

The International Paper for Seventh-day Adventists

WEEK OF PRAYER ISSUE

ADVENTIST WORLD



By
Grace
Alone



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BY GRACE ALONE

ON THE COVER: This year's Week of Prayer readings highlight the gospel as the basis of our salvation in Christ alone. Jesus' love and acceptance of sinners—no matter how bad—is why we have hope.

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About This Special Issue

This year marks the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, when the message of salvation through Christ alone was heard by many for the first time. Light spread not only through the teachings of the great Reformers, but through God's Word itself, as the Bible became available in common languages and people could read the truth for themselves.

It is fitting that our Week of Prayer readings in 2017 focus on "Christ Our Righteousness," for there is truly "no other name under heaven . . . by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Ellen White expressed this thought beautifully during a General Conference session when she said, "The only way in which men will be able to stand firm in the conflict is to be rooted and grounded in Christ. . . . The preaching of Christ crucified, Christ our righteousness, is what satisfies the soul's hunger. When we secure the interest of the people in this great central truth, faith and hope and courage come to the heart.*"

I encourage you this week not only to contemplate these special readings, but also to spend time in God's Word and prayer as we focus together on "Christ Our Righteousness." If you have younger ones in the home, be sure to share with them the accompanying children's readings.

May the Lord bless us as we come together as a world church family to study and pray during this important time of earth's history.

Ted N. C. Wilson, *president*
Seventh-day Adventist Church

*In *General Conference Daily Bulletin*, Jan. 28, 1893 (see also *Last Day Events* [Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1992], p. 151).

MEET THE AUTHOR



Hans (Johann) Heinz, born in Vienna, Austria, studied theology at Séminaire Adventiste du Salève in Collonges, France. Following graduation he worked for four years as a pastor in Vienna. Beginning in 1957, he taught for 21 years at Seminar Schloss Bogenhofen (including seven years as director). After completing doctoral studies at Andrews University, he served as dean of Seminar Marienhöhe in Darmstadt, Germany, from 1982 to 1995. He has authored several books and many articles on theology and church history. His doctoral dissertation,

Justification and Merit, dealt with the conflict between the Roman Catholic doctrine of merit and the biblical doctrine of righteousness by faith. Heinz and his wife, Louisette, enjoy an active retirement near Bogenhofen, Austria.

God's Word, Our Faith Foundation

By Ted N. C. Wilson

At first glance the small group seemed similar to any other funeral procession: members of the clergy, curious onlookers, and men with grave digging tools. Only one thing was missing—a coffin with the deceased.

Strange and Angry Funeral

As the group entered the graveyard of the parish church of St. Mary in Lutterworth, England, a sense of excitement—and revenge—permeated the air. At last, 43 years after the arch-heretic John Wycliffe was laid in his grave, he would receive his due.

Reaching the gravesite, the men eagerly tore at the ground, digging deeper until at last their picks struck wood. Ripping open the coffin, unsanctified hands threw Wycliffe's bones from their resting place and into a blazing fire.

Not able to execute him during his life, the Papacy was determined to accomplish its ends following his death. After the bones of John Wycliffe were turned to ashes, the proud prelates scooped up his remains and poured them into the nearby River

Swift, hoping to leave no trace of the man or his work.

Why such hate? Why such vitriol? Because John Wycliffe had dared to defy the pope, had dared to preach against the freeloading friars, and worst of all, had dared to translate the Bible from Latin into the English language, providing God's holy Word to people in their native tongue. Priests, bishops, and the pope himself knew that the light of God's Word would dispel the darkness that was keeping them and their corrupt system in power.

"But the burning of such a man's bones could not end his influence," wrote theologian and historian George Townsend centuries later. "As John Foxe said in his book of martyrs, 'though they digged up his body, burnt his bones, and drowned his ashes, yet the Word of God and the truth of his doctrine, with the fruit and success thereof, they could not burn; which yet to this day . . . doth remain.'"¹

While Wycliffe escaped the fire until after his death, many others who came after were burned at the stake, beheaded, drowned—martyred for their faithfulness to God and His Word.

Providing the Bible for the People

The effort to provide the Bible for people in their own language continued. Two hundred years after the birth of Wycliffe, Martin Luther, the most well known of all the Reformers, published his German translation of the New Testament in 1522. His complete translation of the Bible was first published in 1534 and was warmly welcomed by the common German-speaking people. But the authorities were not pleased: "In vain both ecclesiastical and civil authorities were invoked to crush the heresy. In vain they resorted to imprisonment, torture, fire, and sword. Thousands of believers sealed their faith with their blood, and yet the work went on. Persecution served only to extend the truth."²

While Martin Luther was bringing God's Word to the common people in Germany, William Tyndale followed in the footsteps of Wycliffe by setting out to provide a new English translation of the Bible. While Wycliffe's Bible had been translated from the Latin text, Tyndale worked from the original languages of Greek and Hebrew. His work was not welcomed in England, so Tyndale fled to Germany, where in 1525 his New Testament emerged—the first to be printed, from the original Greek, in the English language.

Promptly smuggled into England, Tyndale's translation was welcomed by the people, but hated by the authorities. While translating the Old Testament, Tyndale was betrayed in 1535. After suffering in prison for 500 days, Tyndale was martyred—strangled with chains and burned at the stake. Trusted friends completed his work, and Tyndale's complete Bible translation was published several years after his death.

“Now is the time to develop **total** faith, confidence, and trust in the Word of God.”

The Reformers' Passion

Why did these men go through such pain and suffering, even death, to bring the Word of God to people? Because they longed for people to know God's truth. Once the public's eyes were opened to the truth of the Bible, they would see the contradictions between what God's Word said and what the priests taught. The truth would set them free from the grip of fear that the institutional church held.³

Ellen White shared the Reformers' passion for giving everyone access to the Scriptures. “The Bible was not given only for ministers and learned men,” she wrote. “Every man, woman, and child should read the Scriptures for himself or herself. Do not depend on the minister to read it for you. The Bible is God's Word to you. The poor man needs it as much as the rich man, the unlearned as much as the learned. And Christ has made this Word so plain that in reading it no one need stumble.”⁴

Because of the Protestant principles of accepting the plain reading of the text and allowing the Bible to interpret itself, most of our foundational truths—the Sabbath, the state of the dead, the sanctuary and the investigative judgment—were established by the time the Seventh-day Adventist Church was officially organized in 1863.

Commenting on this foundational Bible study, Ellen White wrote, “Elder [Hiram] Edson, and others who were keen, noble, and true, were among those who, after the passing of the time in 1844, searched for the truth as for hidden treasure. I met with them, and we studied and prayed earnestly. Often we remained together until late at night, and sometimes through the

entire night, praying for light and studying the Word. Again and again these brethren came together to study the Bible, in order that they might know its meaning, and be prepared to teach it with power.”⁵

A Critical Eye

Today some disparage the idea of a “plain reading” of the text. To their way of thinking, it is necessary to approach the Bible with a critical eye to understand what parts of God's Word have meaning for us in the twenty-first century. Rather than comparing scripture with scripture, they set human wisdom as the arbiter between what is relevant and what is not.

One of the biggest battles we face as Seventh-day Adventists is the battle over the authority of the Bible.

Let's remember that the Scriptures are our only safeguard as we faithfully follow and promote the historical-biblical method of interpreting Scripture, allowing the Bible to interpret itself, line upon line, and precept upon precept.

Note the following instructions about accepting the Bible as it reads: “God requires more of His followers than many realize. If we would not build our hopes of heaven upon a false foundation we must accept the Bible as it reads and believe that the Lord means what He says.”⁶

Methods of Bible Study

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has an official document on how to study the Bible. Voted by the General Conference Executive Committee at its Annual Council in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the document “is addressed to all members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church with the purpose of

providing guidelines on how to study the Bible.” It then explains two different approaches to Scripture:

The historical-critical method minimizes the need for faith in God and obedience to His commandments. In addition, because such a method de-emphasizes the divine element in the Bible as an inspired book (including its resultant unity) and depreciates or misunderstands apocalyptic prophecy and the eschatological portions of the Bible, we urge Adventist Bible students to avoid relying on the use of the presuppositions and the resultant deductions associated with the historical-critical method.

In contrast with the historical-critical method and presuppositions, we believe it to be helpful to set forth the principles of Bible study that are consistent with the teachings of the Scriptures themselves, that preserve their unity, and are based upon the premise that the Bible is the Word of God. Such an approach will lead us into a satisfying and rewarding experience with God.⁷

God has given us a mandate from heaven to be defenders of His Word because it has been shown to be true and it changes people's lives. The world is awash in existential behavior—people think everything is relative, but it is not! There are absolutes, and they are found in the Word of God and our faithful adherence to His Word.

Make Time for God's Word

We are living in the Laodicean last-day period when Christianity is often superficial. The devil will try everything to distract us from the Bible and the truth. Every possible means will be used: recreation, media, amusements,

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When most of the religious leaders of Jesus' day focused on condemnation, Jesus emphasized grace and forgiveness, as seen in His interaction with the woman taken in adultery (John 8).



work, music, disagreements and internal fighting, false teachings, family discord, economic problems—anything that will take time away from God's Word.

But now is the time to make sure to read the Bible each day. God's Word is vitally important because it brings us face to face with Jesus Christ. It teaches us that salvation is possible only through complete reliance on Him. It tells of His life and death, His resurrection, and His ministry for us in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary. It reminds us that the Sabbath is Christ's special seal and covenant with His commandment-keeping people. It confirms our belief and hope in a soon, literal second coming of Christ, our Redeemer. It helps us to know that we serve a God who will never fail and whose church will be triumphant against the attacks of the devil.

Now is the time to develop total faith, confidence, and trust in the Word of God. We know that a time is coming when we will not be able to trust our senses, that an “almost overmastering delusion”⁸ and deception so alluring

will be presented that “if possible, even the elect” will be deceived (Matt. 24:25).

Now Is the Time

A storm is coming. Now is the time to build upon the firm foundation of God's Word. Jesus Himself tells us how to be ready: “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock” (Matt. 7:24, 25).

Our faith and beliefs must be built upon the timeless Word of God. The Bible, which has been faithfully preserved and sealed with the blood of martyrs, transcends time and culture. It is God's living Word, and through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can find the answers that are so desperately needed now. ■

¹ George Townsend, *The Acts and Monuments of John Foxe: With a Life of the Martyrologist, and Vindication of the Work*, vol. 3, p. 96.
² Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. 196.
³ “William Tyndale,” at <http://greatsite.com/timeline-english-bible-history/william-tyndale.html>.

⁴ Ellen G. White manuscript 12, Feb. 7, 1901.
⁵ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958, 1980), book 1, p. 206.
⁶ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 5, p. 171.
⁷ “Methods of Bible Study,” <https://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/documents/article/go/-/methods-of-bible-study/>.
⁸ E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 624.

QUESTIONS FOR Reflection and Sharing:

- 1 What historical significance do you see in the story of (the burning of Wycliffe's bones)?
- 2 How can we improve our practice of Bible study so we can benefit more from it?
- 3 What is meant by “a storm is coming”? How are we preparing for it?

Learning the Gospel

Philipp Melancthon, the peace-loving and consensus-seeking fellow Reformer of Martin Luther, was once asked by friends why he was so devoted to Luther, although the great man could sometimes be rather obstinate, bossy, and rude. Melancthon, himself being one of the great scholars of the Reformation period, simply and concisely replied: “I have learned the gospel from him.”

Through the influence of Luther and the Reformation “the gospel” returned to the center of Christian faith at the beginning of the modern era. According to the apostle Paul, it is the message through which “the power of God” works, bringing “salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16, NIV).

This definition provided by the apostle presents five terms of particular importance:

Gospel

This word means the “good news,” the “joyful message,” the “victory message.” It is the “gospel of God” (Rom. 1:1) because it comes from God and speaks of God. But it is also the “gospel of Christ” (Rom. 15:19), that is, the message of the mission, the sacrifice, and the atoning death of Jesus of Nazareth, the divine Messiah, for the world. Further, it also speaks of His victory over death, His mediation before God for His people who are still living and struggling in this world, and also of His future return to complete His work. Thus, the gospel consoles us that after the present

“salvation in an unsaved world,” Christ will return to “change the whole world.”

The gospel provides the solution to the basic human problem: “For earth’s sin and misery the gospel is the only antidote.”¹

Power of God

The gospel has creative power because it is God’s Word. Human words do not hold creative power. They are often only “sound and fury.” But when God speaks the gospel, what He says also happens: everyone who believes receives salvation.

Salvation

Salvation does not occur as a result of philosophical speculation, theorems, or wisdom gleaned from books. The salvation of humanity from their misery of guilt and fleet- ingness of life is not produced by human speech, but by divine action

and divine acquittal. It is, what Luther called, the “admirabile commercium,”² the marvelous exchange or substitution.

At the cross “God . . . in Christ” (2 Cor. 5:19) exchanged places with the world. He took over the judgment that should have been executed on the sinner: “The Judge judged in our place.”³ He took our punishment on Himself and gives us His righteousness (verse 21); He became weak and gives us His strength (2 Cor. 12:9); He became poor for us and gives us His abundance (2 Cor. 8:9); He exchanged misery for glory, suffering for joy, and “made himself ‘nothing’” (Phil. 2:7) in contrast to His ‘all,’ so that we ‘have all,’ although we ‘have nothing’” (2 Cor. 6:10).⁴

For All

The gospel’s wonders apply not only to a particular nation, gender or social status but are for all.

“*I have learned the Gospel from him*”
(*Philipp Melancthon*).

Through his Damascus experience the apostle Paul, who would have proudly boasted of his Jewish ancestry and Pharisaic self-righteousness (Phil. 3:4-6), became a friend of the Gentile nations to which so many of his fellow Christians belonged. They were his “joy and crown” (Phil. 4:1). For him, Christ’s suffering and death for all (1 Tim. 2:6) erased all national, social, and gender prejudices (Gal. 3:26-28). The gospel breaks through all barriers and creates a supranational community.

In Christ diverse people with different origins and varied education and experience are merged into the “familia Dei,” the family of God: “Christ tears away the wall of partition, the dividing prejudice of nationality, and teaches a love for all the human family.”⁵ Above all, humans all become “children of God.” Christ unites us not only on the horizontal plane, but also and especially on the vertical: He reconnects humanity with God by His salvific death. How?

Through Faith in Christ

When Paul speaks of “believing,” he does not refer to surmising or imagining, nor even agreeing to a specific statement. Believing in the Scriptures—the Old Testament at that time—means to “take firmly hold of, grasp, be faithful.”⁶ In the New Testament, belief means “trust” and “faithfulness.” We receive salvation—forgiveness of sins, acceptance

by God, renewal of life and final redemption—by trusting Christ’s promise of salvation, holding firmly on to it, and remaining faithful to the end. What saves the “wicked,” or sinners, is not their religious achievements (“works”), but their trust in the God who declares them righteous in Christ (Rom. 4:5). Justification of sinners, that is, their declaration of being righteous before the mercy seat of God, happens by faith alone, apart from the works of the law (Gal. 2:16).

The church believed that it had preserved this gospel through the centuries, and that it was its faithful interpreter. Many who thought they understood Paul had forgotten the essence of his message. A type of “innocent righteousness of works”⁷ had taken possession of Christendom and had turned the apostolic preaching of grace by faith into a subtle work religion. Under the influence of synagogue legalism, Greek virtue teachings, and Roman legal thought, sinners’ acquittal by grace was replaced by an indispensable “toil,”⁸ in which salvation seekers never knew whether they had done enough to be worthy of salvation. There were dissenting voices, but either they were not entirely clear themselves, or they went unheeded.

Then came the glorious rediscovery of the apostolic message by the Reformation of the sixteenth century, when Paul’s word, “The righteous will live by faith” (Rom. 1:17, NIV), again began to shine, and Christendom

once more realized: “The only glory of Christians is in Jesus Christ alone.”⁹ ■

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905), p. 141.

² Martin Luther, *Luthers Schriften: Weimar Edition* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2003), vol. 7, p. 25.

³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2009), Vol. IV.1, p. 211.

⁴ Horst Pöhlmann, *Abriss der Dogmatik* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlag, 1975), p. 185.

⁵ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898), p. 823.

⁶ Rolf Luther, *Neutestamentliches Wörterbuch* (Hamburg: Furche Verlag, 1963), p. 95.

⁷ Barth, p. 523.

⁸ Tertullian *De poenitentia* 6.

⁹ Martin Luther, *Luthers Schriften: Weimar Edition* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2004), vol. 13, p. 570.

QUESTIONS FOR Reflection and Sharing:

- 1 How has the gospel changed your life? What have you gained by it?
- 2 How can we interact with people of a scientific mindset, to show them that they need the gospel?
- 3 What healing effect does the message of justification by faith alone have for our soul?
- 4 What in the gospel can attract young or old people to the importance of the Christian faith?

The doctrine of justification by faith alone is the “sanctuary of the Reformation.”¹ When Martin Luther understood the marvelous promise of the sinner’s justification through trust in the crucified Christ, it was as if the Reformer had already entered into Paradise.

As monk, priest, and theology professor, Luther had struggled for years to understand Paul’s sentence: “In [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed” (Rom. 1:17). Day and night his thoughts revolved around that phrase. In his own words he hated the expression “righteousness of God” because he understood it philosophically, according to the church fathers and scholastics, as justice, which God demands, but which sinners cannot produce and consequently fall under God’s judgment.

Encounters in the Tower

In 1545, a year before his death, the former Augustinian monk and later Reformer looked once again back to the turning point in his life, belief, and practice. This turnaround was the breakthrough to the realization that the “righteousness of God” is not a demand, but a gift: the passive righteousness that God imputes to everyone who believes in Christ. According to Luther, he had realized this in the tower room of the Black Monastery in Wittenberg: “The Holy Spirit unveiled the Scriptures for me in this tower.”²

Biblical Righteousness

“Deliver me in Your righteousness” (Ps. 31:1). Already in the Old Testa-

ment, God’s righteousness is the righteousness that saves sinners. When Abraham received the promise of his future descendants (Gen. 15:5), he was not a “superhuman,” but a sinner, as we all are. But because he trusted the promise of God, God counted it to him as righteousness (verse 6). This means that God considered Abraham as “righteous” because of his trusting faith. As the “wicked” in the Bible does not represent an atheist in the modern sense, but a general “sinner” (Ps. 1:1; Prov. 11:31), so also the “righteous” is not the “sinless one,” but the “believer” (see Hab. 2:4). This allowed the apostle Paul to ascertain that even under the Old Covenant people were justified not by works but by faith (Rom. 4:6-8). So He who “justifies,” who “declares righteous,” or “counts someone as righteous,” is God alone: “The Lord [is] our righteousness” (Jer. 23:6).

Thus, justice in the Bible is a religious, not a moral or political, term.

People who follow state and government laws, who abide by the rule of law, are not exceptional in this world. But a person who claims to be righteous before God falls prey to a fateful mistake, because even the psalmist in the Old Testament knows that “no one living is righteous” before God (Ps. 143:2).

So if people want to come “right” before God, they need God’s righteousness. This is why the psalmist says: “Deliver me in Your righteousness” (Ps. 31:1; 71:2). This righteousness is primarily redemptive righteousness, salvation, not punitive justice.

In the light of the New Testament, this means that the God who assumes the guilt and the judgment of the wicked world (John 1:29), pays for that guilt in the judgment that takes the life of His righteous, sinless Son on the cross. Because of that same sacrifice He can forgive the unjust, accept them, work in them a new way of thinking as well as a new life, and give to them the

The Ground of Our Salvation

“All at once I felt that I had been born again and entered into **paradise** itself through open gates”
(Martin Luther).

hope of a new, just world (2 Peter 3:13). Only those who reject this gift will fall under condemnation for their personal iniquity (Heb. 10:29, 30).

They Did Not Know

“Since they did not know the righteousness of God” (Rom. 10:3, NIV). Old Testament prophets clearly taught that humanity’s need of salvation cannot be supplied by mere human virtue (Isa. 64:5). Human salvation requires God’s righteousness—through His forgiveness and merciful acceptance. This truth did not remain clear during the centuries following the conclusion of the Old Testament.

During that period oral teachings intended to interpret the biblical texts came to be regarded as equivalent to the revealed Word of God. Thus Scripture combined with oral tradition became the foundation of faith. The Law, the Torah, was supplemented by many instructions on how to execute it, some of which even substituted (Matt. 15:1-6) and changed it (Rom. 9:31, 32). What was intended as “instruction for life” was converted to the “way of salvation.” This misconception led to religious formalism (Matt. 23:23), even religious arrogance (Luke 18:9-14) among the Pharisees of Jesus’ day.

Knowledge of the necessity of God’s grace was not completely lost, as illustrated by the Old Testament Apocrypha.³ But more and more there was an emphasis on the value of one’s own works, which were thought to atone for sins⁴, as well as claim merit before God.⁵

The whole life became a “yoke of

bondage,” and the Pharisees strove to “make a show of their piety,” a “glorification of themselves,” believing that their righteousness would serve as a “passport to heaven.”⁶

Lost People and Our Loving God

Jesus countered this doctrine of salvation with a clear “No.” He maintained and taught a fundamentally different image of God and humanity. He searched the nature of humankind much more deeply than any of His contemporaries. The individual, from whose heart “evil thoughts” arise (Matt. 15:19), is completely unable to do works that are good before God. It requires a radical conversion and faith in the gospel (Mark 1:15). But even if one has become a disciple, one has to completely depend on God, for we are always “empty-handed” before God (Matt. 5:3). What we do in following Jesus does not provide any merit but is the natural fruit of His abiding presence (Luke 17:10).

God, our merciful Father, loves His lost children unceasingly; He is ever forgiving the penitent and gladly accepting them back (Luke 15:20-24). We, His disciples, have been called to work. But the reward we receive for our efforts is not a due we can demand from or charge to Him, because He always gives us more good things than we deserve (Matt. 20:15). The reward God gives is not something He owes, but only one more gift of His goodness.

What gave Martin Luther the advantage over his opponents lay in the fact that he had not only acquired this knowledge but also experienced it.

Through many struggles with himself, with the theology of his time and its proponents, he had understood what needs to be the foundational experience of being a Christian: “Righteousness means to recognize Christ.”⁷ ■

¹ Wilhelm Dantine, *Die Gerechtmachung des Gottlosen* (Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1959), p. 248.

² Martin Luther, *Tischreden*, 3, 3232c.

³ Baruch 2:19, 27.

⁴ Tobit 12:9.

⁵ H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (Munich: Beck, 1961), Vol. IV/1, p. 491.

⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898), pp. 204, 612, 409, 309.

⁷ Martin Luther, *Luthers Schriften: Weimar Edition* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2005), vol. 31/II, p. 439.

QUESTIONS FOR Reflection and Sharing:

- 1 What is the difference between the popular understanding of “righteousness” and what the Bible calls “God’s righteousness”?
- 2 How might God’s righteousness be more important than the world’s righteousness? How can we explain this to our contemporaries, both young and old?
- 3 How did Jesus’ understanding of God and humanity differ from the current thought of His and our time?

Righteousness: A Practical Matter

*Does anything come after
justification?*

Faith alone justifies, but it does not remain alone. Following Martin Luther's courageous testimony to the emperor, the princes, and theologians on April 18 of 1521, during which he refused to recant any of his positions, the emperor's Spanish entourage shouted: "Into the fire with him!"

Luther threw up his arms and cried, "I've been through it, I've been through it."

What Righteousness by Faith Looks Like

"Behold, new things have come" (2 Cor. 5:17, NASB).¹

This dramatic event in the history of the Reformation provides a vivid illustration for what righteousness by faith means. Although Luther had not been acquitted, he had courageously stood firm before the court. Before the judgment seat of God we too can stand firm and be acquitted because of the saving work of Christ. By faith, we have already been through our personal judgment and have "crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24, NIV).

But there is a great difference between human judgments and God's judgment: a human judge can only acquit, but the divine judge is capable of creating anew. God's acquittal is a creative judgment that transforms the natural into a spiritual person: believers become what they already are! Justified, they now live just lives. Both together meant "justification in its fullest sense"² for the Reformer.

Today we speak of "justification" (forgiveness of sins) and "sanctifica-

tion" (overcoming of sins). Ellen White calls the Christian life a life "of faith, of victory, and joy in God."³ Miraculously, a new life begins.⁴

By faith we grasp Jesus and submit to heaven's reign. Christ and the Holy Spirit inspire in us a vibrant and dynamic spiritual life. This life is fruit and testimony of the salvation we have received. It is for the glory of God and for the good of others, because faith is, as the Reformer says, "a divine work in us that transforms and lets us be born anew from God (John 1:13)."

Faith "kills the old Adam, and changes our heart, courage, mind and all powers, bringing the Holy Spirit along. There is something lively, industrious, active, powerful about faith that makes it impossible to not continuously do good. It also does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before one asks, faith has already done it and continues to do so."⁵

A Walk That Honors God

"So we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4).

Although this newness of life is indeed a consequence of the salvation received by faith, it is nevertheless necessary if the Christian life is to be credible. In His work of salvation God aims not only at forgiveness but also at transformation.

While being righteous before God occurs the moment we believe in Jesus, becoming righteous in our life is a process that continues throughout our lifetime. This process begins Christ's reign over the life of the faithful. It represents, as Luther says, "the beginning of the new creation."⁶ After believers have been legally justified, Christ through the Holy Spirit initiates in them a day-to-day life of godly existence.

God works with sinners like the "good Samaritan" who saved the man's life after he had been robbed and wounded. As the Samaritan did

"The Christian life is a life 'of faith, of victory, and joy in God'"
(Ellen G. White).

not hesitate to help a Jew, so God does not shy away from loving those who live far away from God (Rom. 5:8). His ultimate intention is to save them (verse 10). And just as the Samaritan did everything and paid what was necessary for the healing of the wounded, so "God in Christ" has "done and paid" everything so we may be reconciled with Him, and become new in Him (see 2 Cor. 5:17, 19, 21).

But just as the victim needed time to heal, so it is with sinners. They need growth (2 Peter 3:18). Even if forgiveness has been received and a new life has already begun, there is nevertheless still sin in (Rom. 7:17) and around (1 John 5:19) sinners.

Through the working of the Holy Spirit, sin no longer reigns in Christians' lives. Sin has, in fact, been reined in (Gal. 5:16). Nevertheless, believers are not now exempt from the battle with sin (verse 13). We are called to victory in this battle (1 John 2:1), and comforted to know that God's forgiveness is not a one-off event, but is continuously offered to those who repent (verse 1; Heb. 7:25).

Luther vividly described this tension between being righteous before God and the struggle with sin in the world. Growth in sanctification is progressive, but will be completed only when the "beloved day of judgment" dawns: "This life is not about being pious but becoming pious, not being healthy, but becoming healthy, not being, but becoming, not rest, but exercise. We are not there yet, but we are getting there. Not all is said and done, but it is under way and in

motion. It is not the end, but it is the way."⁷ It is God's will that "day by day we will be more sanctified."⁸

Similar thoughts can be found in the writings of Ellen White: Sanctification is "the work . . . of a lifetime"; a "lifelong" experience. The struggle with sin is "daily work," but "faith" gives "victory" even though our struggle never ends while we are alive on earth.⁹

Love Known by Action

"Faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6).

We affirm that both the righteousness that God declares and the newness of life we live depend on faith in Christ. For the apostle Paul this faith shows itself in love, and love shows itself in action.

To understand what believers receive in the gift of justification and sanctification, justification has at times been compared to a \$100 bill, given by a father to his son. The son is not to keep the bill for himself; he should change it into smaller bills in order to do good with the gift: This is sanctification, or as Luther wrote: "For such a Father, then, who has overwhelmed me with these inestimable riches of His, why should I not freely, cheerfully, and with my whole heart and from voluntary zeal, do all that I know will be pleasing to Him, and acceptable in His sight? I will therefore give myself, as a sort of Christ, to my neighbor, as Christ has given Himself to me; and will do nothing in this life, except what I see will be needful, advantageous, and wholesome for my

neighbor, since by faith I abound in all good things in Christ."¹⁰ ■

¹ Scripture quotations marked NASB are from the *New American Standard Bible*, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

² Paul Althaus, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlag, 1975), p. 205.

³ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. 477.

⁴ Martin Luther, *Luthers Schriften: Weimar Edition* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2006), vol. 39/1, p. 98.

⁵ Quoted from Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luthers Vorreden zur Bibel* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1983), p. 182.

⁶ Luther, p. 83.

⁷ Martin Luther, *Luthers Schriften: Weimar Edition* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2003), vol. 7, p. 337.

⁸ Martin Luther, *Luthers Schriften: Weimar Edition* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2006), vol. 40/II, p. 355.

⁹ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), pp. 560, 561; *idem, Messages to Young People* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1930), p. 114; *idem, The Great Controversy*, p. 471.

¹⁰ *First Principles of the Reformation or The 95 Theses and the Three Primary Works of Dr. Martin Luther*, ed. Henry Wace and C. A. Buchheim (London: John Murray, 1883), p. 127.

QUESTIONS FOR Reflection and Sharing:

- 1 What gift does God give us through justification and sanctification respectively?
- 2 How does sanctification relate to sinlessness?
- 3 What does sanctification mean in the daily life of Christians?
- 4 Sanctification does not create salvation, but is a necessary testimony of it. Discuss.

BY GRACE ALONE

The man at the pool of Bethesda, disabled for 38 years, was not healed because he was worthy, but because Jesus saw his need.



God's Commandments a Reflection of God's Character

We do because we have become.

The Christian world on the eve of the Reformation was a world of busy and vigorous religiosity. Most people at the time were pious and faithful to the church. However, their piety was largely misled. This is acknowledged even by Catholic historiography: "Prayer, life, and teachings were far removed from Scripture and the apostolic ideal."¹

Religious life was frequently marked by formalism and routine. In Cologne, Germany, alone, hundreds of Masses were officiated every day, but no single prayer service was offered in the local vernacular, and no instruction was given to youth. People flocked to monasteries to find secular and spiritual security. Germany then had perhaps 20 million inhabitants, 1.5 million of whom were priests and monks. Believers were not encouraged to read the Holy Scriptures, but rather to undertake arduous pilgrimages (such as the journey to the "Holy

Robe of Christ" in Trèves, Germany) or to marvel at the numerous collections of relics. Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony, the sovereign who reigned over the region where Luther lived, possessed a collection of more than 19,000 relics,² which included "hay from Jesus' manger," a "twig from the burning bush," and "milk drops from Mother Mary." The authenticity of these artifacts was never questioned.

The Battle Over Indulgences

Jesus' demand to do "good works" (Matt. 5:16) was distorted in a way completely foreign to the gospel. When Jesus forgave people their sins (Mark 2:5; John 8:11), He did not burden them with further punishment, but sent them off in peace. Medieval theologians, however, turned Jesus' mercy into a complex legal and works-oriented system. It was said that one could get the remission of guilt from

the priest during confession, but then one still needed to provide the works of the penitent to make up for the sin. Fortunately, one could also be exempted from these works of penance. Consequently, the doctrine of indulgences from temporal sin punishments was developed. Beginning in the Middle Ages such indulgences could be bought for the dead who were (supposedly) in purgatory. Aside from the discontinuation of the sale of indulgences after the Reformation, the Roman Catholic doctrine of indulgences is still in existence today.³

The Reformation arose because of the struggle over the legitimacy of such works of penance and the sale of indulgences. Popes at the time needed funding for the construction of St. Peter's Dome in Rome, so they promoted the sale of indulgences. A "scandalous money business"⁴ began to spread, writes Catholic Church historian Joseph Lortz. One of the most prominent preachers of indulgences was the Dominican priest Johann Tetzel, who promised believers: "As soon as the gold in the casket rings; the rescued soul to heaven springs."⁵

This aroused the anger of the young theology professor Martin Luther in Wittenberg. In a letter to the archbishop Albrecht of Mainz he protested this deformation of Christian doctrine: "Christ has nowhere commanded the preaching of indulgences, but with all emphasis the preaching of the gospel."⁶

Based on the account of his friend, Philipp Melancthon, Luther wrote these lines on October 31, 1517, and nailed 95 theses concerning indulgences and works of penance to the

“The Christian lives ‘under the law, but without the law.’”

door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. The first thesis hit like a bombshell: works do not represent punishment for sin; repentance is the constant manner of the Christian’s life: “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent,’ he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”⁷

“Keep the Commandments!”

In the “Treatise on Good Works” (written in 1520), the Reformer expounded what the intended works of Christians should be. Good works are only those that God requires and not those that people demand. If one wants to know what these works are, one should listen to Christ speaking to the rich young ruler: “If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matt. 19:17).

These commandments are the Ten Commandments, not ecclesiastic canons or traditions. To keep these commandments, God-given faith is needed, which provides the necessary power. Without Christ, works are dead.⁸ Without works as a consequence, faith is only an appearance of faith: “Combine faith and good works, so that the sum of all Christian life is contained in both.”⁹ Good works are “sign and seal” that faith is true.¹⁰ Faith manifests itself in love and love in following the commandments.¹¹

Thus, Christians live “under the law, but without the law.”¹² “Without the law” because believers in Christ may not be condemned by the law; “under the law” because it remains

valid even for born-again Christians. The law is needed to recognize sin (Rom. 3:20) and to reorient oneself—enlightened and motivated by the Holy Spirit—toward the will of God (Rom. 8:4; Heb. 8:10).

Ellen White similarly wrote that the law is indeed unable to save us. But when God impresses it upon our hearts, Christians can and should fulfill it.¹³

Struggling with “antinomians,” “opponents of the law” from within his own ranks, the Reformer at the time deplored that many of his followers would only indulge the “sweet gospel,” where the justification of sin is more important than the justification of the sinner. He suspected that there would come a time that people would be living according to their own discretion and saying that there is no God.¹⁴

God has called Advent people to warn of this danger and plead for faithfulness toward God’s commandments. He has given us a “special message,” a Reformation message to restore, preserve, and follow the “law of God.” Ellen White described it as the “last message of warning to the world.”¹⁵ ■

¹ Joseph Lortz and Erwin Iserloh, *Kleine Reformationsgeschichte* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1969), p. 25.

² Roland Bainton, *Martin Luther*, 4th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), pp. 54, 55.

³ *Katechismus der katholischen Kirche* (Munich: 1993), § 1494-1498.

⁴ Lortz and Iserloh, p. 41.

⁵ Martin Luther, 27th thesis, quoted from Ingegraud Ludolphy, *Die 95 Thesen Martin Luthers* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1976), p. 23.

⁶ Martin Luther, *Luthers Schriften: Weimar Edition, Briefe* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2002), vol. 1, p. 111.

⁷ Ludolphy, p. 20.

⁸ Martin Luther, *Luthers Schriften: Weimar Edition* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2003), vol. 6, pp. 204, 205. Unfortunately, Luther himself went back to ecclesiastic tradition, when he thought to have discovered elements in the Ten Commandments that were dependent on the time they were given, describing the Sabbath as Jewish, which, however, originated in the order of Creation (Gen. 2:2, 3). At the same time, he had to admit that Sunday worship finds its origin in ecclesiastic tradition (*Der große Katechismus* [Munich: Siebenstern, 1964], pp. 37, 38).

⁹ Martin Luther, *Luthers Schriften: Weimar Edition* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2003), vol. 12, p. 289.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 10/III, pp. 225, 226.

¹¹ Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luthers Vorreden zur Bibel* (Frankfurt/Main: Insel Verlag, 1983), p. 179.

¹² Martin Luther, *Luthers Schriften: Weimar Edition* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2006), vol. 39/1, p. 433.

¹³ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1890), p. 373.

¹⁴ Martin Luther, *Luthers Schriften: Weimar Edition, Deutsche Bibel* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2003), vol. 11/II, p. 117.

¹⁵ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), p. 225.

QUESTIONS FOR Reflection and Sharing:

- 1 Why is it important for Christians to know their norm of conduct?
- 2 What significance do the commandments of God have in our lives? How do we experience the “freedom from the law” and the “freedom for the law”?
- 3 What was Luther afraid of already during his time? Did his premonitions come true? What is the purpose of the Advent people for our time?

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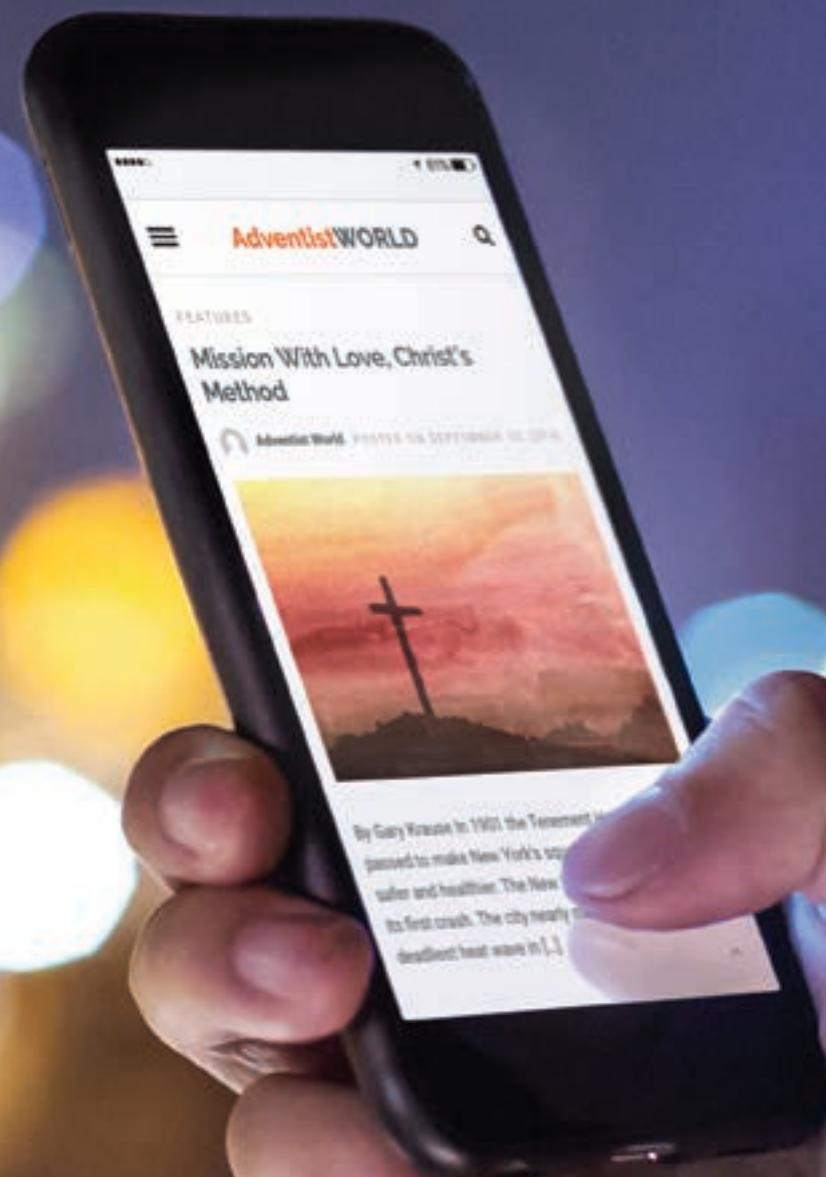
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Justification by Faith Today

*Where theology meets
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Whenever Christians remind themselves of the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone, people experience an awakening, revival, and reformation. This was the case when Martin Luther reached back to the apostle Paul (“Paul, my Paul”) across a church tradition of more than a thousand years, and with this “supreme thesis”¹ set the Reformation of the sixteenth century in motion.

On May 24, 1738, after John Wesley in Aldersgate Street, London, listened to Luther’s *Preface to Romans*, he started a revival movement in England, which became “a ruling epoch of English history.”²

This was also the case when in 1888 at the General Conference session in Minneapolis a new Christocentric chapter of Adventist church history began with the contemplation of Christ’s righteousness. The fruit of that turnaround were a number of Ellen White’s Christ-centered books: *Steps to Christ*, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, and *The Desire of Ages*.

On the other hand, times during which Christians focused on their own achievements and merits were always periods of decline. As early as the second century A.D., Paul’s focus on righteousness by faith alone was no longer properly understood. During the Middle Ages his followers were a minority, and on the eve of the Reformation the opinion prevailed that “if a man does what is in his own might, then God will add His grace.” This

sentence appalled Luther and drove him to exclaim in his lecture on Romans: “Oh, you fools!”³

Justification of Sinners or Justification of God?

If one considers these circumstances in the context of the present religious situation, they seem to have little significance for today:

In modern theology the doctrine of justification plays only a subordinate role. It is considered a time-limited polemic against Judaizing legalism during apostolic times. After all, it occurs only in two of the Pauline epistles, and thus is only of “secondary importance” for the Christian doctrine of redemption. It is a disappearing doctrine because, so it is said, the historical situation for which it was formulated has no relevance today.

An exception to the current lack of interest is registered only in the area of ecumenical church policy, where the

“Joint Declaration” of 1999 between the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Lutheran World Federation claimed a “principal consensus” on the doctrine of justification, which Pope Benedict XVI rated as a “milestone on the road to Christian unity.”⁴ But since that time it has gotten very quiet regarding this document, as it, in the opinion of many commentators, says only with similar words what continues to be understood differently.

Finally, most people, often secular people, no longer search for a “merciful God” as Luther did, but ask whether this God really exists. If so, then He should justify Himself for all the suffering and evil in the world!

Of course, most secular-minded people are not aggressive atheists. The prevailing attitude among them is one of “practical atheism,” an outlook in which one is not fighting against God, but simply ignores Him, because one lives pretty well without Him.

“The only solution to this dilemma can be found in Jesus of Nazareth, the “absolute man,” whose life, death, and resurrection **guarantee** present and future salvation.”

Our Challenge

How can we Christians approach people like this and raise an awareness for the gospel? Most do not know what sin is, let alone that it is primarily an offense against God (Ps. 51:5-11). They also do not know how sin can be forgiven (1 John 2:2) and that part of a fulfilled life consists in a peace (Rom. 5:1) and a hope (Titus 2:11-14) that are not found in this world.

While people don’t seem to have space for God, they do suffer from guilt on the horizontal level: interpersonal conflict, social and political injustice, wars among nations, and the destruction of nature—the very foundation of our existence.

Christian-Adventist preaching can connect to this self-awareness of people in several ways:

We recognize that the alienation from ourselves and from our environment lies in the alienation from the Life-giver and Creator. The apostle’s verdict is clear: “There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away” (Rom. 3:11, 12, NIV).

Our experience testifies to the truthfulness of Scripture’s claim: “Can an Ethiopian change his skin or a leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil” (Jer. 13:23, NIV).

The problem lies not so much in the circumstances but in humanity itself that is unable to control itself and to find a solution for this world. It is, as Jesus says and Paul affirms:

“For out of the heart come evil thoughts” (Matt. 15:19, NIV) and we are “sold as a slave to sin” (Rom. 7:14, NIV). Sin (in the singular, as a condition) is ultimately turning away from God and turning toward creation: we think we can master our lives. This attitude leads to sins (plural, actions of sin).

What Then Shall We Do?

The only solution to this dilemma can be found in Jesus of Nazareth, the “absolute man,” whose life, death, and resurrection guarantees present and future salvation. He lived among us “in the world” but was not “of the world.” He is the way back to God, because, as the Son of God, He Himself is the “revelation of God” (see John 14:6, 9).

If we are honest, we recognize that human aspiration to achieve the “brave new world” is really utopian. Despite great technological advances—think nuclear power, space exploration, the digital realm of bits and bytes—this “perfect world” remains elusive. Sinners are not able to create something sinless! The “new earth, where righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13, NIV), can be promised and given only by God; then it can be hoped for and expected by Christ’s followers.

All this turns the Christian doctrine of salvation into a timeless and indispensable option for our helpless and hopeless fellow humans. Advent people are called to preach this message for our time to the world: Only

“in Christ” can we make peace with God and one another; only His love gives meaning to life and hope for a world in which righteousness reigns! As Ellen White wrote: “Of all professing Christians, Seventh-day Adventists should be foremost in uplifting Christ before the world.”⁵ ■

¹ Martin Luther, *Luthers Schriften: Weimar Edition* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2004), vol. 21, p. 219.

² William Lecky, quoted in Julius Roessle, *Johannes Wesley*, 2nd ed. (Giessen: Brunnen, 1954), p. 24.

³ Martin Luther, *Luthers Schriften: Weimar Edition* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2007), vol. 56, p. 274.

⁴ *IdeaSpektrum* 46 (November 2005): 12.

⁵ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), p. 188.

QUESTIONS FOR Reflection and Sharing:

- 1 Why have people so little appreciation for the doctrine of the justification of sinners?
- 2 What does the Seventh-day Adventist Church need to experience a revival? What is our task in these times?
- 3 What gives you confidence and hope in a world that believes it can save itself, yet finds itself on the edge of a bottomless pit?

The Summer That Will Never End

Anticipating the Second Coming of Jesus

The Reformation of the sixteenth century is one of the grand events in human history. For historians it is an epochal divide between medieval and modern times. For believing Protestants (including Adventists), however, it represents divine intervention. Christianity was to align itself in doctrine and practice back with the standard of the biblical Word, not human traditions. This is the essence of this enormous religious upheaval that ended the “Dark Ages.” As Ellen White wrote: “[Protestantism] lays down the principle that all human teaching should be subordinate to the oracles of God.”¹

“Come, Dear Last Day”²

This important principle made of Martin Luther not only a Reformer regarding the question of how a person is justified before God, but also concerning the renewal of the early Christian attitude toward the Last Day.³

Medieval Christians believed in the second coming of Christ, but this promise was primarily a subject of fear and terror. Without the assurance of salvation, the end appeared as a “day of vengeance and horror,” wrote the medieval Franciscan monk Thomas of Celano, when the “judge comes to sternly mete out justice.” But Luther, based on his study of the Bible, brought early Christian joy back into the expectation of the end, because he recognized that the Christian hope is a “better hope” (Heb. 7:19), a “living hope” (1 Peter 1:3), and therefore “the

blessed hope” (Titus 2:13).

One can easily understand the passionate longing for liberation in Christ that the Reformer experienced in his faith walk. The older Luther became, the stronger this expectation grew. The promise of the return of Christ was for him “a sweet and cheerful sermon.” If the day would not come, the Reformer did not want to be born. Thus, it is understandable that he had only one wish to God throughout the struggles and sorrows of his life: “You promised the day, to redeem us from all evil. So let it come this very hour, if it should be, and make an end to all our misery.”⁴

A “Having” and a “Not Yet Having”

The life of the Christian in this world, expounded Luther, is a life filled with tensions. The state of the believer is a “having” and at the same time a “not yet having,” a “being” and

a “not yet being.” Christians already have salvation by faith, but they do not yet have it by sight. Already they are righteous before God, but they still live in a fragmented world estranged from God. Considering the biblical principle of “already” and “not yet,” we can understand the passion and longing with which Luther expected the day of Christ’s return. For we, who have the assurance of the gift of salvation based on a trusting faith in God, will—as long as we remain in God—long for the day with fervent desire and deep joy, when personal redemption will turn into the redemption of all creation. As Luther put it: “Help, dear Lord God, that the blessed day of Your holy future may come soon.”⁵

Signs of the Times—“A Sweet and Cheerful Sermon”

The hope for Christ’s return became increasingly stronger with the advancing age of the Reformer

“The life of the Christian in this world, expounded Luther, is a life filled with tensions.”

because he often felt helpless in dealing with humanity and the world. It became clear to him that neither princes nor the pope could solve humanity’s problems: “The world is the devil’s child . . . one cannot aid it nor instruct it.” And: “No preaching, shouting, admonishing, threatening, or pleading” can help anymore. It’s the “devil’s tavern,” the “reversed Ten Commandments” are its mark, and, therefore, it is and remains a “den of thieves.”

Only the coming of Christ can help, because in the world Christians are “surrounded by a multitude of devils.” Pope and emperor put their hope in politics, and people considered them to be their “saviors.” But Luther cautioned to wait for the “true Savior,” who has given the sure promise of His return.

To strengthen His church in this expectation, Christ pointed to “signs of the times,” including natural disasters and wars. The clearest sign for Luther were the major dangers of his time, which are still relevant today: The decline of faith within Christendom and the conflict between Islam and Christianity. With great concern Luther observed the drifting away of the papal church from the gospel and the wave of Islamic expansion that had already flooded southeastern Europe and in 1529 even surged to the gates of Vienna. But he also saw a distinct sign of the coming judgment in the ingratitude of the Reformation’s followers in terms of the light they had received: “I want to prophesy over

Germany, not from the stars, but from theology I proclaim against it the wrath of God . . . Let us just pray, and God and His word not despise!”⁶

According to Luther, all signs occur for the encouragement of believers and for the judgment of unbelievers. The latter ones still have “grace” not to worry about them, while the former ones are probably able to see “God’s wrath” in them, which will not hurt them as God preserves His people.

The Reformer did not want to argue about how far the signs had already been fulfilled, but he was convinced that the “majority [of the signs] have already occurred,” and this was a reason for Christians to rejoice despite disasters and distress. This joy is characteristic for the true interpreters of the Bible, because the “star gazers and soothsayers”—Luther was probably thinking of astrologers and esoterics—speak only of catastrophes. Only Christians understand the “cheerful, sweet word, ‘your redemption’ (Luke 21:28).” Therefore, the return of Christ must be seen through the eyes of Christian hope, not through the eyes of secular reason.

Luther thought that Christians have to “bite the bullet” and drink the “bitter cup,” but afterward “sweetness” will come. That is why Christ is now calling His family to rise and to rejoice. Even if the proclamation of the gospel is not received well by most people, the “small throng” will understand it and will work and pray with Christ’s coming in view, because, as noted by Luther, “it has been a long

enough winter, now wants to come a beautiful summer, and such a summer that will never end.”⁷ ■

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. 204.

² Martin Luther, *Luthers Schriften: Weimar Edition, Briefe* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2002), vol. 9, p. 175.

³ Paul Althaus, *Die Theologie Martin Luthers*, 4th ed. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1975), p. 351.

⁴ Martin Luther, *Luthers Schriften: Weimar Edition* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2005), vol. 34/II, p. 466.

⁵ Martin Luther, *Luthers Schriften: Weimar Edition, Tischreden* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000), vol. 5, no. 5777.

⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 3, no. 3711.

⁷ Luther, *Luthers Schriften*, vol. 34/II, p. 481.

QUESTIONS FOR Reflection and Sharing:

- 1 How did Martin Luther regard human endeavors to achieve salvation? Compare his analysis with modern concepts of salvation.
- 2 What role did the hope of the second coming of Christ play in Luther’s faith?
- 3 To what extent was Luther’s expectation of final events different from that of medieval humanity?
- 4 What does the hope of Christ’s second coming mean for your life to you?

