

## THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS

Drawn from the writings of E. J. Waggoner, this study shows that in the 1888 message justification or forgiveness is much more than a declaration. It is a living power that changes the heart and makes us righteous, obedient to God's will.

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It is my conviction that the messages of Elders Jones and Waggoner are the clearest, most powerful presentations of the gospel in Adventist history. Today we are either ignoring these messages or we are openly opposing them, which is really no surprise. If this is the message to prepare the last generation for the seal of God and translation, Satan will exert every effort to discredit the message and the messengers, because if this message takes hold of the hearts of God's people his days on earth are numbered.

This presentation is taken largely from the writings of E. J. Waggoner. A recent book, *Living by Faith*, has drawn on articles in several church magazines. (Available from LbyFaith7@gmail.com)

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One of the characteristics of light is that it may multiply itself indefinitely without diminishing itself in the least. A lighted candle may give light to a million candles, and yet its own light is just as bright. The sun supplies light and heat to this earth, and there is enough for all. Each individual gets as much benefit from the sun now as it was possible for anyone to get when the population of the earth was only half as great as it is now. The sun gives its whole strength to each person, and yet it has as much heat and light as though it supplied no one.

Jesus Christ is the Sun of righteousness, and the Light of the world....Just as the light of the candle is not diminished although many others are lighted by it, so Christ's life is not diminished though He gives it to many. Every one of us may have it in all its fullness. The light shone in the darkness, and the darkness could not overcome it....Satan could not take His light, because he could not tempt Him to sin. Even when He laid down His life, He still had as much life left. (p.9)

In any study of righteousness by faith we must start with Jesus Christ whose righteousness is our only hope and our only power.

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The power of the word of God is best appreciated when you consider the work of creation. "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth."...It is as though the world existed in the word, before it took the shape that it's in now....When the word of God names something, then the thing that is named is formed. Whatever is described by the word, exists in that word....The instant that His word goes forth, that instant the thing exists. Consider this text carefully. "He spake and it was." Not that He spake, and after that it was performed....As soon as He spake, everything was there. Whatever God's word says, is, because His word creates the thing....

The word which is written in the Bible is the word of God, the same as that which created the heavens and the earth. "All scripture is...God breathed."...The breath of God, which has creative energy in it, is that which gives us the precepts and promises of the Bible. That creative power is the power of the Gospel....The power of redemption is the power of creation, for redemption is creation....

So just as He spoke to emptiness and created the earth, so He speaks to the soul that is destitute of righteousness, and if that word is received, the righteousness of that word is on that person....So when God declares His righteousness in Christ for the remission of sins, righteousness is spoken into and on you, to take the place of your sins, which are taken away....If you once look lightly on creation, the force of the Gospel is weakened for you.... Redemption and creation are the same work, and redemption is exalted only as creation is greatly appreciated. (pp. 13-15)

This is a hugely important principle. When God speaks the reality exists at that moment. When He declares us righteous we are righteous at that moment, inside and out. There is no such thing as a declaration by God while we remain carnal and sinful. There is no such thing as being righteous and sinning at the same time, as some of the Reformers taught. Also, is it any surprise that Satan is attacking creation in the remnant church?

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It can't be doubted that there is power in the word of God, far above that of any other book....The word hidden in your heart protects against sin. "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee."...The word has power to give life...."Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." How simple! There is in the word that divine energy which can transform your mind, and make you a new creation....

When provoked almost beyond endurance, how the gentle rebuke, "The servant of the Lord must not

strive; but be gentle unto all men," helps you to be calm....The power that was in the Word that was made flesh, is the power that is in the word that the apostles and prophets have written for us....

Many people earnestly long for Christ to come and dwell in their hearts, and they imagine that the reason why He does not do so is because they are not good enough, and they vainly set about trying to get so good that He can condescend to come in. They forget that Christ comes into your heart, not because it is free from sin, but in order to free it from sin....Christ is coming into your heart with the same power that created the worlds from nothing.... (pp. 21-24)

Now let us return to the eternal Word made flesh.

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"Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God." Note again the present tense. It is not enough to confess that Jesus Christ did come in the flesh; that will not bring you salvation. You must confess from positive knowledge, that Jesus is just now come in the flesh, and then you are of God. Christ came in the flesh two thousand years ago....He did it once and, deny the possibility of His ever having come in the flesh.... (p. 29)

The gospel, the mind of Christ, the divine nature, are all based on Christ in you, the hope of glory. Righteousness by faith is Christ dwelling in our flesh, our fallen nature.

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Christ...has met and overcome every obstacle that can possibly be brought against your humanity in the struggle with temptation....And therefore in Christ you have the victory; for when you are in Him, the temptations assail Him, and not you by yourself. When you hide your the victory that has already been won, the victory that He gained....The glorious truth is revealed that the victory over every temptation and difficulty is already yours, in Christ....Defeat cannot possibly be the outcome, no matter how formidable the foe may make himself appear. The battle is already fought, and Jesus Christ holds out to you the victory. You have to simply take it, and say, "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (pp. 19-20)

What a powerful gospel, so different from the evangelical version which is becoming so popular in Adventist churches and schools. It is full of hope and courage and especially peace in our hearts, because Christ is fighting the battle with us.

Now let us go back to the beginning and see what went wrong, so that the gospel and the character of God became so distorted.

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If Eve had believed the word of God she never would have sinned....If Eve had said: "No; God said that I must not eat of that tree....I believe God. I do not claim to understand it, but He does understand it. I will trust Him."...And as long as she had continued to believe, she could not have sinned....Now this is just as true today as it was that day; and it is just as true of you today as it was of Eve that day....Today, if you believe God...you cannot sin....Christ in our human nature has demonstrated it.... (p. 43)

Sin is always disbelief of what God has said. "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." This is the reason sin, any sin, is so serious. We are saying that God is lying to us.

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The flesh can't do anything good....The flesh is joined to sin, and there is no way in which the two can be separated.... [remember, flesh means fallen nature]

When your flesh stops trying to do the works of the law, you get a sense of freedom, not because the bondage is gone, but because you don't feel it anymore. When you were struggling to walk at liberty you had a keen sense of the chains that bound you; but when you relinquished your efforts and sat down passively, the power of the chains was not felt. And if you are blind to spiritual things, you might easily imagine that you are no longer in bondage....You only have the freedom that Satan gives....So long as you move where Satan wants you to go, you don't feel the restraining force of his bonds. The devil will give you enough rope so that you will not be unpleasantly conscious of your captivity.... (pp. 77-78)

This is why many former Adventists who have given up Biblical standards and the Sabbath praise God for their newfound freedom and happiness.

How can we have true freedom, not the false peace that comes by surrendering to the flesh?

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The life of Christ is divine power. In the time of temptation the victory is already won....The victory is yours before the temptation even comes...When Satan comes with his temptation, he has no power, for you have the life of Christ, and that life in you wards Satan off every time. Oh, the glory of the thought, that there is life in Christ, and that you may have it! The just shall live by faith, because Christ lives in them. "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which

I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me."...

What is the Gospel? This question is answered in a few words by the apostle Paul,..."For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth."

The work of the gospel is...to cause you to think the thoughts of God.... (pp.119-122)

We often use the expression, "as free as a bird," and that exactly expresses the liberty with which Christ makes you free....Christ says, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."...Imagine a bird that has been caught and shut up in a cage. It longs for freedom, but the cruel bars make that impossible. Then the door is opened. The bird sees the opening, but has so often been deceived in its attempts to gain its freedom, that it hesitates. It hops down and finds that the prison really is open, trembles a moment for very joy at the thought of liberty, then spreads its wings and wheels through the air with such rapture as can only be known by one who has been a captive. "Free indeed!"...This is the liberty with which Christ frees the captive of sin. The Psalmist had that experience and said "Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers, the snare is broken, and we are escaped."...It is the truth that gives this freedom....

The liberty which Christ gives you...is liberty from the bondage of sin. That, and that alone is real religious liberty. It is not found anywhere but in the religion of Jesus Christ....Your prison doors are already open, and you only have to believe it, and to walk out, continually believing it. Christ is today proclaiming liberty to you....Believe His word, declare yourself free in His name, and then by humble faith stand fast in the liberty by which Christ has made you free. Then you will know the blessedness of the assurance: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint." (pp. 48-51)

What a difference from the rationalized freedom which keeps you a slave to sinful habits and leads to hopelessness and self-destruction.

We will focus now on one of the most misunderstood subjects in Adventism—justification, forgiveness, and the new birth.

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Christians often say, "I can understand and believe that God will forgive my sins, but it is hard for me to believe that He can keep me from sinning." These have much to learn about what is meant by

forgiveness of sins....When you hear the words, "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee,"...a new life is begun in you and you are a different person. It is the power of God's forgiveness, and that alone, that keeps you from sinning....As a free gift, out of the riches His grace, He makes you righteous.... (pp. 39-42)

What is it to be justified?...Many...think it is a sort of half-way house to perfect favor with God....They think that the idea of justification by faith is that if you will only believe what the Bible says, you will be counted as righteous when you are not. All this is a great mistake. [this is the justification of the evangelical Christian world] Justification...means making just....To be just means to be righteous....When you are justified, or made just, you are made a doer of the law. Being justified by faith, then, is simply being made a doer of the law by faith....The moment God declares you righteous, that instant you are a doer of the law....Remember that to justify means to make you a doer of the law....

That does not mean that Christ's righteousness which He did two thousand years ago is laid up for you, to simply be credited to your account, but it means that His present, active righteousness is given to you. Christ comes to live in you when you believe....So it will be seen that there can be no higher state than that of justification.... (pp. 111-113)

The message of Jones and Waggoner is not a repetition of the Reformers' message, but goes far beyond it. Notice that over and over justification is equivalent to making righteous, which flies in the face of the current theology of the evangelicals and many Adventist scholars. It is common for us to say that justification means forgiveness and sanctification means power. Notice carefully their emphasis on the power of justification or forgiveness. Justification changes us from the inside out, which is the greatest miracle of the gospel. Sanctification follows naturally and easily, as we receive more knowledge of God's will.

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When you acknowledge that your whole life has been nothing but sin, and you willingly give it up for Christ's sake, you make a complete exchange, and have Christ's life from infancy up to adulthood, in the place of your own. So you will necessarily be counted just before God. You are justified, not because God has consented to ignore your sins because of your faith, but because God has made you righteous—a doer of the law—by giving you His own righteous life....

When you receive His life by faith you stand before God as though you had never sinned....Your old life is

gone, and the life that you now have—the life of Christ—has never done anything wrong....The life that He will live in you now will be the same life that He lived when He was on this earth two thousand years ago....The works He did then He will do now in you...and whatever sins He did not commit cannot be committed by you as you fully live His life....

This principle is then applied to the Sabbath.

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He called Himself the Lord of the Sabbath day, because He made it. He never kept a Sunday. Therefore there is no Sunday keeping in His life, to give to you who believe in Him. His life can only impart to you the keeping of the Sabbath day. As He kept the Sabbath when He was on this earth, so He will keep it now in you in whom He lives.... (pp. 98-100)

When we realize that the life Christ lived two thousand years ago is not just credited to us but lived in us day by day, it changes the way we make choices about how we live. If we are always conscious that Christ is in us, we will never want to dishonor Him by selfishness and cherishing sin.

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A woman was bleeding and her life had been slowly and steadily wasting away for many years. She had spent all her income in a vain attempt to recover her health....Then she heard of the great Physician and went to Him. She was timid and the multitude of people pressed about Jesus so closely that she could scarcely approach Him. But "she said within herself, If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole."...As she touched the border of His garment, she was fully healed immediately. Although Jesus was crowded and jostled by the people, He instantly detected that gentle touch. That touch was different from every other, because it was the touch of faith, and drew power from the person of Jesus....Something real went from Jesus into the woman. It was not imagination;...it was an actual fact that the woman was healed....The words of Jesus to that poor woman show that she was healed in the same way and by the same means by which you are justified and have peace with God. He said to her, "Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace."...Nothing is said about forgiveness of sins in this instance, but...such faith as the poor woman had, brought healing of the soul as well as the body....

The same thing is done in the forgiveness of sins that was done in healing the woman who was bleeding. The method is the same, and the results are the same....Just as something real, although invisible, went from Jesus into the person of the diseased woman, making her perfectly well and strong, even so you are

to know that something real comes from Christ into your person as a repentant sinner, making you whole, and free from sin....

Many think that the forgiveness of sins by the imputed righteousness of Christ, is something that exists only in the mind of God....They fail to grasp and to make real the living connection between Christ and them....The forgiveness of sins is too often thought to be illustrated by the payment of a poor man's debt by a rich friend....The record on the books shows that the debt is cancelled....But it is different when God for Christ's sake forgives your sins....The sinless, endless, inexhaustible life of Christ flows into you when you have faith in Him, to cleanse you from sin, and to make you walk in newness of life.... (pp. 131-134)

Once again, forgiveness is much more than crediting us with Christ's atoning death. It is transferring healing and strength and power and peace and joy from Christ to us.

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"I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live."...It is evident that the Christian religion is a religion of the present tense. In the Christian life, nothing counts for anything except what is present....The new birth is a continuous process, and thus something that is ever present....Many who profess to be Christians...always look either to the past or the future....Christianity in the present tense takes you just where it finds you....Each moment will become "now" as soon as you reach it....Therefore the only thing to do is simply to look to Him now and believe now, without reference to your past failures or future hopes. The only starting point in the Christian life is "now;" the only point attainable is "now."...It is looking to Christ now. It is when you forget to live in the present moment, by looking at that moment to Jesus Christ for grace and strength, that you fail. (pp. 125-126)

This is such an important principle. The only important time for Christian living is right now. We cannot look at the successes or failures of the past or hope for something better in the future. The assurance of salvation now and possessing a Christian character are based on the reality of the present moment. Do we have the mind of Christ right now?

Ezekiel 36:26 says "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh." Ellen White comments, "Many who speak to others of the need of a new heart do not themselves know what is meant by these words....Satan leads people to think that because they have felt a rapture of feeling, they are converted. But their experience does not change. Their actions are the same as before....They...are constantly referring to the feelings they had at such and such a time. But they do not live the new life. They are deceived....To have a new heart

is to have a new mind, new purposes, new motives....There is a daily, hourly dying to selfishness and pride." (To Be Like Jesus, p. 356)

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One of the most striking miracles of Jesus is told in the following few words:..."Behold a man full of leprosy; who seeing Jesus, fell on his face, and besought Him, saying, Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean. And He put forth His hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him."...The most striking feature of this miracle is the fact that Jesus touched the leper....Jesus does not despise you, and is not ashamed to come into the closest companionship with you, in order that He may help you....With true faith, there can never arise any question as to works; for this faith itself works. It is impossible to have this faith and not have works....Since this faith is a living thing it cannot exist without working. And coming from God, the only works that it can possibly work are the works of God....Christ Himself living in you; Christ in you the hope of glory; God with you; God revealed in your flesh now, today, by the faith of Jesus Christ—this and only this is living faith. (pp. 57-59, 85)

We must always distinguish between the works of the flesh, which is legalism, and the works of faith, which is righteousness by faith. Both works may look the same, but one comes from selfishness and pride, while the other comes from humility and surrender.

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God says to you: "Be still, and know that I am God."...You must be silent before the Lord, or else you will miss the still, small voice which alone reveals Him to the soul....This still, small voice is the same voice by which the universe was created....Think of the thousands and millions of tons of water that the sun is constantly lifting up from the earth to the clouds, to send down again in dew and rain. Not a sound is heard....The power manifested in the growing plants is beyond all human conception, yet there is no sound.... (pp. 62-63)

We tend to be pleased with our strong points of character, but perhaps we should take a second look.

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It is on these "strong points" that people make their greatest moral failures. Peter's strong point was his boldness;...Solomon was the wisest man on the earth;...Moses' strong point was his meekness....People naturally trust in their "strong" points,...but...your weak points include your strong ones. You have nothing but weak points. Whatever point it is that you trust in, that point especially is weak....But you need not be discouraged because you find yourself weak where you had fancied yourself strong;...in God,

and depending on Him, you are strong where you are weak....God has to reveal your weakness to you before He can save you. The devil, on the other hand, leads you to think you are strong in order that, by trusting in yourself, you may fall and be ruined....But when you feel weak, to weak to do anything of yourself, you are in a position to gain the victory....If you are weak enough to yield entirely to the Lord, then...you become as strong as the Lord Himself, for you have His strength....The closer you come to God, thus getting a more perfect view of Him, the greater will be your sense of your own imperfections.... (pp. 143-144, 69)

Ellen White comments, "Christ pardons none but the penitent, but whom He pardons He first makes penitent." (To Be Like Jesus, p. 382) We must always remember that everything good comes from Christ; that we have no spiritual strong points; that we are strong only when we realize our weakness and helplessness.

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It is the nature of a plant to turn toward the sun; but in God's spiritual garden some plants try to grow in another way. There are some that try to grow by something inherent in themselves....Imagine a plant trying to make itself grow, exerting itself...to become higher and stronger and to strike its roots more deeply into the soil!...Yet this is what many people think they must do in order to grow as Christians....A plant grows and reaches up and becomes stronger without any exertion on its own part. It simply looks to the sun....The whole process is simply an effort to get nearer to the source of its life....You cannot grow by looking at yourself; you cannot grow by looking at other plants around you....All God wants of you is to let Him work in you....If you will look steadfastly at Him as the plant looks at the sun that shines in the heavens; if you will make it your constant effort to turn toward Him as the plant turns to the source of its life, and to reach up more and more toward the brightness of His face, than you will experience no difficulty in obtaining the full measure of growth that you desire.... (pp. 146-147)

Whenever you fall into sin, it is because for that moment your faith has let go of the Lord, and you are not believing in Him....It is a blessed truth that through faith you are shut in by the arms of the Lord, and the evil one cannot touch you....Through faith you can be kept from the iniquity that surrounds you, that is even in your very flesh ready to spring on you....It is He that is pledged to keep you in the midst of the consuming fire of sin. You cannot endure it alone; you always fall, and the fiery darts strike into your soul. The prayer of David may be yours continually. "Create in me a clean heart, O God." (pp. 7-8)

Helpless, utterly helpless in yourself, unable to care for yourself a single moment, unable to resist the

smallest temptation, unable to do one good act. But look again. An unseen power has taken possession of you, a new life has animated you, and lo, you have "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouth of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens!"...Where once you would have trembled and fallen, now you stand unmoved like a house built on a solid rock....But even if you are the most helpless person who ever lived, God is willing to take you...and work through you in the most marvelous manner by His mighty word. He loves to do it. He has "chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty; and the base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen." Then when you...realize your frailty, and your helplessness, don't become discouraged, but rather lift your eyes in thankfulness to heaven and praise that mighty One who can take you—the weakest and most helpless of His creatures—and by His word strengthen you "with all might according to His glorious power." (pp. 17-18)

Does this gospel have all the power we need? God is eagerly looking for the weak and helpless, who see nothing strong in their present or their past, who see nothing worthy or commendable about themselves, and who will allow God to release His gospel power into their lives, turning them into the wonder of the universe, an object lesson of grace which will be remembered by all created beings for the rest of eternity.

Will you pledge, with me, to be that people, called like Esther, for such a time as this?

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