

Chapter 104 - 1888 Materials :: MS - 36 - 1890**Danger of False Ideas on Justification by Faith**

Can we not understand that the most costly thing in the world is sin? It is at the expense of purity of conscience, at the cost of losing the favor of God and separating the soul from Him, and at last losing heaven. The sin of grieving the Holy Spirit of God and walking contrary to Him has cost many a one the loss of his soul.

Who can measure the responsibilities of the influence of every human agent whom our Redeemer has purchased at the sacrifice of His own life? What a scene will be presented when the judgment shall sit and the books shall be opened to testify the salvation or the loss of all souls! It will require the unerring decision of One who has lived in humanity, loved humanity, given His life for humanity, to make the final appropriation of the rewards to the loyal righteous, and the punishment of the disobedient, the disloyal, and unrighteous. The Son of God is entrusted with the complete measurement of every individual's action and responsibility. To those who have been partakers of other men's sins and have acted against God's decision, it will be a most awfully solemn scene.

The danger has been presented to me again and again of entertaining, as a people, false ideas of justification by faith. I have been shown for years that Satan would work in a special manner to confuse the mind on this point. The law of God has been largely dwelt upon, and has been presented to congregations, almost as destitute of the knowledge of Jesus Christ and His relation to the law as was the offering of Cain. I have been shown that many have been kept from the faith because of the mixed, confused ideas of salvation, because the ministers have worked in a wrong manner to reach hearts. The point which has been urged upon my mind for years is the imputed righteousness of Christ. I have wondered that this matter was not made the subject of discourses in our churches throughout the land, when the matter has been kept so constantly urged upon me, and I have made it the subject of nearly every discourse and talk that I have given to the people.

In examining my writings fifteen and twenty years old [I find that they] present the matter in this same light—that those who enter upon the solemn, sacred work of the ministry should first be given a preparation in lessons upon the teachings of Christ and the apostles in living principles of practical godliness. They are to be educated in regard to what constitutes earnest, living faith.

Many young men are sent forth to labor, who do not understand the plan of salvation and what true conversion is; in fact they need to be converted. We need to be enlightened on this point, and the ministers need to be educated to dwell more particularly upon subjects which explain true conversion. All who are baptized are to

give evidence that they have been converted. There is not a point that needs to be dwelt upon more earnestly, repeated more frequently, or established more firmly in the minds of all, than the impossibility of fallen man meriting anything by his own best good works. Salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

When this question is investigated, we are pained to the heart to see how trivial are the remarks of those who ought to understand the mystery of godliness. They speak so unguardedly of the true ideas of our brethren who profess to believe the truth and teach the truth. They come far short of the real facts as they have been laid open before me. The enemy has so entangled their minds in the mist and fog of earthliness and it seems so ingrained into their understanding, that it has become a part of their faith and character. It is only a new conversion that can change them, and cause them to give up these false ideas—for this is just what they are shown to me to be. They cling to them as a drowning man clings to a life preserver, to keep them from sinking and making shipwreck of faith.

Christ has given me words to speak: "Ye must be born again, else you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Therefore all who have the right understanding of this matter should put away their controversial spirit and seek the Lord with all their hearts. Then they will find Christ and can give distinctive character to their religious experience. They should keep this matter—the simplicity of true godliness—distinctly before the people in every discourse. This will come home to the heart of every hungering, thirsting soul who is longing to come into the assurance of hope and faith and perfect trust in God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let the subject be made distinct and plain that it is not possible to effect anything in our standing before God or in the gift of God to us through creature merit. Should faith and works purchase the gift of salvation for anyone, then the Creator is under obligation to the creature. Here is an opportunity for falsehood to be accepted as truth. If any man can merit salvation by anything he may do, then he is in the same position as the Catholic to do penance for his sins. Salvation, then, is partly of debt, that may be earned as wages. If man cannot, by any of his good works, merit salvation, then it must be wholly of grace, received by man as a sinner because he receives and believes in Jesus. It is wholly a free gift. Justification by faith is placed beyond controversy. And all this controversy is ended, as soon as the matter is settled that the merits of fallen man in his good works can never procure eternal life for him.

The light given me of God places this important subject above any question in my mind. Justification is wholly of grace and not procured by any works that fallen man can do. The matter has been presented before me in clear lines that if the rich man has money and possessions, and he makes an offering of the same to the Lord, false ideas come in to spoil the offering by the thought he has merited the favor of God, that the Lord is under obligation to him to regard him with special favor because of this gift.

There has been too little educating in clear lines upon this point. The Lord has lent man His own goods in trust—means which He requires be handed back to Him when His providence signifies and the upbuilding of His cause demands it. The Lord gave the intellect. He gave the health and the ability to gather earthly gain. He created the things of earth. He manifests His divine power to develop all its riches. They are His fruits from His own husbandry. He gave the sun, the clouds, the showers of rain to cause vegetation to flourish. As God's employed servants you gathered in His harvest, to use what your wants required in an economical way and hold the balance for the call of God. You can say with David, "For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee." 1 Chronicles 29:14. So the satisfaction of creature merit cannot be in returning to the Lord His own, for it was always His own property to be used as He in His providence should direct.

By rebellion and apostasy man forfeited the favor of God; not his rights, for he could have no value except as it was invested in God's dear Son. This point must be understood. He forfeited those privileges which God in His mercy presented him as a free gift, a treasure in trust to be used to advance His cause and His glory, to benefit the beings He had made. The moment the workmanship of God refused obedience to the laws of God's kingdom, that moment he became disloyal to the government of God and he made himself entirely unworthy of all the blessings wherewith God had favored him.

This was the position of the human race after man divorced himself from God by transgression. Then he was no longer entitled to a breath of air, a ray of sunshine, or a particle of food. And the reason why man was not annihilated was because God so loved him that He made the gift of His dear Son that He should suffer the penalty of his transgression. Christ proposed to become man's surety and substitute, that man, through matchless grace, should have another trial—a second probation—having the experience of Adam and Eve as a warning not to transgress God's law as they did. And inasmuch as man enjoys the blessings of God in the gift of the sunshine and the gift of food, there must be on the part of man a bowing before God in thankful acknowledgement that all things come of God. Whatever is rendered back to Him is only His own who has given it.

Man broke God's law, and through the Redeemer new and fresh promises were made on a different basis. All blessings must come through a Mediator. Now every member of the human family is given wholly into the hands of Christ, and whatever we possess—whether it is the gift of money, of houses, of lands, of reasoning powers, of physical strength, of intellectual talents—in this present life, and the blessings of the future life, are placed in our possession as God's treasures to be faithfully expended for the benefit of man. Every gift is stamped with the cross and bears the image and superscription of Jesus Christ. All things come of God. From the smallest benefits up to the largest blessing, all flow through the one Channel—a superhuman mediation sprinkled with the blood that is of value beyond estimate because it was the life of God in His Son.

Now not a soul can give God anything that is not already His. Bear this in mind. "All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee." 1 Chronicles 29:14 This must be kept before the people wherever we go— that we possess nothing, can offer nothing in value, in work, in faith, which we have not first received of God and upon which He can lay His hand any time and say, They are Mine—gifts and blessings and endowments I entrusted to you, not to enrich yourself, but for wise improvement, to benefit the world.

The creation belongs to God. The Lord could, by neglecting man, stop his breath at once. All that he is and all that he has pertains to God. The entire world is God's. Man's houses, his personal acquirements, whatever is valuable or brilliant, is God's own endowment. It is all His gift to be returned back to God in helping to cultivate the heart of man. The most splendid offerings may be laid upon the altar of God, and men will praise, exalt, and laud the giver because of his liberality. In what? "All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee." No work of man can merit for him the pardoning love of God, but the love of God pervading the soul will lead him to do those things which were always required of God and that he should do with pleasure. He has done only that which duty ever required of him.

The angels of God in heaven, that have never fallen, do His will continually. In all that they do upon their busy errands of mercy to our world, shielding, guiding, and guarding the workmanship of God for ages—both the just and the unjust—they can truthfully say, "All is thine. Of Thine own do we give Thee." Would that the human eye could catch glimpses of the service of the angels! Would that the imagination could grasp and dwell upon the rich, the glorious service of the angels of God and the conflicts in which they engage in behalf of men, to protect, to lead, to win, and to draw them from Satan's snares. How different would be the conduct, the religious sentiment!

Discussions may be entered into by mortals strenuously advocating creature merit, and each man striving for the supremacy, but they simply do not know that all the time, in principle and character, they are misrepresenting the truth as it is in Jesus. They are in a fog of bewilderment. They need the divine love of God which is represented by gold tried in the fire; they need the white raiment of Christ's pure character; and they need the heavenly eye salve that they might discern with astonishment the utter worthlessness of creature merit to earn the wages of eternal life. There may be a fervor of labor and an intense affection, high and noble achievement of intellect, a breadth of understanding, and the humblest self abasement, laid at the feet of our Redeemer; but there is not one jot more than the grace and talent first given of God. There must be nothing less given than duty prescribes, and there cannot be one jot more given than they have first received; and all must be laid upon the fire of Christ's righteousness to cleanse it from its earthly odor before it rises in a cloud of fragrant incense to the great Jehovah and is accepted as a sweet savor.

I ask, How can I present this matter as it is? The Lord Jesus imparts all the powers, all the grace, all the penitence, all the inclination, all the pardon of sins, in presenting His righteousness for man to grasp by living faith—which is also the gift of God. If you would gather together everything that is good and holy and noble and lovely in man, and then present the subject to the angels of God as acting a part in the salvation of the human soul or in merit, the proposition would be rejected as treason. Standing in the presence of their Creator and looking upon the unsurpassed glory which enshrouds His person, they are looking upon the Lamb of God given from the foundation of the world to a life of humiliation, to be rejected of sinful men, to be despised, to be crucified. Who can measure the infinity of the sacrifice!

Christ for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich. And any works that man can render to God will be far less than nothingness. My requests are made acceptable only because they are laid upon Christ's righteousness. The idea of doing anything to merit the grace of pardon is fallacy from beginning to end. "Lord, in my hand no price I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling."

Man can achieve no praiseworthy exploits that give him any glory. Men are in the habit of glorifying men and exalting men. It makes me shudder to see or hear of it, for there have been revealed to me not a few cases where the home life and inner work of the hearts of those very men are full of selfishness. They are corrupt, polluted, vile; and nothing that comes from all their doings can elevate them with God for all that they do is an abomination in His sight. There can be no true conversion without the giving up of sin, and the aggravating character of sin is not discerned. With an acuteness of perception never reached by mortal sight, angels of God discern that beings hampered with corrupting influences, with unclean souls and hands, are deciding their destiny for eternity; and yet many have little sense of what constitutes sin and the remedy.

We hear so many things preached in regard to the conversion of the soul that are not the truth. Men are educated to think that if a man repents he shall be pardoned, supposing that repentance is the way, the door, into heaven; that there is a certain assured value in repentance to buy for him forgiveness. Can man repent of himself? No more than he can pardon himself. Tears, sighs, resolutions—all these are but the proper exercise of the faculties God has given to man, and the turning from sin in the amendment of a life which is God's. Where is the merit in the man to earn his salvation, or to place before God something which is valuable and excellent? Can an offering of money, houses, lands, place yourself on the deserving list? Impossible!

There is danger in regarding justification by faith as placing merit on faith. When you take the righteousness of Christ as a free gift you are justified freely through the redemption of Christ. What is faith? "The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Hebrews 11:1. It is an assent of the understanding to God's words which binds the heart in willing consecration and service to God, who gave the

understanding, who moved on the heart, who first drew the mind to view Christ on the cross of Calvary. Faith is rendering to God the intellectual powers, abandonment of the mind and will to God, and making Christ the only door to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

When men learn they cannot earn righteousness by their own merit of works, and they look with firm and entire reliance upon Jesus Christ as their only hope, there will not be so much of self and so little of Jesus. Souls and bodies are defiled and polluted by sin, the heart is estranged from God, yet many are struggling in their own finite strength to win salvation by good works. Jesus, they think, will do some of the saving; they must do the rest. They need to see by faith the righteousness of Christ as their only hope for time and for eternity.

God has given men faculties and capabilities. God works and cooperates with the gifts He has imparted to man, and man, by being a partaker of the divine nature, and doing the work of Christ, may be an overcomer and win eternal life. The Lord does not propose to do the work He has given man powers to do. Man's part must be done. He must be a laborer together with God, yoking up with Christ, learning His meekness, His lowliness. God is the all-controlling power. He bestows the gifts; man receives them and acts with the power of the grace of Christ as a living agent.

"Ye are God's husbandry." 1 Corinthians 3:9. The heart is to be worked, subdued, ploughed, harrowed, seeded to bring forth its harvest to God in good works. "Ye are God's building." You cannot build yourself. There is a Power outside of yourself that must do the building of the church, putting brick upon brick, always cooperating with the faculties and powers given of God to man. The Redeemer must find a home in His building. God works and man works. There needs to be a continual taking in of the gifts of God, in order that there may be as free a giving out of these gifts. It is a continual receiving and then restoring. The Lord has provided that the soul shall receive nourishment from Him, to be given out again in the working out of His purposes. In order that there be an outflowing, there must be an income of divinity to humanity. "I will dwell in them, and walk in them." 2 Corinthians 6:16.

The soul temple is to be sacred, holy, pure, and undefiled. There must be a copartnership in which all the power is of God and all the glory belongs to God. The responsibility rests with us. We must receive in thoughts and in feelings, to give in expression. The law of the human and the divine action makes the receiver a laborer together with God. It brings man where he can, united with divinity, work the works of God. Humanity touches humanity. Divine power and the human agency combined will be a complete success for Christ's righteousness accomplishes everything.

The reason so many fail to be successful laborers is that they act as though God depended on them, and they are to suggest to God what He chooses to do with them, in the place of their depending on God. They lay aside the supernatural power, and fail to

do the supernatural work. They are all the time depending on their own and their brethren's human powers. They are narrow in themselves and are always judging after their finite human comprehension. They need uplifting for they have no power from on high. God gives us bodies, strength of brain, time and opportunity in which to work. It is required that all be put to the tax. With humanity and divinity combined you can accomplish a work as enduring as eternity. When men think the Lord has made a mistake in their individual cases, and they appoint their own work, they will meet with disappointment.

"By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." Ephesians 2:8. Here is truth that will unfold the subject to your mind if you do not close it to the rays of light. Eternal life is an infinite gift. This places it outside the possibility of our earning it, because it is infinite. It must necessarily be a gift. As a gift it must be received by faith, and gratitude and praise be offered to God. Solid faith will not lead any one away into fanaticism or into acting the slothful servant. It is the bewitching power of Satan that leads men to look to themselves in the place of looking to Jesus. The righteousness of Christ must go before us if the glory of the Lord becomes our reward. If we do God's will we may accept large blessings as God's free gift, but not because of any merit in us; this is of no value. Do the work of Christ, and you will honor God and come off more than conquerors through Him that has loved us and given His life for us, that we should have life and salvation in Jesus Christ.

Justification by Faith—How Perverted by Some

Said the apostle Paul, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?...And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. The absence of devotion, piety, and sanctification of the outer man comes through denying Jesus Christ our righteousness. The love of God needs to be constantly cultivated.

Oh, how my heart cries out to the living God for the mind of Jesus Christ! I want to lose sight of self. I want to work with all the powers I am capable of exercising to save souls for whom Christ has made the infinite sacrifice of His own precious life. I must seek wisdom daily to know how to deal with souls that are entrapped by Satan's snares. There are many erring, well-beloved souls whom we may win back to God if we are imbued with the spirit of Christ. The Lord loves them, notwithstanding their sins and follies. He gave His only beloved Son to save them, and it was because He loved them that He sent His Son into the world that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

I must ever keep close to Jesus Christ that I may constantly be a partaker of the divine nature and have a deep personal interest in those who have once been my best friends but in time of temptation have lifted up their heels against me. The love of Christ must

not be extinguished in the soul. The prejudice against me cannot make me what they think I am, and I shall not feel hard toward them; but when I see my own brethren in the faith, responsible men, working in darkness, my heart aches. They have not injured me, but the Lord Jesus who has delegated me to bear His message to them.

And now I can but weep as I think of the suffering, stubborn natures who will not yield to evidence. They wear an appearance of non-concern, but it is not truth. Gladly would they change their relation to me and those whom they have deeply wronged by thoughts, by words, by influence, if they could avoid the humiliation of saying, "I have committed an error; I confess my faults, will you forgive me?" The haughty, stubborn will evade the very points they will have to face if their souls are recovered and converted. Oh, will they never break the spell of Satan that is upon them? Will they cherish their pride to the last? How my heart longs to see them free and not in the strong deceptions of Satan.

While one class pervert the doctrine of justification by faith and neglect to comply with the conditions laid down in the Word of God—"If ye love me, keep my commandments,"—there is fully as great an error on the part of those who claim to believe and obey the commandments of God but who place themselves in opposition to the precious rays of light—new to them—reflected from the cross of Calvary. The first class do not see the wondrous things in the law of God for all who are doers of His Word. The others cavil over trivialities, and neglect the weightier matters, mercy and the love of God.

Many have lost very much in that they have not opened the eyes of their understanding to discern the wondrous things in the law of God. On the one hand, religionists generally have divorced the law and the gospel, while we have, on the other hand, almost done the same from another standpoint. We have not held up before the people the righteousness of Christ and the full significance of His great plan of redemption. We have left out Christ and His matchless love, brought in theories and reasonings, and preached argumentative discourses.

Unconverted men have stood in the pulpits sermonizing. Their own hearts have never experienced, through a living, clinging, trusting faith, the sweet evidence of the forgiveness of their sins. How then can they preach the love, the sympathy, the forgiveness of God for all sins? How can they say, "Look and live"? Looking at the cross of Calvary, you will have a desire to bear the cross. A world's Redeemer hung upon the cross of Calvary. Behold the Saviour of the world, in whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Can any look, and behold the sacrifice of God's dear Son, and their hearts not be melted and broken, ready to surrender to God heart and soul?

Let this point be fully settled in every mind: If we accept Christ as a Redeemer, we must accept Him as a Ruler. We cannot have the assurance and perfect confiding trust in Christ as our Saviour until we acknowledge Him as our King and are obedient to His

commandments. Thus we evidence our allegiance to God. We have then the genuine ring in our faith, for it is a working faith. It works by love. Speak it from your heart: "Lord, I believe Thou hast died to redeem my soul. If Thou hast placed such a value upon the soul as to give Thy life for mine, I will respond. I give my life and all its possibilities, in all my weakness, into Thy keeping."

The will must be brought into complete harmony with the will of God. When this is done, no ray of light that shines into the heart and chambers of the mind will be resisted. The soul will not be barricaded with prejudice, calling light darkness and darkness light. The light from heaven is welcomed, as light filling all the chambers of the soul. This is making melody to God.

How much do we believe from the heart? Draw nigh to God, and God will draw nigh to you. This means to be much with the Lord in prayer. When those who have educated themselves in skepticism and have cherished unbelief, weaving questioning doubts into their experience, are under conviction of the Spirit of God, they see it to be their personal duty to confess their unbelief. They open their hearts to accept the light sent them and throw themselves by faith over the line from sin to righteousness, from doubt to faith. They consecrate themselves unreservedly to God, to follow His light in the place of the sparks of their own kindling. As they maintain their consecration, they will see increased light and the light will continue to grow brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.

The unbelief which is cherished in the soul has a bewitching power. The seeds of doubt which they have been sowing will produce their harvest, but they must continue to dig up every root of unbelief. When these poisonous plants are pulled up, they cease to grow for want of nourishment in word and action. The soul must have the precious plants of faith and love put in the soil of the heart and enthroned there.

—*Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, pp. 810 - 823.