

Analysis of the Doctrine of Universal “Legal” Justification

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Introduction

According to the 1888 Message Study Committee ("1888 MSC"), the 1888 message reveals many "fresh, beautiful truths . . . that are not usually understood today." [1] One such "truth" is the concept that Christ's death at the cross accomplished a legal or objective justification which is universally and unconditionally applied to all men. [2] This doctrine is said to derive from the observations that Christ has borne the sins of "all men" and has died the second death for "every man." It is viewed as the basis for the present life enjoyed by all men. This legal justification, also referred to as a corporate justification, is distinguished by its proponents from justification by faith, or "experiential" justification, and should not be taken to imply universal salvation wherein all men would be saved, some even against their will. The especial merit of such universal legal justification, as seen by the spokesmen for the 1888 MSC, is that it provides foundational proof and an earnest of the loving initiative taken by God to bring about man's salvation. When the full import of God's initiative on man's behalf is recognized, it is believed to be pivotal in galvanizing the sinner's complete devotion to, and saving faith in, Christ.

I. Examination of Key Scriptural Texts

A number of scriptural passages are cited as authority for the doctrine of universal or corporate legal justification. [3] This essay first summarizes an analysis of the pivotal scriptures and whether they support this tenet of the 1888 MSC. Later sections explore

ancillary issues implicated by a universal or corporate legal justification, including the dimensions of justification by faith and the extent of God's initiative for the salvation of men.

Romans 3:23, 24

One of the cardinal rules of hermeneutics is that a scripture must be understood within the overall context in which it is found if the writer's intent is to be accurately discerned. The necessity of this principle lies in the fact that it is not usually possible to include all essential components of a proposition within one or two sentences. Often, several sentences or more are necessary to fully express the concept at issue. Moreover, more complex scriptural themes usually have many facets, not all of which are addressed within the immediate context of a statement on the matter. Thus, the more reliable approach for reaching a complete understanding of a particular proposition is to review all relevant statements from scripture which bear upon the issue.

These interpretative principles must be violated if Romans 3:23-24 is to be read as supportive of a universal justification, albeit only a "legal" justification. If one were to isolate these two verses from their surroundings, one might think the two could be linked directly so as to construe them to say that "since all have sinned, all are justified freely." This is apparently the view of the 1888 MSC.[4]

However, the immediate context of verses 23 and 24 is a passage extending from Romans 3:20-31 expounding upon the theme of righteousness by faith. The broader milieu spans back to the beginning of chapter 2 wherein Paul, in comparing Jews and Gentiles in relation to God and His judgment, concludes that both are in the same predicament. God, being "no respecter of persons,"[5] judges both by the same standard: by whether their deeds are righteous or unrighteous. Such being the case, the problem is succinctly stated in verses 10 and 23: "There is none righteous, no, not one." "For all have sinned." [6] Thus, Paul rightly observes in Romans 3:20 that no person (no "flesh") shall be justified before God by the

deeds of the law. All have sinned and, consequently, are already condemned under the law.

It is at this point, beginning with verse 22, that Paul introduces his insightful summary of the plan of salvation: There is a righteousness of God arising from a source other than the keeping of the law, "even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe." This "righteousness by faith" is the direct, logical antecedent of the phrase "being justified freely by his grace" of verse 24. This justification, freely available through faith in Christ, stands in bold contrast to the unavailability of justification through observance of the law.

The mechanism by which the justification of verse 24 is freely provided is explained in the latter part of that verse and the following verse. It is the operation of grace through the redemption in Christ Jesus, which is achieved by the sacrifice of His life as a propitiation. Significantly, this propitiation is stated to be effective for the sinner *only through faith in His blood* (vs. 25). It is the sacrificial death of the sinless Christ, as guilty man's substitute, which fully satisfies the penalty of the law and thus demonstrates God's righteousness and justice in remitting the sins of the believer and justifying him (vss. 25, 26).

From this we see that verses 23 and 24 of Romans 3 are not closely linked in parallelism such that the justification of verse 24 would be freely given, implied, to the "all" who have been found to be sinful in verse 23, as is advocated by the 1888 MSC. Instead, verse 23 is obviously a continuation of the last phrase of verse 22 and the combined passage is seen to be a parenthetical statement to emphasize that the "all" of verse 22 to whom righteousness is made available through their belief in Christ encompasses both Jew and Gentile, "for there is no difference, for all"-both Jew and Gentile-"have sinned."

This parenthetical remark harkens back to Romans 3:9-18 wherein Paul emphatically states that the Jews possess no moral superiority over the Gentiles for they all are under sin, none are righteous. Because all men, of all races and creeds, have sinned under God's law, there is no one who can be justified by the deeds of the law (vs. 20).

Consequently, Paul wishes to leave no doubt that "the righteousness of God without the law . . . which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all . . . them that believe" is equally relevant and essential to all men of all persuasions, Jew and Greek, free and bond, man and woman. Thus, the parenthetical sentence is added to accentuate the universal need. Verse 24 returns to the theme of verses 21 and 22: the righteousness (or justification) of God which is made available by faith in and through Christ.[7]

Dr. E. J. Waggoner, one of the principal articulators of the original 1888 message, is quite lucid on the interrelationship between verse 24 and verses 21-22. He comments extensively on Romans 3 in his seminal work, *Christ and His Righteousness*.<[8] On page 61 of this work, Waggoner declares: "The scripture that we have just been considering (Rom. 3:24-26) is but another statement of verses 21, 22. . . ."[9]

Since Romans 3:21-22 unmistakably describe righteousness (justification) by faith, we have Waggoner's unequivocal conclusion that one is "justified freely" (vs. 24) by faith alone. Nowhere in his discussion does Waggoner propose that the justification of verse 24 is different from the justification elsewhere described in verses 22-26. In fact, as mentioned below, his conclusion is quite the opposite: There is only one justification, that of faith (and, we must say, that which embraces both objective and subjective aspects).

Throughout the entire passage in Romans 3:21-31, Paul repeatedly identifies the key qualification to justification: that it is "by faith" in the redeeming Christ. (See verse 22, "which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all . . . them that believe"; verse 25, "propitiation through faith in his [Christ's] blood"; verse 26, "that he [God] might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus"; verse 28, "we conclude that a man is justified by faith"; verse 30, "one God, . . . shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.") Clearly, in the face of this consistent theme, there are no grounds on which to contend that the justification of verse 24 has a basis other than faith.

Any assertion that the justification described in Romans 3:24 is a universal "legal"

justification, imputed without condition of faith, is manifestly at odds with Dr. Waggoner's understanding. As described above, Waggoner observes that Romans 3:24-26 is "but another statement of verses 21, 22." Thus, the justification freely provided by God's grace is the "righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe." Commenting elsewhere on Romans 3, Waggoner further emphasizes this point in his declaration that the justification of verse 24 means "to be clothed within and without with the righteousness of God," that is, to encompass both the imputed and imparted righteousness of God, to include both objective and subjective justification.[10] Moreover, the verses cited by Waggoner to explain how justification is given "freely" unquestionably convey the conditionality of that provision. The gift, free through it may wonderfully be, still must be accepted by the recipient. He must respond to Christ's invitation of Revelation 22:17, "'Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.' That is, let him take it as a gift."

Romans 5:12-18

It is this passage, and specifically verse 18, that is relied upon most heavily by the 1888 MSC in support of the doctrine of a universal "legal" justification. Here again, the interpretation advocated by the 1888 MSC is not consistent with application of sound hermeneutic principles, including the understanding of a verse within its larger context.

Verse 18 reads as follows:

Therefore as by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.

This verse is construed by the 1888 MSC as teaching a universal legal justification on two grounds. For one, the structure of the verse is viewed as a perfect parallel: The judgment which came upon all men by Adam's sin is matched by the free gift which came upon all men unto justification of life through Christ's righteousness. As there is no exception with the

former, so there can be no exception with the latter.[11] Second, that the gift unto justification is free is viewed by Waggoner as "evidence that there is no exception to its application.[12]

In beginning an analysis of Romans 5, one first must recognize that it is a continuation of the theme introduced in the third chapter, that is, righteousness by faith. As discussed above concerning Romans 3:23-24, the only justification presented in the third chapter is that which is accessed by faith in Christ and His sacrificial death. So begins the fifth chapter: "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Comparisons of the Acts of the First and Second Adams

In Romans 5:12-21, Paul provides a series of comparisons between the sin of Adam (and its consequences) and the righteousness of Christ and its ramifications. The intent of these comparative illustrations seems to be to emphasize how much the righteous act of Christ overshadows the sinful work of Adam.

That Paul intends to demonstrate that the result of Christ's righteousness far exceeds the legacy of Adam is quickly seen from the following: "But *not* as the offence, *so also* is the free gift" (Rom. 5:15). "For if many are dead all through the offence of Adam, so, *much more*, the grace of God and the gift of grace (righteousness) has abounded, through Christ, unto many." [13] In other words, the gift of grace, Christ's righteousness, is more than able to negate the death brought through sin.

Again, in Romans 5:16, the superiority of the gift is accentuated. While judgment came because of the *one sin* of Adam leading to condemnation, in contrast, the free gift of righteousness through Christ is sufficient to bring justification for a *multitude of sins*.

Yet again, Romans 5:17 emphasizes that the result of Christ's righteousness-the *reign in life* by those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of his righteousness- predominates over the *death reigning* through Adam's offence. This preeminence is seen to be even greater when the life in which the recipients of grace reign is recognized as

encompassing an eternity.

It seems relatively clear that Paul's burden here is not to establish that the present life in carnal flesh is the gift of God (although we fully agree that it is God's gift). Generally, men and women accept this present life as a given. Mankind's preeminent concern, which Paul addresses in this chapter, is the death which follows and the absence of a remedy (but for the gracious gift of Christ). Thus, the death addressed in Romans 5 is most immediately the first death which has reigned throughout man's experience (although that death implicitly carries with it the promise of the second death as the sentence for sin but for the salvation graciously made possible through the righteousness act of the man Jesus Christ).

Thus, in brief, the point of Romans 5:12-21 is, in large part, to convey emphatically how much greater and more potent is the glorious effect of Christ's righteous act of a perfect sacrifice over the doleful effect of Adam's sin.

What Is the Free Gift of Romans 5?

As we have seen, Romans 5:12-21 repeatedly refers to the free gift which abounds to men through Christ's righteousness.[14] But what is this gift? The answer comes clearly from verse 17: the gift of righteousness. Whose righteousness? Certainly, the righteousness of Christ, which appears from verses 15 and 17. As we have noted, chapter 5 continues the theme of chapter 3. Thus, the righteousness of Christ spoken of in Romans 5:12-21 must be the righteousness of Christ which is received by His believers through their faith as shown in Romans 3:21-22. Moreover, the gift of Christ's righteousness is described as given "by grace" (Rom. 5:17), which is consistent with the justification freely given through grace, which comes through faith in Christ's blood, as stated in Romans 3:24-25 and 5:1. This conclusion is in accord with Waggoner's understanding.[15]

From this, we conclude that the free gift which came upon "all men" in Romans 5:18 is the one and same righteousness of Christ by faith. There is no basis to identify a gift of

righteousness here which differs from that of preceding or following verses.[16] In fact, verse 18 is seen to be a summing up or conclusion of the preceding verses 12-17. This being so, the justification of verse 18 is that which occurs by faith and the life which results is Christ's life within the believer which culminates in eternal life with Christ.

The close, direct relationship between the believer's receipt of the righteousness of Christ by faith and His justification by faith appears frequently in Scripture. As stated so directly in Romans 3:24-26, the righteousness of Christ is demonstrated to be sufficient that His sacrifice may justly discharge the penalty of the law and bring about the remission of sins, such that Christ may be the justifier of those who believe in Him. In essence, to be "righteous" and to be "just" have virtually the same meaning (as is apparent from the Greek, with one word being used for both): to be righteous is to obey the law, for unrighteousness is sin, which is transgression of the law (1 John 3:4). To be justified is to be found righteous.

That the "justification" of Romans 5:18 is justification by faith can be seen by further comparison with the immediately preceding and following verses. In Romans 5:17, the reign of death (which is described in previous verses as affecting all men) is contrasted with the reign in life of those who *receive* the abundance of God's grace and abundance of the gift of Christ's righteousness. It can only be the believer who has invited Christ to rule in his life and who thus walks after the Spirit (Rom. 8:4) who can be described as reigning in life. Whether the reign is considered to be a victorious overcoming in this life, through the indwelling presence of Christ by his Spirit, or the reign prophesied for believers after Christ's second coming (Rev. 20:4), it can only be applied to the believer. It would be a farce to describe a carnally minded person, living apart from Christ, as reigning in life. Similarly, the contrast in Romans 5:21 is between the sin which reigned unto death and the grace which reigns through righteousness unto eternal life. It is only the believer who is reigning or is the object of the reign of grace in verses 17 and 21. Likewise, the justification of verse 18 must be that of the believer by faith.

A final comparison is provided to corroborate the conclusion. In 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, we find an abbreviated version of the comparisons of Romans 5.

For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

The obvious comparison is between the death resulting from sin and the life through the resurrection made available through Christ. The life which is contrasted with death is, thus, eternal life of the saved. This clear statement confirms the inference expressed above that the life which results from justification in Romans 5:18 is the eternal life of the redeemed and that the justification must be that of faith. It also becomes more apparent from the passage in 1 Corinthians 15 that the parallel between the effects of the acts of Adam and Christ, while stated quite literally, perhaps for literary effect, cannot be literally intended. While all die the death of Adam, not all will be resurrected unto eternal life.

The Condemnation of Romans 5:18 and 8:1 and the Meaning of "In Christ"

In Romans 5:18, the sin of Adam is said to have brought judgment upon all men resulting in the condemnation of all.[17] However, under the 1888 MSC understanding of this verse, the righteousness of Christ brought the free gift upon all men so as to result in the legal justification of all. "As 'all men' are under the legal 'condemnation' 'in Adam' by birth, so Christ has become the 'last Adam' in whom the entire human race are legally acquitted. . . . This is the 'in Christ' idea of the New Testament." [18]

If it is correct to say that all men, whether converted or not, have had their legal status before God adjusted to reflect Christ's imputed righteousness,[19] then the condemnation of the law necessarily must have been negated for all men without condition.

Such a state of affairs does not square with the first verse of Romans 8: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. . . ." The rather obvious

corollary to this verse is that condemnation continues to weigh upon those who are not in Christ, a situation which could not exist if all condemnation had been effectually eliminated by Christ's sacrifice.

But, objects the 1888 MSC, there is no conflict between Romans 5:18 and 8:1 for the reason that all men are "in Christ" regardless of their belief or unbelief in Christ. Thus, the import of Romans 8:1 is said to be that there is now no condemnation for anyone since all are in Christ. Regrettably, such a position is unwarranted in view of the context. Whatever applicability corporate representational concepts may have in chapter 5 of Romans, they have no place in chapter 8.

Verse 8:1 immediately follows Paul's recounting of the pathetic dilemma of the individual who desires to serve God and obey His commandments but finds himself powerless to do so. Romans 8:1 assures such a one that, if he is willing to walk after the Spirit rather than after the flesh, if he is thus in Christ, God will remove the condemnation and guilt which has been weighing down his soul.[20]

Sin in the flesh, which has brought about the condemnation of the sinner of chapter 7 leaving him in anguish, remains condemned in chapter 8. In fact, it is shown to be irrevocably condemned in that it has brought about Christ's substitutionary, sacrificial death, as described in verse 3. However, it is His death which enables the lifting of condemnation from those who are "in Christ," having accepted His righteousness by faith.

Perusal of Romans 8 shows uncontrovertible evidence throughout that the benefits of Christ's life are not there discussed as universally applied to all in a corporate sense but individually to the believer. Numerous contrasts are presented between those who walk in Christ after the Spirit and those who are carnally (sinfully) minded. But one notable example is, "they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. . . . And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness" (Rom. 8:8-10).

Romans 8 is exemplary of the clear theme running throughout Scriptures to the effect that Christ assumes an indwelling presence in the life of the believer once he is converted. Only then can a person be said to be "in Christ." See, for example, 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20; Philippians 3:8-10, where Paul states that "I have suffered the loss of all things [for Christ] . . . that I may win Christ, and *be found in him*, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ"; and Colossians 1:26-28; 2:6, where Paul describes this theme as "the mystery which hath been hid from ages . . . now is made manifest to his saints . . . which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: whom we preach, . . . that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. . . . As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him."

Moreover, if we were to suppose that Christ's death had eradicated condemnation of the law for all men, unconditionally, we would be confronted by John 3:18, which states that "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." Moreover, under the law, all the world is "guilty before God" (Rom. 3:19). Since guilt is the companion of condemnation, the latter must still be in the world weighing upon the sinner until he accepts the redemption of Christ.

Looking once again to Waggoner, we find that he likewise understood Romans 8:1 as discussed above. In commenting upon this verse, Waggoner observes that "getting into Christ is only the beginning, not the end, of Christian life. It is the entrance of the school where we are to learn of Him. He takes the ungodly man with all his evil habits and forgives all his sins, so that he is counted as if he had never sinned. [Here, we might note, is legal justification: at the point of conversion.] Then he continues to give him his own life, by which he may overcome his evil habits." [21] Also in *Christ and His Righteousness* Waggoner is indisputably clear in the following statement given on page 88:

The freedom from condemnation comes to those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1); and we put on Christ by faith (Gal. 3:26, 27). It is by faith that Christ dwells in our hearts.

In view of the foregoing, one must strenuously protest the proposition that the freedom from condemnation for those who are "in Christ," as described in Romans 8:1, is somehow supportive of a universal legal justification whereby the "entire human race are legally acquitted."

In concluding this analysis of the two principal scriptural passages cited by the 1888 MSC as foundation for a universal legal justification, it has been seen that neither provides support for such a doctrine. Upon close examination, both are correctly understood to be addressing justification by faith rather than an unconditional objective justification.

II. Dimensions of Justification by Faith

Is Justification by Faith Entirely Subjective?

As we have seen, a legal justification applying universally and unconditionally to all mankind is stated by the 1888 MSC to have resulted from Christ's sacrifice. We have found the scriptural evidence for this teaching to be lacking. A concomitant of the 1888 MSC position is that justification by faith consists entirely of subjective justification or sanctification.[22] In this section, we will examine briefly whether this corollary of 1888 MSC belief, the separation of justification's objective and subjective components, is consistent with the scriptural dimensions of justification by faith.

The plan of salvation was conceived by God to provide an effective remedy for the formidable problem presented by sin. Not only is the problem pervasive, "For all have sinned" (Rom. 3:23, but more important, man is powerless to devise a solution. "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified [or declared righteous] in his [God's] sight" (Rom. 3:20).

The divine solution to sin is for God, at great cost to Himself, to declare the repentant,

believing sinner to be righteous, that is, to be possessed of the righteousness of God (Rom. 3:21, 22). But in what way and to what extent is God's righteousness to be possessed by the believer? This question implicates a debate of considerable depth and duration among various Christian commentators. A detailed exploration of the issue will not be attempted here. The following discussion briefly surveys Scripture and commentary which is believed to provide insight into the content of "justification by faith."

Legal Justification Is an Integral Part of Justification by Faith

As might be supposed, the book of Romans holds a central role in illuminating this issue. This writer posits that a careful, wholistic reading of Romans leaves no grounds for attempts to separate objective and subjective justification.

The foundational revelation is made in chapter 3 that God Himself will supply to His wayward creatures the needful righteousness which they so woefully lack. The setting of this chapter seems largely a legal one wherein God graciously provides His own perfect righteousness as an answer to man's dilemma of ineffaceable guilt and impending judgment for sin. As we have discussed above, the core meaning of "justify" is to demonstrate or declare one to be just.[23] Here, Paul shows that God Himself will justify man through faith by imputing to man His righteousness. This objective focus continues into chapter 4 where Abraham's faith in God "was counted unto him for righteousness" (vs. 3).

Furthermore, on pages 61-63 of *Christ and His Righteousness*, Waggoner obviously places righteousness by faith in a legal context, thus encompassing (but not solely consisting of) *legal* justification. Near the top of page 62, he explains, in commenting on Romans 3:21, that "the righteousness which comes by the faith of Jesus Christ is the same righteousness that is epitomized in the law; and this is further proved by the fact that it is 'witnessed by the law.'" In explaining how this occurs, Waggoner states that the righteousness that the sinner obtains

through faith in Christ is the righteousness that the law requires. Further, he personifies the law as a witness, saying:

And the law witnesses to the genuineness of this righteousness. It says that so long as the man retains that [righteousness], it will go to court and defend him against all accusers. It will witness to the fact that he is a righteous man.

It is hard to imagine language which could more plainly describe the meaning of legal justification than this.

The truth is that Waggoner saw only one type of justification: justification by faith. Most certainly that is so regarding Romans 3:21-25.

As with Waggoner, E. G. White likewise comprehended justification by faith to be the only biblical justification and considered it to comprise both imputed and imparted (objective and subjective) elements. Illustrative of Mrs. White's statements concerning this point are the following:

When God pardons the sinner, remits the punishment he deserves, and treats him as though he had not sinned, He receives him into divine favor, and justifies him through the merits of Christ's righteousness. The sinner can be justified only through faith in the atonement made through God's dear Son, who became a sacrifice for the sins of the guilty world. No one can be justified by any works of his own. He can be delivered from the guilt of sin, from the condemnation of the law, from the penalty of transgression, only by virtue of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. Faith is the only condition upon which justification can be obtained, and faith includes not only belief but trust.

Many have a nominal faith in Christ, but they know nothing of the vital dependence upon Him which appropriates the merits of a crucified and risen Saviour.[24]

It takes only a cursory examination of this passage to see that Mrs. White is placing legal justification within the context of justification by faith. Many of the benefits of justification described here-remission of a sinner's due punishment, restoration to divine favor, affording him the status of a righteous person, deliverance from the condemnation of the law and from the penalty of transgression-manifestly define legal justification. Moreover, she unequivocally states that faith in the merits of Christ's atonement is the only condition upon which justification, with all the foregoing benefits, can be had.

A few pages later in the same volume Ellen White addresses imputed righteousness, a term generally understood to equate to legal or objective justification and which is clearly shown by the context to do so in this instance. On page 392, she states:

Those who are justified *by faith* will make confession of Christ. "He that . . . *believeth* on him . . . shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). (Emphasis added)

Obviously, if legal justification were to be universally imputed to all men without condition on the basis of Christ's impending death, then all men would have passed from death to life by virtue of that universal justification and there would have been no reason for Christ to declare that it is the *believer* who passes from death to life.

Mrs. White further says within the same paragraph (p. 392):

By Him who speaketh truth he [the sinner] is declared righteous. The Lord imputes unto the *believer* the righteousness of Christ and *pronounces him righteous* before the universe. . . . Upon Christ He lays the iniquity of *every soul that believeth*. (Emphasis added)

Here, in unmistakable language, Mrs. White describes the legal justification of the sinner as occurring upon his conversion.[25]

Proceeding to page 393 in book 1 of *Selected Messages*, we find the following:

Although *as sinners we are under the condemnation of the law*, yet Christ by His obedience rendered to the law, *claims for the repentant soul the merit of His own righteousness*. (Emphasis added)

Interestingly, at the end of the section on imputed righteousness (which is steadfastly described as occurring through the faith of the believer), on page 394, Mrs. White quotes as a unit Romans 3:24-26, as we have advocated throughout. Thus she clearly links the freely given justification of verse 24 with the believer's faith.

In but one more example from *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 396, she states:

By faith in His merits I am free from the condemnation of the law. He clothes me with His righteousness, which answers all the demands of the law. (Emphasis added)

There can be no question that E. G. White saw justification by faith as the solution to our legal problem as well as the basis of our victorious experiential overcoming of sin.

Subjective Justification Is Similar an Essential Component of Justification by Faith

It would be most shallow and erroneous to suppose that objective justification is all that is addressed in the passages cited above. The very source of the sin problem is the desire to commit, and the actual commission of, sinful acts. It is this unrighteousness, decried in the first three chapters of Romans, which calls for condemnation and judgment of the sinner. The hypocrisy of the Jews, who broke the law while boasting in it, is denounced (Rom. 2:23). The true Jew is described as he who is one inwardly (subjectively) and true circumcision is "that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter" (Rom. 2:29).

Foreseeing that righteousness by faith might be misconstrued as a legal cover for continued unrighteous acts, Paul clearly and decisively eliminates any warrant for such a misconception. Answering his own rhetorical query, "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" Paul states emphatically, "God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any

longer therein?" (Rom. 6:1, 2).

Two chapters—chapters 6 and 8—are then devoted to explaining in depth the essential subjective element of righteousness by faith.

Paul leaves no doubt that true repentance, the prerequisite of righteousness by faith, is not a surface act but one which goes to the very root of human will and desire. True and deep repentance directly results in the crucifixion of one's carnal nature. In Romans 6 Paul explains that baptism is symbolic of the death—the willing sacrifice—of our sinful desires and acts. In verse 6 he declares that by our conversion our "old man" is crucified with Christ in order that the body of sin might be destroyed, that we might not serve sin.[26] Carrying this thought further in verse 11, Paul exhorts his readers to consider themselves "to be dead indeed unto sin." Once we are converted and walk after the Spirit, we will mortify the sinful deeds of the body (and the underlying sinful will) through the Spirit's power (Rom. 8:13).

The subjective aspect of justification by faith is well illustrated by Zechariah 3. There the angel of the Lord offers Joshua, the high priest (representing those who repent of sin) a change of raiment. He is not given a new clean garment (symbolic of Christ's righteousness) to cover the filthy garments of his past unrighteousness. Instead, Joshua is instructed to take off his filthy garments as a precondition to his receipt of the clean garments. There is a profitable exchange involved here for the repentant sinner.

It can be, indeed must be, concluded with confidence that justification by faith encompasses both objective and subjective elements, both legal and experiential components. The two are integral parts of the whole of righteousness by faith.

III. Scripture Demonstrates That God Has Taken the Initiative in Accomplishing Man's Salvation

The 1888 MSC repeatedly expresses the belief that only a realization of a universal legal justification is sufficient to convince the sinner of God's love and to dispel the fear of and

alienation from God which otherwise bars his or her faith in God's sanctifying justification.[27] The reader might ask whether there is warrant in Scripture for such a position, even assuming *arguendo* that universal legal justification was scriptural.

To the serious student of Scripture, there can be no question that God has boldly seized the initiative in making man's salvation possible. The evidence spans from the Bible's beginning to end. Genesis 3:8-9 records that the Lord God sought out Adam and Eve after their sin. Though the account of their encounter is brief, it leaves no doubt that God promptly initiated this contact after the couple's transgression. In verse 15 of that same chapter, God first reveals in terse but unmistakable form the promise of man's salvation through the seed of the woman.

The profound truth of God's initiative on man's behalf is quintessentially stated in Revelation 13:8, where Christ is described as "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," and also in Ephesians 1:4-7, which reveals that God has "chosen us in him before the foundation of the world" that we might be adopted through Christ in whom we have redemption through His blood. Thus, Scripture clearly states that God, who occupies eternity and therefore foresaw man's sin, had made provision for man's redemption prior to his creation. To our utter amazement, not only does God take the initiative in advance planning for man's salvation but he offers Himself as the sacrificial means of accomplishing that salvation.

The writings of the Old Testament are replete with references to the salvation which God has wrought on behalf of His people. Such references reach their zenith in the Psalms and the book of Isaiah. In Psalm 25:5 David writes, "Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation." In the preceding Psalm, he notes that the redeemed "shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation" (Ps. 24:5). The psalmist writes in Psalm 98:2-3, "The Lord hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly shewed in the sight of the heathen. . . . all the ends of the earth have seen the

salvation of our God." Among Isaiah's favorite descriptors of the Lord are "thy redeemer" (Isa. 41:14; 48:17; 54:8) and "thy Saviour" (e.g., Isa. 43:3; 49:26). In his most sublime expression of God's saving purposes, Isaiah says that the Lord was willing to "bruise" his Servant, the Messiah, that his soul might be an "offering for sin" which is "poured out . . . unto death," that by the knowledge thereof many shall be justified (Isa. 53:10-12).

The loving basis of God's overture is expressed in Romans 5:8-10 where Paul observes that "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us [the ungodly]" and "when we were [God's] enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." The same truth is given in the well-known John 3:16-19. Elsewhere Christ states His purpose as "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Numerous parables were given by Christ to illustrate that God is the originator and active promoter of man's salvation. See for example, Luke 15:4-10. These are reminiscent of the parable of the Lord's vineyard (Isa. 5:1-7) in which God describes the all-sufficient efforts and preparations He has made to nurture the development of His righteousness in His people and thereby save them.

That God's salvific efforts have been made on behalf of all people and not just a select group is evident from the verses reviewed in the previous paragraph alone. If this were not enough, the apostle Peter adds in 2 Peter 3:9 that "the Lord is . . . not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." This statement is not to be misconstrued as authority for universal salvation but does plainly express God's desire that all would turn to Him. Similar sentiment is recorded in Ezekiel 18:31-32, where God plaintively pleads with His people, "for why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, . . . wherefore turn yourselves, and live." And more, Paul states in 1 Timothy 2:6 that Christ "gave himself a ransom for all," and in Hebrews 2:9 that Christ "by the grace of God should taste death for every man." God's boundless initiative has made ample provision for the salvation of all.

With even this small sampling of a wealth of scriptural evidence, man cannot reasonably doubt God's initiative and ever active purpose in accomplishing the salvation of His people. God has not lacked for initiative-far from it. The truth revealed in Scripture is that God has done as much as divinely possible to lead His creatures to salvation without overruling their freedom of choice. The deficiency is on our part-a dumbfounding failure to recognize and acknowledge what the Lord has done for us. Such being the case, there is no need and even less warrant to introduce a doctrine such as a universal legal justification (which, as we have seen, lacks a scriptural origin) as a means of convincing doubters that God desires their reconciliation far more than they and that they need not fear or question his intentions.

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- [1]. Robert J. Wieland, *Lightened With His Glory*, 14.
- [2]. Ibid., see 16-18, 26, 30-31, 33, 35-36. This doctrine has been commented on favorably by others, including Dr. Arnold Wallenkampf in chapter 5 of his book *What Every Christian Should Know About Being Justified* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald Pub. Assn., 1988).
- [3]. Ibid., 33.
- [4]. Ibid., 30.
- [5]. Rom. 2:11.
- [6]. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile concerning their fate under judgment, for all have sinned.
- [7]. Thus, the verse can be depicted as follows for emphasis: "[21] But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, . . . [22] Even the righteousness of God which is by faith in Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: [23] For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; [24] Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood. . . ."
- [8]. E. J. Waggoner, *Christ and His Righteousness* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Company, 1890).
- [9]. Ibid., 61.
- [10]. E. G. Waggoner, *Waggoner on Romans* (compiled by Glad Tidings Publishers from numerous articles published originally in *Signs of the Times*, October 1895 to September 1896), on p. 3.71.
- [11]. *Lightened With His Glory*, 16, 30.
- [12]. *Waggoner on Romans*, 101.
- [13]. Waggoner refers to this abundance of grace, appropriately, as a superabundance. See *Waggoner on Romans*, p. 5.103.
- [14]. Rom. 5:15, 16, 17, 18. While the reference is sometimes to the "free gift" and other times to the "gift," both are seen to have the same object, as in verses 15 and 16. In fact, the term "free gift" involves a redundancy since a gift, by definition, is free. Paul apparently uses the redundancy for emphasis.
- [15]. See *Christ and His Righteousness*, 60, where Waggoner employs Paul's term "the gift of righteousness" in Romans 5:17 to explain the "freely" dispenses justification of Romans 3:24, which, as discussed elsewhere, is justification by faith.
- [16]. In fact, there is no scriptural mention of a justification which may be had by means other than by faith except for Romans 5:18 *as it is construed by the 1888 MSC*. Thus, there can be no warrant to introduce a new justification in verse 18 so wholly at odds with the rest of Scripture.
- [17]. We will not venture here into the competing interpretations of the cause of the condemnation—that is, whether the sin of Adam, as the corporate representative of all his future progeny, brought guilt and condemnation upon his descendants without any independent act of sin on their part or, alternatively, that the verse is a truncated statement of how Adam's sin introduced substantive, degenerate changes into human nature that have led, universally, to acts of sin by his descendants which have brought condemnation.
- [18]. *Lightened With His Glory*, 17. We understand the use of "in Christ" to be intended in this context to refer to a corporate or representational role of Christ in which all men share vicariously in his accomplishment.
- [19]. It should be clear by now, however, that this writer rejects the proposition of a universal legal justification.
- [20]. Some may complain here that the latter part of verse 1 is of questionable value since some early manuscripts omit the phrase concerning those who walk after the Spirit. However,

the very same phrase appears in verse 4 as well where there is no dispute as to its authenticity and with much the same intent. In order for there to be no condemnation, Christ first had to assure the fulfilling of the righteousness of God in us through His own sinless life.

[21]. *Waggoner on Romans*, p. 8.127.

[22]. See *Lightened With His Glory*, 19.

[23]. Thus, the term in this essence arises from a forensic context.

[24]. Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, 389.

[25]. The quoted statement demonstrates that, although the sacrifice of Christ was *sufficient* to pay the penalty of the sins of every person (that is, of the whole world), it is *effective* in remitting *only* the sins of believers. This truth is foreshadowed in Leviticus 23:29 wherein Moses admonished the children of Israel that any person who did not enter into the purpose of the Day of Atonement—that is, did not afflict his soul—would be cut off from his people. While the atonement to be accomplished by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God was to be performed on behalf of all Israel, it would have no beneficial effect for the unbeliever, the one who does not afflict his soul.

[26]. This thought is reiterated and further explained in Galatians 2:20, where Paul declares that "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live . . . I live by the faith of . . . [Christ]."

[27]. See *Lightened by His Glory*, 17-19, 26-27, 30-31. In one instance, the 1888 MSC characterizes the concept of a universal legal justification as "the foundation on which justification by faith rests" (*Ibid.*, 33).