

## THE CROSS JUSTIFIES THE EXISTENCE OF ALL LIFE

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The subject of temporary, universal, justification of life for all men is one of the big ideas which God invites us to wrap our minds around. From the perspective of God's government which is under an all-out assault from Satan in an ideological warfare of ideas to annihilate it, we want to set this truth in its true perspective.

When God commanded Adam not to eat of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, . . . for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Gen. 2:17), it is true that Adam died spiritually; but more profoundly, God told the truth and He had reference to literal, physical, eternal death. Adam sinned and "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). Adam should have been struck dead for his personal choice of rebellion against God, but he wasn't. Why?

The reason is that in the long ago before the creation of the world, God the Father and God the Son made a promise; or covenant to one another, as they were planning the creation of free-will agents to live in an environment of God's love on the earth. The Son pledged Himself as Surety for man should he choose to sin. Since the first man, Adam, was the head of the new race of intelligent beings; should he sin, Satan, the adversary of God, would demand that sinning Adam receive his just reward by instant death. However, there was a mitigating factor, in that, Lucifer sinned, while having the fullest knowledge of the character of God; whereas Adam sinned, not having been exposed to all the cosmic pre-history existing between Lucifer and God. There was a degree of innocence wherein he had been sheltered. Thus God was fully within His rights to give man a second probationary opportunity to learn the nature of the two competing governments of the universe and make an informed choice for life or death.

God's ways are always just and true. He must legitimize sinning man's survival of eternal death. He did this on the basis of the everlasting covenant between the Father and the Son. God justified the existence of fallen man by means of the last Adam, Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Christ had a legitimate claim on humanity in that He was their Creator. In addition,

He is the vast resource of life from which all derive their breath and existence. Hence, God's government justified the existence of sinful man on the pledged Lamb's death for sin from the foundation of the world. "Ye were . . . redeemed . . . with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world." 1 Peter 1:18-20.<sup>1</sup>

No society or government can exist without the rule of law and a court system to adjudicate and administer the law. God's government is no exception. It is not by sheer despotic force that God maintains sinful man's existence in the eyes of sentient cosmic beings, angels, and demonic principalities and powers. It is some form of democracy which acclaims and perceives that He is acting upon the rule of law and yet dealing mercifully with the erring giving them a second probation because of their representative Head.

Let's look at the Scriptural evidence beginning with the teaching of Christ Himself. We might introduce this by asking the question, Why did Christ teach Nicodemus the truth of the most well-beloved and memorized verse in all of the Bible, John 3:16? It must have been because of a deep theological misunderstanding which Nicodemus had regarding God's dealings with the world. Jesus told him, "For God so loved the world."

Nicodemus believed, as did all the religious leaders and elite of Judaism, that God's covenant with Israel meant that only they were the elect ones for salvation. Nicodemus was the Calvinist of his day. Only the Jews were predestined for eternal life. All the Gentiles were predestined for damnation and destruction.

This theology continues to this day in the great systems of religion including Catholicism and Protestantism. Its Protestant representatives are Presbyterians, Reformed Baptists, Reformed Church, etc.

The other evangelical counterpoint to this is Arminianism which arose during the seventeenth century in Europe which saw the universal

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<sup>1</sup> "As soon as there was sin, there was a Saviour. Christ knew what He would have to suffer, yet He became man's substitute. As soon as Adam sinned, the Son of God presented himself as surety for the human race, with just as much power to avert the doom pronounced upon the guilty as when He died upon the cross of Calvary." Ellen G. White, "Lessons from the Christ-life," *The Review and Herald* (March 12, 1901), par. 4.

dimensions of Christ's death for the world. It teaches that Christ's death was sufficient to embrace every one, but it is not effective until faith is exercised by the recipient. In other words, Christ offers salvation to all. The atoning sacrifice is an atonement for sin provided one believes. So there is prevenient grace and means by which God has of reaching mankind with the gospel of Jesus Christ, but man must choose to believe the provisional gift. This might be expressed in terms of showing some genuine proffer of building a relationship with God.

However, Jesus taught the pure truth to Nicodemus when He said, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16). Christ is God's gift to the world. This gift has a legal basis in that Christ has been constituted Head of the race; and this gift is voluntary in that Christ of His own volition, motivated by love, pledged Himself as Surety for sinners.

Christ uses a legal term to indicate what this means for the world. "For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved." John 3:17. If the world was condemned by God in sending His Son, then it would be instantly destroyed for its sin. But it does not stand in a judicial state of condemnation for it is not condemned. The extent of this Divine judicial action embraces the totality of the world.

Jesus went on to teach, however, that the present, individual choices with respect to God's gift of Christ, short-circuits God's pardon. "He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." John 3:18. Thus the future day of judgment for the unbeliever becomes a present reality of condemnation. Nevertheless, the probationer continues to live briefly by the gracious life of God given to him or her; and at any time prior to death or the coming of Christ one may choose life in the Son. John 3:36.

Christ commissioned the Apostle Paul to explain the gospel to the Gentiles. Thus he was inspired to teach the clearest gospel of them all. His epistle to the Romans contains the teaching of God's universal justification for the existence of all sinful life. Notice that the first half of the sentence contains the word "all" which is understood as the subject of the last half of the sentence. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; [the "all" are] being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in

Christ Jesus.” Romans 2:23, 24. It isn’t difficult to see that without exception, everyone born into the world has sinned. It is the “all [who] have sinned” that are “being justified.” This, of course, is a legal term meaning pardoned from sin, on the basis of a redemptive price paid by Christ. As an objective, legal reality, all human life is acquitted from sin because of the redemption of the cross.

As we move through Romans 5 this legal reality of justification of life looms large and explicit. We read that “Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom. 5:6). The “ungodly” are the impiously wicked. This is the natural inheritance from Adam of all who come into the world. But “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). There is no need to emphasize that the class of “sinners” involves all for whom Christ died.

Furthermore, “when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son” (vs. 10). So the whole class of sinners, as enemies of God, were “reconciled,” (past tense), “by the death of His Son.” The notion of enemies being in a state of hostility toward God requires a legal settlement of hostilities, as well as a pathway to experience a restoration of peace. God has set forth the judicial peace at Calvary. This initiates the road map to experience peace by which we are “being reconciled” to God and “shall be saved by His life” (vs. 10).

Paul forthrightly states the objective, legal, setting right of the race in Rom. 5:18: “Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation [κατακριμα is the punishment of eternal death]; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.” Adam’s one sin was judged (vs. 16) by God and he was pronounced guilty for his personal sin, but since he was the fountain head of the whole human family and could only pass on to his descendants that which was in him, “all men” receive “condemnation,” i.e., the punishment, meaning eternal death.

However, Adam’s one offence is reversed by “the righteousness of one” which is “upon all men unto justification of life” (vs. 18).<sup>2</sup> There is a

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<sup>2</sup> “There is no exception here. As the condemnation came upon all, so the justification comes upon all. Christ has tasted death for every man. He has given himself for all. Nay, he has given himself to every man. The free gift has come upon all. The fact that it is a free gift is evidence that there is no exception. If it came upon only those who have some special qualification, then it would not be a free gift. It is a fact, therefore, plainly stated in the Bible, that the gift of righteousness and life in Christ has come to every

reference here to “one act of righteousness” [see margin of KJV]; i.e., one judgment or decision. Obviously it was the Divine judgment against sin, which act was publicly displayed before the world, at the cross. He received the punishment for all the world’s sin. The Divine wrath against sin was executed upon Christ.

The cross was not done in a corner. Satan saw it. The angels beheld their beloved commander crucified. Our human representatives were there as eyewitnesses. It has been recorded as a witness for eternity in the Sacred Word. By means of the cross of Christ, it came “upon all men unto justification of life” (vs. 18). All of human life both in the past, present, and future exists because it is justified by the cross. Calvary justifies the existence of all life. So when reference is made to “justification of life” it is a specific Scriptural term for the legal reality of legitimizing, from God’s standpoint in His government, because of the great controversy with Satan, why He has given a second probation to sinful mankind. And this temporary probationary life of each individual is a real pardon from sin whether they are believers or unbelievers. It is a reality that goes far beyond the enjoyment of bread, food, family, loving relationships, a semblance of societal bliss, an accommodation of living within laws of social respect, etc. It goes far beyond making it possible for God to treat sinners in Christ as though they had never sinned. It is a fundamental answer to Satan’s charges to destroy sinners immediately if God’s government is one of law and order.

Now this teaching of the Apostle Paul was fundamental to his mission and message to the world. On his first missionary journey with Barnabas, they journeyed to Antioch of Pisidia, located in modern Turkey, about 100 miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea.

He was invited to preach in the synagogue on the Sabbath day by the ruler of the congregation. His audience, we glean from Acts 13, was a widely diverse group; consisting not only of a large Jewish community, but god-fearers who converted to Judaism, Gentile sympathizers to the religion of Jehovah, and the elite aristocracy of the city. And to these he proclaimed “that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins” (Acts

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man on earth. There is not the slightest reason why every man that has ever lived should not be saved unto eternal life, except that they would not have it.” E. J. Waggoner, “Studies in Romans. The Free Gift,” *The Signs of the Times* 22, 11 (March 12, 1896), pp. 164, 165.

13:38). This is the universal gift to every person. This is what legally justifies our life and existence on earth. The cross legitimizes our existence legally before the throne of God. This gift is to every individual: man, woman and child. “Through this man,” i.e., in [dia] Christ, we are all in Him. Thus, in this earliest of Pauline sermons recorded by Luke, we find “the forgiveness of sins” preached unto all “men and brethren.”

And then Paul makes the subjective appeal to every human heart listening. And his sermon did reach their hearts so that they had to make a decision. “And by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.” Acts 13:39. To the one who believes that Christ “was raised again for our justification” (Rom. 4:25), he presently experiences what was legally declared by the Son’s resurrection, “Thou art my Son.”

There is a sense in which when we are born again, converted, and baptized and appreciate what it cost for our sins to be forgiven by the death of Jesus, that a legal declaration is made by God that we are pardoned; and that experience has a profound effect upon our assurance of salvation in Christ.

Next our attention is called to the Bible’s teaching about predestination. We read that “whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son.” Romans 8:29. Our Calvinist friends understand God’s predestination to mean that before the creation of intelligent beings on this earth, God chose to favor certain ones with salvation and others He chose for eternal hell fire. There is no Seventh-day Adventist who would follow such an interpretation of God’s predestination.

Nevertheless, we find that some understand the following words to pertain to believers only:<sup>3</sup> “Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified.” Romans 8:30. If God’s predestination here pertains only to believers and not to unbelievers, then God has singled out only those who respond by faith to His offer of salvation as eligible for justification and glorification.

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<sup>3</sup> Quoting Romans 8:30, “These are the steps God takes with His followers. First He calls them to accept His Son. Then He justifies those whom He foreknew would accept His Son. . . . Ultimately He will glorify them.” Jack Sequeira, *Romans: “The Clearest Gospel of All,”* Vineyard Ministries: Salem, OR, 2005, p.154.

But the Father, without whose knowledge not even a sparrow falls to the ground, knew from ancient times every son and daughter of Adam who would ever live upon this earth. And “whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son.” Rom. 8:29. So that instead of predestinating certain ones who would believe only to be saved,<sup>4</sup> God predestinated to eternal life every one who was to be born.

Consider the phrase “whom He did predestinate.”<sup>5</sup> This is completed action. This predestination is in Christ. “In Christ we have already been blessed with all spiritual blessings.”<sup>6</sup>

“Them He also called.” “All men are called to that which God has prepared for them.”<sup>7</sup> God’s gift to every one who has been born would not be well-intentioned unless His call was particular to each individual. Calling involves conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit.<sup>8</sup> Surely the Lord leaves no one who has ever been born out of this important step of conversion. “The call of God is addressed to every man individually.”<sup>9</sup> “I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine.” Isa. 43:1.

“Them He also justified.” This is past action on God’s part. Every one has been given the gift of justification of life. But Paul continues further by saying, “them He also glorified.” How can the unbelieving be said to be glorified? In the same sense that Paul said his unbelieving fellow Jews—“kinsmen according to the flesh”—“who are Israelites” pertained “the adoption, and the glory” (Rom. 9:4). Glorification is the change that comes when Jesus returns and bestows immortality upon mortal flesh and we are no more subject to temptation. In Christ the unbelieving person has been given the gift of legal justification and glorification.

Further confirmation of God’s justification of the world in Christ’ death is set forth in 2 Corinthians 5:19: “To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the

<sup>4</sup> W. T. B., “The Election of Grace,” *The Present Truth* 17, 9 (February 28, 1901), p 132.

<sup>5</sup> “He did not merely in His premundane decree, acquit them of sin, but also *clothe them with glory*: the aorist *edozaren* being used, as the other aorists, to imply the completion in the divine counsel of all these, which are to us, in the state of time, so many successive steps,—simultaneously and irrevocably.” Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, Vol. II, (Rivingtons: London, 1886), p. 599.

<sup>6</sup> W. T. B., “The Election of Grace,” *The Present Truth* 17, 9 (February 28, 1901), p 132.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> “Calling is the drawing of the sinner to Christ, and it is a work wrought by the Holy Spirit upon the heart, convicting of sin, and inviting to repentance.” Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 390.

<sup>9</sup> W. T. B., “The Everlasting Mercy,” *The Present Truth* 17, 10 (March 7, 1901), p. 147.

world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” Again, we detect judicial language in the word “imputing.” When God takes inventory of the world, He does not reckon or put to its account “their” sins; either intentional or unintentional sins. In Christ the world is legally reconciled unto Himself. Notice that it is the world that needs the reconciliation, not God needing to be reconciled to the world. The reconciliation is wholly unilateral on His part.

Just how God accomplished this reconciliation is fleshed out in the words “for He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21). He, on the cross, was the Representative of sinners,—and “made” the sin of the world; “that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). The word “made” is in the past tense (aorist), as joining the whole justification [“righteousness”] of all whose sins He bore, as one act accomplished, with the sacrifice of Christ. The sacrifice is the righteousness of God. By virtue of God making Him to be sin for us, “in Him” we are made justified. The world stands “in Him” justified, God “not imputing their trespasses unto them.” This is how the reconciliation was effected by God at the cross.

Again, Paul emphasizes that “God, . . . is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.” 1 Timothy 4:10. The first portion of the sentence indicates God is Saviour of all men. This is temporary universal legal justification of the human race. The last portion of the sentence indicates that those who believe, indeed, appreciate the gift which God has given to them. They, indeed, come to know God as their personal Saviour from sin.

When Jesus promised living water to the Samaritan woman at the well, He represented Himself as a river of righteousness that would flow into her; forever forgiving her sins as a Gentile, and cleansing her from sin. And she was willing to carry the water of life for Jesus back to her village. She bore witness of Him to her people. And they came out to see for themselves; and readily recognized in Him “the Saviour of the world” (John 4:47). They saw in Him the Divine Messiah who forgives the sins not only of Samaritans, but of the world of Gentiles.

Though she did not ask Him for it, the woman who anointed Jesus’ feet with oil received from Him the forgiveness of sins. “Thy sins are forgiven” (Luke 7:48). He identified this forgiveness of sins as “peace” with the words: “Thy

faith hath saved thee; go in peace" (Luke 7:50). Peace is reconciliation with God through the forgiveness of sins. Thus He gave her objective, legal justification, and she believed His word and experienced the practical outworking of God's gift.

Likewise, the woman who touched the hem of His garment believed that she would receive from Him what she needed, and that was life which was slowly draining from her body over the course of twelve years' time. Her immediate conscious need was physical healing; however, Jesus gave to her justification, —the forgiveness of her sins,—by saying, "Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace" (Luke 8:48). The word "peace," as we have seen, is another word for justification or the forgiveness of sins. The point is she didn't ask for the forgiveness of her sins. She sought healing for her hemorrhage, but Jesus gave her the whole package of salvation.<sup>10</sup>

It remains to give brief evidence from the Old Testament that justification of life is taught there. In the everlasting covenant which the Lord gave Abraham the promise is "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). The blessing of Abraham is his "seed" which is Christ. Christ has been given to everyone in the world. "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. . . . That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." John 1:4, 9. The blessing of Abraham to "all families" is Jesus, the Saviour from sin.

In the servant passages of Isaiah is found the broadest vision of God's gift of righteousness to the world. "It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant. . . I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth" (Isa. 49:6). Of this light to the Gentiles we read, "the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6). Again, "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied: by His knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities" (Isa. 53:11). All the iniquities which He has borne as the Representative servant, in turn justifies the many;<sup>11</sup> "because He hath

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<sup>10</sup> "It may be said that God does not actually forgive men until they repent. This is true; but *he desires that they shall receive his pardon*, and therefore, *so far as he is concerned, he has pardoned them*." E. J. Waggoner, "The Lord's Prayer. Forgive Us Our Debts," *The Signs of the Times* 13, 16 (May 5, 1887), pp. 262, 263.

<sup>11</sup> "Jesus, the world's Redeemer, stands between Satan and every soul. . . . The sins of every one who has lived upon the earth were laid upon Christ, testifying to the fact that no one need be a loser in the

poured out His soul unto death: and He was numbered with the transgressors; and He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." Isa. 53:12. The "many" must be all the world of both Jews and Gentiles.

The cross of Christ is the legal justification for the existence of life on this earth in the face of sin. It adequately explains how God can maintain the temporal existence of sinners in view of the accusations of Satan that He must execute the punishment due sinners which is eternal death.

The story is told of a prisoner who sat in his death cell awaiting execution. One day a clergyman bearing a message from the governor came to see the prisoner. As the clergyman entered the prisoner's cell, the prisoner shouted, "I don't want to see you. I need none of your prayers."

"But," the minister insisted, "I have a message for you from the governor."

When he handed the prisoner an envelope, the convict shouted, "Take it away! I don't want to hear anything from him, either."

Greatly disappointed, the minister left with the message still in his pocket. Later the warden told the prisoner, "The message you refused from the governor contained your pardon!"

It is said that when he was executed, the prisoner's last words were: "I'm dying not because I murdered a man, but because I refused a pardon."

No one will be eternally lost because he is a sinner; he will be lost because he refused the pardon given him from heaven. And anyone who is saved will be saved because of the initiative of God in giving the gift of righteousness in Christ who died for the sins of the whole world. The cross legally justifies the existence of all temporal life on the earth. Those who appreciate this gift of life believe God's promise,—the everlasting covenant,—and thus experience the forgiveness of sins and deliverance from its bondage.

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conflict with Satan." Ellen G. White, "The Law Exalted by Christ," *The Review and Herald* (May 23, 1899), par. 10.