful man to be pardoned. And, “When God pardons the sinner, remits the punishment he deserves, and treats him as though he had not sinned, He receives him into divine favor, and justifies him through the merits of Christ’s righteousness. The sinner can be justified only through faith in the atonement made through God’s dear Son, who became a sacrifice for the sins of the guilty world. No one can be justified by any works of his own. He can be delivered from the guilt of sin, from the condemnation of the law, from the penalty of transgression, only by virtue of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. Faith is the only condition upon which justification can be obtained, and faith includes not only belief but trust.” *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 389.

Man could not bring himself back to righteousness—back to God—because he was now unrighteous and could not change himself, any more than a leopard can change its spots or an Ethiopian can change his skin. It was exactly the same as the impossibility for man to bring himself up before his existence. Man absolutely cannot be righteous on his own, and he cannot do any work of any kind to receive pardon or justification. The same way in which man came into existence is how he can be made righteous. This helps us understand that “The whole work is the Lord’s from the beginning to the end. The perishing sinner may say: ‘I am a lost sinner; but Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. He says, ‘I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.’ Mark 2:17. I am a sinner, and He died upon Calvary’s cross to save me. I need not remain a moment longer unsaved. He died and rose again for my justification, and He will save me now. I accept the forgiveness He has promised.” *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 392.

Man’s responsibility is to accept the justification that has been purchased for him. If human beings could understand this, they would not try to obtain virtue by their own efforts. “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works

of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” Galatians 2:16. We can say that, when Adam was placed in the garden of Eden, the law justified him because he met all the requirements of the law. He did not keep the law to make himself righteous; rather, he kept the law because he was righteous. After he went against the law, it condemned him, because it found no righteousness in him.

Even if Adam had done some work in the attempt to regain what he had lost, it would have been worthless. Good “works will not buy for us an entrance into heaven. The one great Offering that was made is ample for all who will believe.” *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 388. “Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” Romans 3:24-26; Ephesians 2:8.

Faith and works

Many have gone so far as to say that once a person is saved, he is saved forever. And some believe that, through His death on the cross, Jesus freed sinners from any duty. But the great preacher of justification by faith sheds light on this so we can understand our responsibility in being saved by grace through faith. He says: “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.” Romans 3:31.

We need to notice and understand something that is absolutely true: People are saved by grace and rewarded in accordance with their works, for it is written; “And, behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be.” “For the Son of man shall come

in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works.” Revelation 22:12; Matthew 16:27. It is an understandable principle that one is rewarded (compensated) after he has performed work at the Master’s command, as found in the parable of the hired servants. At the twelfth hour, all were blessed for their service (duty)—rewarded for faithfully carrying out their responsibilities. We read: “Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.” Revelation 22:14. And the wise man said: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.” Ecclesiastes 12:13. “While good works will not save even one soul, yet it is impossible for even one soul to be saved without good works.” *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 377.

To be a candidate for heaven, one must meet the requirements of the law: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.” Luke 10:27. By faith, one must grasp the righteousness of Christ and accept it as his righteousness. Through union with Jesus, through acceptance of His righteousness by faith, we are made able to work the works of God, to be co-laborers with Christ. “If you are willing to drift along with the current of evil, and do not cooperate with the heavenly agencies in restraining transgression in your family, and in the church, in order that everlasting righteousness may be brought in, you do not have faith.” *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 374. But He cannot accept those who claim to have faith in Him and yet are disloyal to His Father’s commandments. To love God is to have faith in Him. Hebrews 11:6. To love God is to keep His commandments. To know Jesus is to walk as He walked, for He says: “If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love.” John 15:10. We need to understand that while the law does not have the power to bring man back to his first estate, “the mission of Christ

on earth was not to destroy the law, but by His grace to bring man back to obedience to its precepts." *—Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 48.

"He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him." John 14:21.

"... I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." Revelation 2:4, 5.

"Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" James 2:19, 20.

"... The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Romans 10:8-10.

"Genuine faith will be manifested in good works; for good works are the fruits of faith. As God works in the heart, and man surrenders his will to God, and cooperates with God, he works out in the life what God works in by the Holy Spirit, and there is harmony between the purpose of the heart and the practice of the life. Every sin must be renounced as the hateful thing that crucified the Lord of life and glory, and the believer must have a progressive experience by continually doing the works of Christ. It is by continual surrender of the will, by continual obedience, that the blessing of justification is retained.

"Those who are justified by faith must have a heart to keep the way of the Lord. It is an evidence that a man is not justified by faith when his works do not correspond to his profession. James says, 'Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was his faith made perfect?' James 2:22." *—Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 397. Amen. ■

Reading 7 – Sabbath, December 9, 2017

The Merchant Rakal and the Pearl of Great Price

By Idel Suarez, Jr., U.S.A.

Chinese pearls

Whenever I visit China, I stop at the Pearl Market in Beijing to inquire about pearls. It is the principal trading post for freshwater pearls worldwide, and the salespeople there often share their extensive knowledge with me. During my last visit, a salesperson named Lucy showed me her most costly pearl. Only eighteen to twenty millimeters in diameter, it was perfectly round and white. Its worth was estimated to be five thousand dollars.

Most Chinese cultured pearls are taken from fresh water mussels, and come in three basic colors: white, pink, and cream. The most desirable shape is round, however pearls form in a variety of non-spherical shapes that can resemble water droplets, bells, rice, and even tiny sticks.

Ironically, these prized pearls begin their development by first inflicting irritation and pain upon a mollusk. The process starts when an irritant gets beneath the tender tissues of the mussel's fleshy mantle. For the next fifteen to thirty months, or longer, the mollusk's system secretes a protective coating of calcium carbonate to cover the foreign object with an iridescent nacre, also called "mother-of-pearl."¹

Many spiritual lessons related to the Christian experience can be drawn from pearls. Like the irritating foreign substances that causes the mollusk to create a pearl, bitter experiences can actually add luster and beauty to our lives. As someone said, "What does not destroy us makes us stronger." Difficult, agonizing, and even traumatic events in our yesteryears can be the basis for the perfection of a Christian character. In overcoming difficulties,

the fruits of the Spirit, such as patience, tolerance, and peace, can be developed. God allows us to have life-changing experiences so that we can mature into living pearls for His kingdom.

According to Lucy, there is one pearl that is most costly, and that is the Tahitian black pearl of the South Pacific. It is the only pearl that is naturally black in color. Its nacre resembles the ebony of Africa. The Tahitian black pearl reminds me of the legendary black wool produced in Laodicea. It symbolizes the evil of our nature that must be given up for Christ's purity, innocence, and righteousness. Man's sin cost the blood of Jesus Christ.

Christ desires those who will enter His kingdom to buy from Him white pearls and white garments to enrich their lives and cover their nakedness. We are to do His bidding by obtaining His pearls and garments, both of which symbolize His perfect righteousness.

"The righteousness of Christ, as a pure, white pearl, has no defect, no stain. No work of man can improve the great and precious gift of God. It is without a flaw. In Christ are 'hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.' Colossians 2:3. He is 'made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.' 1 Corinthians 1:30."²

Parable of the merchant

Jesus Christ was a master storyteller. He recounted stories of daily life with all its triumphs, failures, and historical events, as well as some tales that could be viewed as science fiction. All of His stories contained deep meanings and values. As He related His

parables, He did not always retell the story in exactly the same way; rather He would alter the details depending on the audience that He was addressing. One such story dealt with an unnamed Jewish pearl merchant. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it." Matthew 13:45, 46.

A merchant man. In the original Greek text, the word for "merchant" is *emporos*. According to Dr. W.E. Vine, *emporos* literally means "a person on a journey," or "a passenger on ship-board." Yet, in reviewing sixteen different English versions, *emporos* was always translated as "merchant" or "dealer." The Hebrew word for "merchant" is *rakal*. Both the Greek and Hebrew words denote a dealer, a peddler, a trader of goods, a businessman, and, yes, a merchant explorer.

Hence, we will name this unidentified Jewish pearl dealer Rakal. Rakal was a merchant explorer. From time to time, he would travel by camel caravan to distant lands in search of pearls. Always on the lookout for beautiful pearls, he was not only in the business of buying and selling pearls; he also traded pearls so as to increase his inventory and profits. If he heard that a shop in the Middle East had some new pearls available, he immediately set out to find the place.

In Rakal's day, some of the nicest, most valuable pearls came from the Persian Gulf and were carried via the silk and spice trade routes to Judea. One day, Rakal was overjoyed to find the biggest, most beautiful, most costly pearl his generation had ever seen!

In telling this parable, Jesus desired His hearers to realize that the believer needs to seek out the truth in the Scriptures as diligently and consistently as a dealer in search of valuable merchandise. Life itself is a journey in which the truth is to be sought and bought, but never sold.

Seeking goodly pearls. Rakal was not on the hunt for just any pearl. He sought out the most exquisite pearls, searching for them among those who sold pearls, among those selling estates, among Gentiles and Jews alike.

He traveled anywhere and everywhere pearls could be found, regardless of the distance he had to travel. Ever diligent in his search, he examined each find carefully with a trained eye. He would not accept any pearl that did not meet his high standard.

In this setting, Rakal represents one who is seeking salvation. Reading the Bible from cover to cover is not enough for him. Instead, the holy word must be closely examined carefully every day, comparing one verse with another. As Isaiah states, "But the word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little...." Isaiah 28:13.

"The merchantman in the parable represents a class who were sincerely desiring truth. In different nations there were earnest and thoughtful men who had sought in literature and science and the religions of the heathen world for that which they could receive as the soul's treasure."³

The true Christian is a merchant of truth. Like Rakal, who sought goodly pearls, Christians seek the pearls found in the rivers of living water recorded in Scripture. Thus, as a professed Christian, ask yourself: Am I a diligent student of the Scriptures? Do I study my Sabbath School Lesson during the week and not just while the lesson is being taught? Do I have a worn-out Bible due to its frequent use? Can I truly say that I am a modern-day Berean—a spiritual seeker of pearls? "And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." Acts 17:10, 11.

As a spiritual merchant, the true believer seeks for genuine religion. He looks at Christianity. He looks into Protestantism and its different branches. He examines Adventism and its fundamental beliefs. For example, the Sabbath truth, vegetarianism, pacifism, the permanency of marriage, the righteousness of Christ, and saving faith are all tested and tried by the real truth seeker. In time, his search will lead him

to the Reform Movement and the present truth that it teaches. Like Rakal, the merchant who could discern between fake and genuine pearls, the true Reformer is able to discern between the true and a false reformation, between a prophesied reform and an independent group. He or she does not seek only the fellowship of worship; rather, he pursues a doctrine founded on truth. He looks for a greater revelation of Jesus Christ and His righteousness, which is the goodly pearl.

"Christ Himself is the pearl of great price. In Him is gathered all the glory of the Father, the fullness of the Godhead. He is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person. The glory of the attributes of God is expressed in His character. Every page of the Holy Scriptures shines with His light. The righteousness of Christ, as a pure, white pearl, has no defect, no stain. No work of man can improve the great and precious gift of God. It is without a flaw."⁴

As I toured the pearl market and spoke with the sellers, they showed me many pearls containing imperfections. Some were not symmetrical; others, not spherical. Some had stains. Others lacked a bright luster. These were considered of little value. So it is with many religious leaders and founders. They have a message of meager value, not a goodly message, not a sound doctrine, when compared to the pearl of great price—Jesus Christ.

It is impossible for Confucius, Buddha, Mohammed, Joseph Smith, and other religious founders to fulfill the yearning desire for salvation, for that comes only from knowing Jesus Christ experimentally. The true seeker will desire practical godliness, not just a theoretical knowledge of Jesus. Like Rakal, the pearl merchant, he knows that goodly pearls are very valuable and require a great sacrifice to obtain them. These spiritual pearls are not

Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? 1 John 5:5.

cheap or ordinary. They are not based on salvation by works, but on righteousness by faith that works by love. As Paul writes, this righteousness by faith, this faith that works by love, is an obedient faith. It is obedient to God's ten precepts that summarize the truth of God. "God calls for your willing obedience."⁵ "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love. Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?" Galatians 5:6, 7.

One pearl of great price. When Rakal found this pearl of great price, he knew he had discovered something of tremendous value. This was the grandest pearl he had ever seen. It was the largest pearl his eyes had ever had the pleasure of gazing upon. It was more precious than all the other pearls he owned. It was shinier and more spherical than all the others, and its nacre was smooth in texture. However, it was also the most expensive pearl he had ever come across. If only he could purchase it!

He tried to haggle the price down, but to no avail, because the seller knew that this pearl was like no other. The price was fixed. And the price was more than he expected. Oh, but how much Rakal desired to have this pearl as his own! He was willing to move heaven and earth to procure it, to own it, and to keep it. Now that he had found it, he did not want to part with it. What could he do? He resolved to sell everything he had to gather the necessary funds to purchase the grand pearl for himself.

"In the parable, the pearl is not represented as a gift. The merchantman bought it at the price of all that he had. Many question the meaning of this, since Christ is represented in the Scriptures as a gift. He is a gift, but only to those who give themselves, soul, body, and spirit, to Him without reserve. We

are to give ourselves to Christ, to live a life of willing obedience to all His requirements. All that we are, all the talents and capabilities we possess, are the Lord's, to be consecrated to His service. When we thus give ourselves wholly to Him, Christ, with all the treasures of heaven, gives Himself to us. We obtain the pearl of great price."⁶

Dear reader, have you tallied the cost of obtaining Christ—righteousness, sanctification, and salvation? The pearl is not a gift. It is not free. But good things are costly, are they not? To obtain an excellent education, do not time, mental effort, and funds have to be expended? God's love is unconditional; but there are conditions to receiving the gifts of Christ, faith, and salvation. Those conditions are summed up by the means necessary to purchase the pearl of great price. That pearl is not raffled off to the lucky one; no, it must be bought. With what? "Without money and without price." Isaiah 55:1.

Can you truthfully say that, for you, Christ is not just a nice pearl, but the greatest pearl of great price? Is He the greatest One you have ever known? Is He your Saviour, King, and Lord? Have you taken the time to examine Him and His righteousness to determine His value in the light of eternity? Do you think obeying His commandments is worth your time, effort, and soul? Do you believe that He is worth the price of all your affections, attentions, and yearnings? Is He costly? Yes. Is He worth it? Definitely yes! Yet only eternity will reveal the true value of having Jesus in your heart, mind, and soul. Only eternity holds that life that measures with the life of God.

The apostle Paul wrote that when everything in the world is compared to Christ, it is as if the comparison is between dung and gold. In our modern context, it is like comparing dirt to platinum, diamonds, and costly pearls. "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ,

the righteousness which is of God by faith." Philippians 3:8, 9.

"Our Redeemer is the pearl so precious that in comparison all things else may be accounted as loss."⁷

Sold all that he had. Rakal desired that pearl so much that he went home, took an inventory of all of his possessions, and held an estate sale. He parted with all his other pearls. He sold his clothing. He sold his food. He sold his jewelry. He sold his weapons. He sold everything that might bring him a dinar or a shekel. Anything that stood between him and the costly pearl of great price was sold.

Charles Spurgeon, the prince of preachers, illustrated the merchant selling his estate with a yard sale. Although it took him years to accumulate all of his possessions, and it must have given him joy to have those items, yet he sold them quickly and with pleasure. All sales were for cash; nothing was sold on credit. Spurgeon further considered the purchase of the pearl requiring the sale of all items owned as a "great bargain."

"'Buy my farm,' he says to one man. 'Come buy it.' 'Let us come to terms. I want money, and I must have money.' 'And away went the furniture down in the house, one article after another. 'They must all go, clear them all out.' There was a rapid sale.... Everything must go for that pearl.'"⁸

Does this compare to the experience of being born again? When we accept the present truth, does it not require a change of lifestyle?

The question comes to you now at the end of the year: What do you need to give up to obtain Christ? Do you need to part with "the garment spotted by the flesh?" Jude 1:23. Or is it the "eating of flesh foods and drinking of wine" at your table that is keeping you from entering the pearly gates? Isaiah 22:13. Or do you need to part from "the strange woman" who is enticing you? Proverbs 2:16. Or is it "to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" that you delay in selling all? Hebrews 11:25. For God has not called us unto "filthiness of the flesh and spirit," but unto "perfecting holiness in the fear of God." 2 Corinthians 7:1.

Spiritually speaking, what are we asked to sell in order to buy the pearl of

If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him. 1 John 2:29.

great price? It is our prejudice. It is our self-righteousness. It is our grudges and roots of bitterness. It is our pride. Simply put, we must sell our sins—give up our transgressions. We are to crucify the flesh and its passions, called in Scripture the “motions of sins” that “bring forth fruit unto death.” Romans 7:5.

“The poorest are as well able as the richest to purchase salvation; for no amount of worldly wealth can secure it. It is obtained by willing obedience, by giving ourselves to Christ as His own purchased possession....

“We cannot earn salvation, but we are to seek for it with as much interest and perseverance as though we would abandon everything in the world for it....

“The price we are required to pay is not gold or silver, for this belongs to God.... He asks you to give up your sins.”⁹

As He told the rich young ruler, Jesus tells us to sell all that we have that impedes our spiritual development and our following Him. Matthew 19:21. We are to sell anything and everything that blocks our spiritual path with Jesus; namely, our sins and self-righteousness. He requires an entire surrender of the will, a death to self, and an abandonment of all worldliness. Even if it seems to be a cross, we are to take it up and follow Him.

“There are some who are seeking, always seeking, for the goodly pearl. But they do not make an entire surrender of their wrong habits. They do not die to self that Christ may live in them. Therefore they do not find the precious pearl. They have not overcome unholy ambition and their love for worldly attractions. They do not lift the cross, and follow Christ in the path of self-denial and self-sacrifice. They never know what it is to have peace and harmony in the soul; for without entire surrender there is no rest, no joy. Almost Christians, yet not fully Christians, they seem near the kingdom of heaven, but they do not enter therein. Almost but not wholly saved means to be not almost but wholly lost.”¹⁰

Now you may find that “this is too hard a line,” and you may agree with what some of the seventy disciples exclaimed in Jesus’ day: “This is a hard

saying; who can hear it?” John 6:60. If so, then consider what Spurgeon said about this.

“Very well, if you do not want to buy the pearl, you see—that is to say, if you do not want to make your fortune—for that buying of the pearl was the making of the man’s fortune—if you do not think the pearl is worth it, please do not have it. It is not possible to estimate the intrinsic value, the real worth of Christ. We do not ‘cast pearls before swine.’ Matthew 7:6. If you do not want Him, there are others who are willing to ‘take your crown.’ Revelation 3:11.”¹¹

Bought it. Rakal hurried with the money in hand to pay the salesman for the pearl of great price. It was an “immediate purchase.” It was a “joyful” experience. It was the “final purchase.” It was “a purchase he never regretted.”¹² He bought the pearl and never sold it. Proverbs 23:23.

Will you buy Jesus Christ spiritually? Will you pay with all your heart, mind, strength, and soul to have Him as your Saviour?

Christ is looking for black pearls

From a different perspective, and yet along the same line of reasoning, the parable of the merchant of pearls can be interpreted as Jesus being the merchant from heaven who came down to earth to look for black pearls. He is the Merchant, and we are the pearls.

“The parable of the merchantman seeking goodly pearls has a double significance: It applies not only to men as seeking the kingdom of heaven, but to Christ as seeking His lost inheritance. Christ, the heavenly merchantman seeking goodly pearls, saw in lost humanity the pearl of price. In man, defiled and ruined by sin, He saw the possibilities of redemption. Hearts that have been the battleground of the conflict with Satan, and that have been rescued by the power of love, are more precious to the Redeemer than are those who have never fallen. God looked upon humanity, not as vile and worthless; He looked upon it in Christ, saw it as it might become through redeeming love. He collected all the riches of the universe, and laid them down in order to buy the pearl. And Jesus,

having found it, resets it in His own diadem. ‘For they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon His land.’ Zechariah 9:16. ‘They shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels.’ Malachi 3:17.”¹³

The Mexican merchant

Let us now connect this parable to another story. It is about a missionary working among the natives in Mexico. He befriends a local pearl merchant near the coast and shares the gospel with him. One day, the pearl merchant says he will walk on his knees to the great cathedral in the capital city. The missionary pleads with him not to go, explaining that God does not require pilgrimages nor grant salvation by works. The pearl merchant does not understand and insists that he must go on this pilgrimage to expiate his sins and reclaim the favor of God. Before leaving, he calls the missionary to his private room, opens a coffer, and places in the hands of the missionary a very large and beautiful pearl. As he does this, the merchant relates the story of how while finding this pearl, his dear son lost his life. Now, as a token of friendship, this merchant wants the missionary to have the pearl as a parting gift.

The missionary seizes the opportunity to refuse the gift and, instead, insists on paying for it, because it is so costly and beautiful. The old merchant vehemently protests, explaining that it is not possible to pay for the pearl, because it is priceless. It cost the life of his son. As he speaks these words, the merchant suddenly understands what the missionary had been trying to explain. Salvation is a priceless gift from God. We cannot purchase it. It can only be received by faith. “For the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Romans 6:23. As understanding dawns in the merchant’s mind, he kneels with the missionary and cries before God with thanksgiving for the gift of Jesus. Humbly, he accepts His salvation by faith.

How many still try to earn heaven with their works, when it really is a gift? Good works are the result of true faith in Jesus. Take hold of the eternal

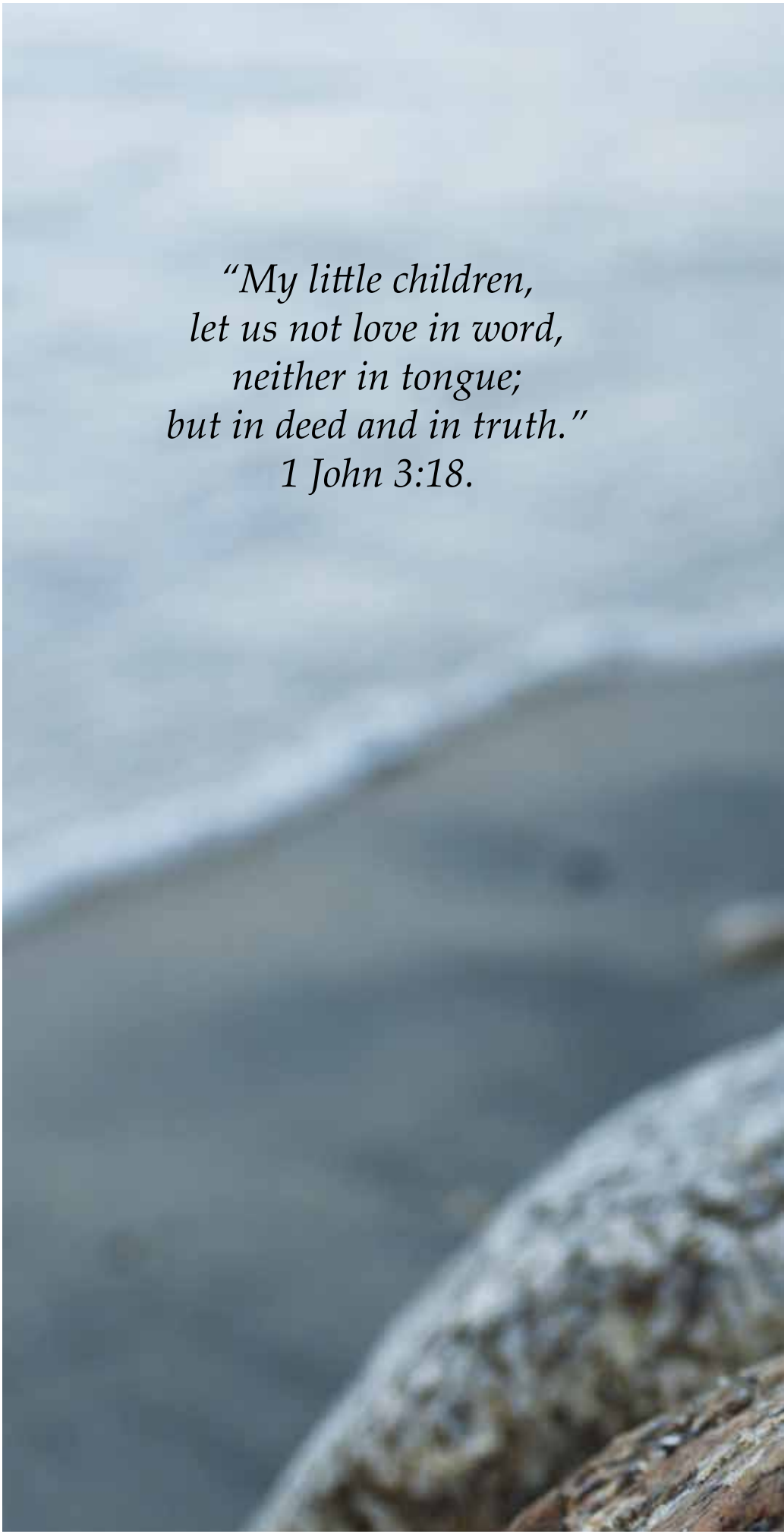
gift of Christ now, and allow Jesus to work in you “both to will and to do of His good pleasure.” Philippians 2:13.

The pearly gates

To conclude, the word “pearl” (singular) appears only twice in the Bible—in the story of the pearl merchant and in the description of the gates of the New Jerusalem. Like the song titled, “Someone Will Enter the Pearly Gates,” the merchant who purchased the pearl of great price symbolizes all who follow his example and will live in the city of the New Jerusalem. In the Revelation, John said that each of the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem is made of a single, beautiful pearl. “And the twelve gates were twelve pearls: every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.” Revelation 21:21.

Oh, that we may enter through those pearly gates! Oh, that they may open as we approach them. However, “the everlasting gates of pearl will not open to those who come with the symbols of power, but they will open wide to the trembling touch of the meek and lowly. To be great in the kingdom of God is to be as a little child in simplicity and love.”¹⁴

Oh, friend, may you enter the pearly gates with the pearl of great price in your bosom. Also, may you have a blessed new year, and may the coming year bring every one of us closer to righteousness, holiness, and redemption. Amen. ■



*“My little children,
let us not love in word,
neither in tongue;
but in deed and in truth.”
1 John 3:18.*

¹ *Encarta Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Pearl” (gems).

² Ellen G. White, “The Pearl,” *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1900), p. 115.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁸ Charles Spurgeon, “A Great Bargain,” *Miracles and Parables of Our Lord*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House), p. 7.

⁹ White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 117.

¹⁰ White, “The Pearl of Great Price,” *Selected Messages*, book 1 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), p. 399.

¹¹ Spurgeon, *Miracles and Parables of Our Lord*, p. 9. Bible references do not appear in the original and are added as Biblical proofs.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 11.

¹³ White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 118.

¹⁴ White, “An All-Powerful Saviour,” II, *The Youth’s Instructor*, September 28, 1899.